



How sport and its values are perceived by adults in the USA and Ukraine: a cross-cultural comparison

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
- D) manuscript preparation
- E) obtaining funding

Iryna Turchyk^{1ABCDE} , Olha Romanchuk^{2BCED} ,
Natalija Sorokolit^{2BCE} , Volodymyr Kemin^{1ACE} ,
Mykola Lukjanchenko^{1ACE} 

¹*Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, Drohobych, Ukraine*

²*Lviv Ivan Boberskiy State University of Physical Culture, Lviv, Ukraine*

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*Correspondence: Iryna Turchyk; Drohobych State Pedagogical University, Ivan Franko St. 24, Drohobych, 82100, Ukraine, email: tura28@ukr.net

Abstract

There are practically no cross-cultural studies in the field of physical education and sport with Ukrainian society as the object of research. However, there is a particular and obvious interest to research not only young people as a major strategic resource for any state, but also adults, including parents. The main purpose of the study is to identify common and different features of the attitude toward sport and its axiological component in the Ukrainian and American societies. A total of 500 adults aged 18-64 (196 men and 304 women) participated in the national survey, with the majority being Ukrainian school teachers. The results obtained from the study were compared with the results of a study conducted in the United States. It should be noted that in our study, we only selected questions from the American questionnaire that solely addressed adults' perceptions of sport and its values. We did not choose other questions. Mathematical processing of the survey indicators was carried out using the computer program SPSS. The result of the research is a comparison of statements from adults of both countries regarding the actual and potential impact of social institutions on the youth; their statements about sport; values or principles that may or may not be important in sport; the extent of sport's actual influence on the formation of values; the values adults hope their children will learn from participating in sport; and statements about the importance of values from adults who are actively involved in sport. The results of the cross-cultural study among adults in the USA and Ukraine indicate that there is both an identical idea of certain values in sport and a different vision due to, in our opinion, the divergence of cultural traditions and the status of sport in the countries.

Key words: physical education, axiological component, culture, parents, public opinion

Introduction

The processes of globalization that transform the human community into a "global village" actualize cross-cultural studies, which are becoming one of the most important areas of scientific research in the humanities. The analysis of publications in recent decades in the humanities proves that today it is one of the most influential empirical and scientific directions, which considerably expands the possibilities for comparative research.

It should be noted that the current socio-economic situation in the world is characterized by the formation of a multicultural environment caused by migration and the intensification of interethnic contacts leading to the

transformation of the value-normative system of the socio-cultural environment and influencing the development of value orientations of the individual, including physical education and sports (Turchyk, Sorokolyt, & Chopyk, 2019, p. 82).

At the same time, as our analysis of literary sources shows, there have been practically no cross-cultural studies in the field of physical education and sports with Ukrainian society as the object of research.

The only research dealing with the level and forms of motor activity was carried out by M.V. Dutchak (2009), who also analyzed reasons for the positive and passive attitude of the population toward sports for all.

Comparative studies with a focus on young people have also been used in scientific publications by such Ukrainian specialists as M.M. Bulatova (2011), E.S. Vilchkovsky, V.R. Pasichnyk (2007), T.Y. Krutsevich (2007), and N.V. Moskalenko et al. (2014).

However, there is a particular and obvious interest to research not only young people as a major strategic resource of any state but also adults, including parents. After all, many scholars define the family as the dominant factor influencing the youth throughout the process of socialization (Dorsch, Smith, McDonough, 2009, p. 444; Kay, 2000, p. 151; Knight, Rouquette, & Furusa, 2020, p. 303), with parental commitment being a key factor leading to young people's engagement in sports activities (Harwood, Knight, Thrower, & Berrow, 2019, p. 66; Mazer, 2012, p. 9; Stefansen, Smette, & Strandbu, 2018, p. 162).

In addition, the systematic study of values, attitudes, self-esteem, needs and interests of people, and analysis of public opinion on the state of sports development is a promising mechanism for managing sports activities/movement in any country (Dutchak, 2008, p. 15; Dutchak, 2009, p. 10; Gonçalves, Rocha, do Nascimento, de Oliveira, & Guerra, 2017, p. 274).

The country where sport has become the "second religion" that most citizens believe in is the United States. The population takes good care of their health, understanding that it is personal capital on the quality of which much depends in life: career, personal happiness, a bright future. Back in the 1960s, after the release of Robert H. Boyle's book *Sports is the Mirror of American Life*, sport became a national hobby and a model of American society itself (Boyle, 1963). The American philosopher M. Novak even warned that neglecting sports would mean losing one of the important national assets (Novak, 1994, p. 12).

According to American scientists, "sports can best build character and contribute to the formation of dignity, honesty, respect, dedicated teamwork, dedication to achieving a great goal. The sports activities/lessons (good or bad), especially the field games are transformed into relationships in the classroom, and subsequently into the business world and the surrounding society, making a huge contribution to shaping the character and culture of American citizens" (U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, 2010). Recognizing sports as a valuable national asset, American experts see some of the existing problems.

Therefore, in order to better understand the role and importance of sports in U.S. society, as well as to identify the public's attitude toward sports ethics and values that are generated through sports, a large-scale study called "What Sport Means in America: A Study of Sport's Role in Society" was held under the auspices of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, 2010). Carrying out a similar survey in Ukraine and comparing it with the results of American researchers allowed us to make a cross-cultural analysis of adults' attitudes toward sport and its implied values in both countries, which became the purpose of this study.

Material and methods

A total of 8,934 surveys were completed in the United States, representing five different audience segments:

- General population adults aged 18-64 (n = 4,443)
- NGB Adults (n = 370): Members of national governing body (NGB) sport organizations who are 18 years or older and who participate in sport, are parents of children who participate, or are officials or volunteers
- NGB Coaches (n = 193)
- Teachers (n = 201) who were selected through the Discovery Education program by telephone survey
- Children aged 8–17 (n = 3590)

Only the first group of representatives and the parents of children who participate in sports from the second group were the objects of comparison in our study. We did not use any other categories as this was not the task of our study.

A total of 500 adults aged 18–64 (196 men and 304 women) participated in the national survey with the majority being Ukrainian school teachers.

It should be noted that in our study, we only selected questions from the American questionnaire that addressed the adults' perceptions of sport and its values. We did not choose other questions.

Our domestic questionnaire was tested during a pilot study with further amendments. According to the conclusions of the Department of Sociology at Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, the questionnaire "meets the standards of sociological tools and is designed for interviews with obligatory participation of the interviewer."

The mathematical processing of the survey indicators was carried out using the computer program SPSS.

Results

The first questions for adults in the survey questionnaire were to identify their perceptions of the potential and actual impact of social institutions, including sports, on youth. Respondents from both countries were asked to rank eight institutions that could potentially and actually impact youth. As can be seen from Figure 1, the U.S. citizens believe that, in fact, most of the institutions listed above influence their children at this stage (average place 3.1), as do family (average 3.3), school (average 4.2), television (average place 4.4), social networks (average place 5), and music (average place 5.1), while sports and church/religion occupy the very last places (average of 5.4).

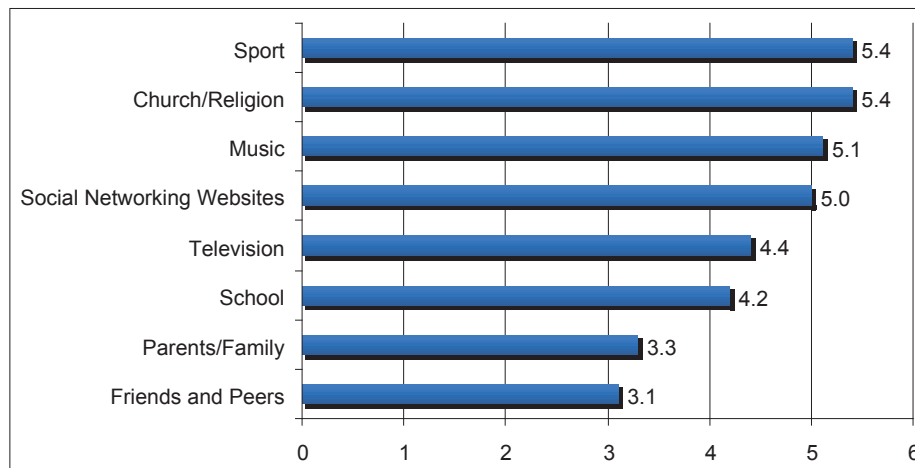


Figure 1. The actual impact of social institutions on youth in the United States

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, "What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport's Role in Society," 2010, p. 12, f. 4

The opinions of Ukrainian citizens on the actual impact of institutions on children somewhat differed (Fig. 2). The adults believe that the biggest influence on children is exercised by social networks (average place 2.9), friends (average place 3.1), and parents (average place 3.4). Other major influences include school (average place 4.5), television (average place 5.1), and sports (average place 5.2), while music and church took last place (average place 5.9).

Thus, according to the analysis of the respondents' answers, the adults of both countries believe that sport has a somewhat limited actual positive impact on the youth, having taken last place in the U.S. study and the penultimate place in the Ukrainian study. The next question was to identify the potential impact of the same institutions on the youth. It was found that the answers in both countries were slightly different from the previous questions.

We found that U.S. adults believe that the following social institutions can and do have the greatest potential for influence: family (average 2.4), school (average 3.5), friends (average 3.9), church (average 4.3), television (average 5.1), sports (average 5.3), music (average 5.7), and social networks (average 5.8) (Fig. 3).

Thus, as we can see, the U.S. adults believe the potential influence of sports activities on the youth is somewhat higher. Among the same institutions, U.S. adults ranked it in sixth place (with an average of 5.3), behind music and social networks.

It is interesting to note that the Ukrainians chose the same first three institutions as the U.S. citizens. Namely, the first place for potential influence is occupied by parents (average place 2.5), school takes second (average

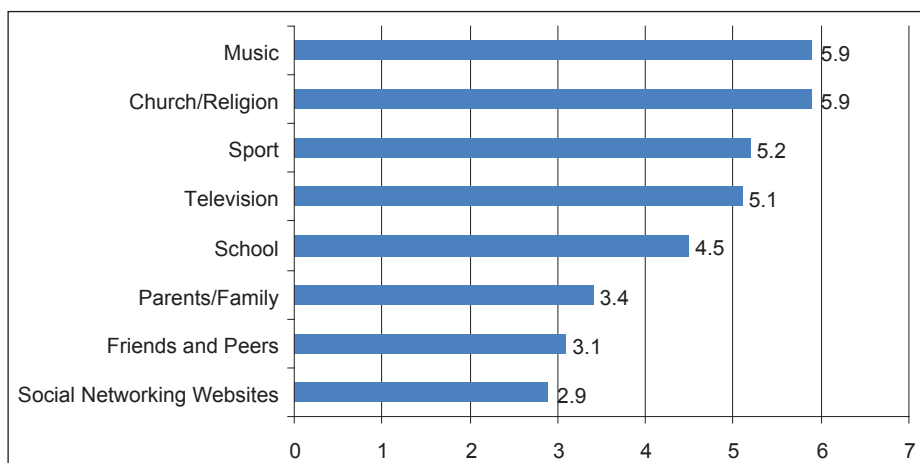


Figure 2. The actual impact of social institutions on youth in Ukraine

Source: own study

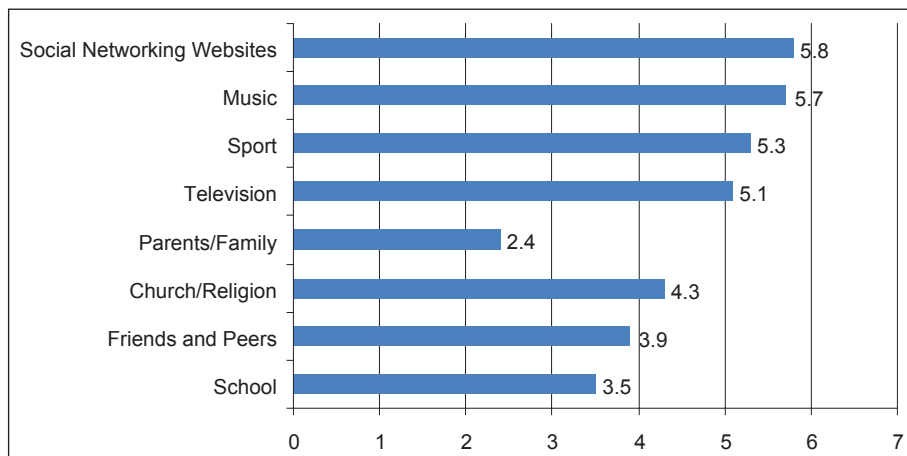


Figure 3. Potential impact of social institutions on youth in the United States

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” p.12, f. 4

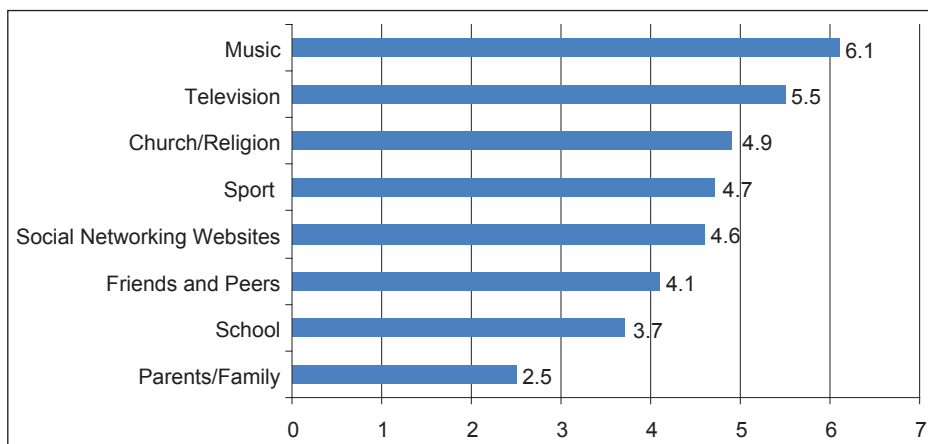


Figure 4. Potential impact of social institutions on youth in Ukraine

Source: own study

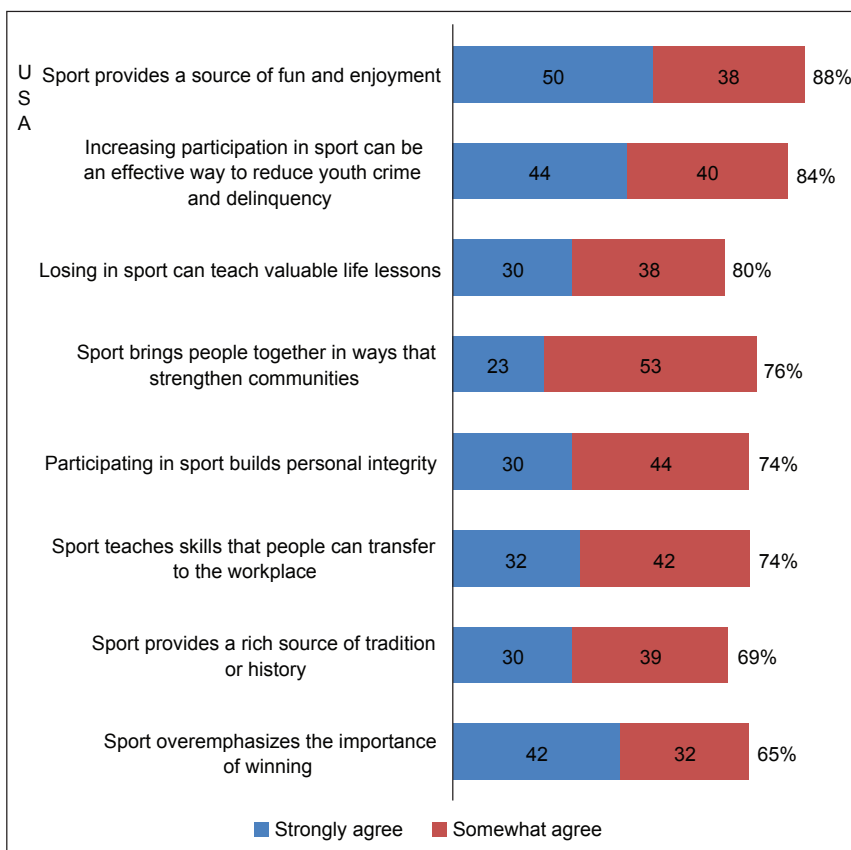


Figure 5. Statements of adults about sports in the USA

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p.13, f. 5

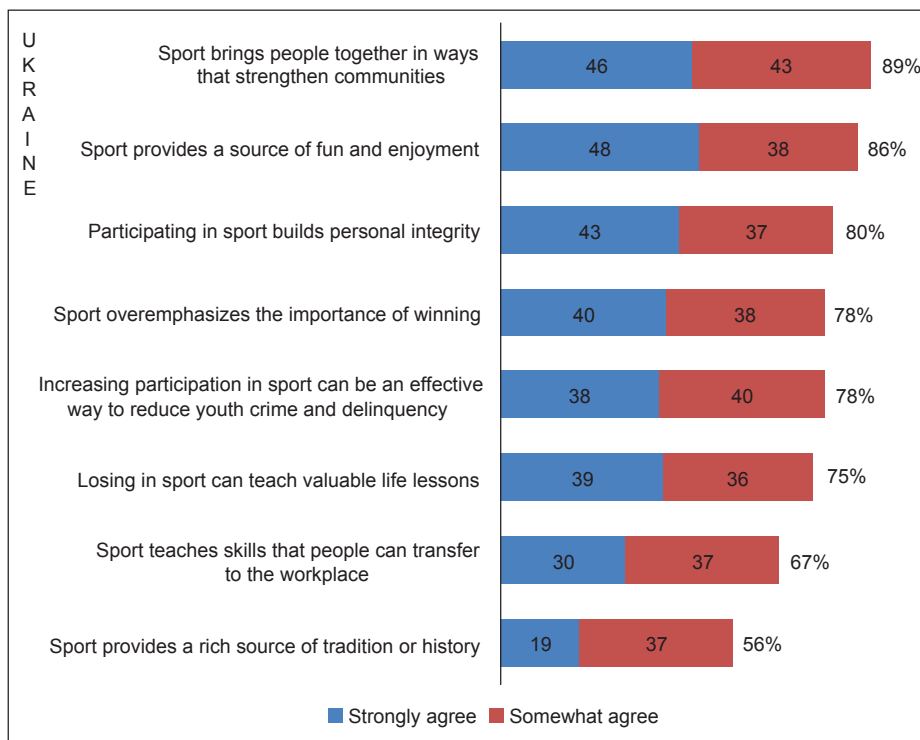


Figure 6. Statements of adults about sports in Ukraine

Source: own study

place 3.7), and friends take third (average place 4.1). Unfortunately, social networks (average place 4.6) occupy fourth place among Ukrainians, but it is nice to note that sport occupies fifth place (average place 4.7), followed by church (average place 4.9) and television (average place 5.5), with music in last place (mean 6.1) (Fig. 4).

Thus, it has been established that the citizens of both countries believe sports have a higher potential for impact on the youth than they do in actuality. Among the U.S. adults, sport was up by two places compared to its actual influence; the result was the same among the Ukrainians. This gives grounds to argue that the two populations hold a similar attitude regarding the impact of sport on youth.

Therefore, while understanding that sport has a relatively mild (minor) impact on the youth, U.S. adults recognize the many positive benefits of playing sports. The results of the following question revealed that 88% of adults agree that sport is a source of pleasure and can prevent and reduce crime (84%), and that defeats in sport provide valuable life lessons (80%) (Fig. 5). However, nearly 55% of the U.S. adult population agree that the importance of winning in sports is over-emphasized.

The adult population in Ukraine was asked the same question. Quite unexpectedly, our compatriots see sport as a phenomenon that first of all aims to consolidate people and form a community (89%). A total of 86% said that sport is a source of joy and pleasure, while 80% agree that participation in sport forms a personality with positive moral qualities. The lowest ranking statement was that sports are a source of history and traditions (56%) (Fig. 6).

Therefore, we can see that adults in both countries find sports to be a source of pleasure and joy and an institution that can unite the community. At the same time, unlike Ukrainians, Americans believe sports have the potential for preventing crime and offenses by the youth and offer a source of history and tradition.

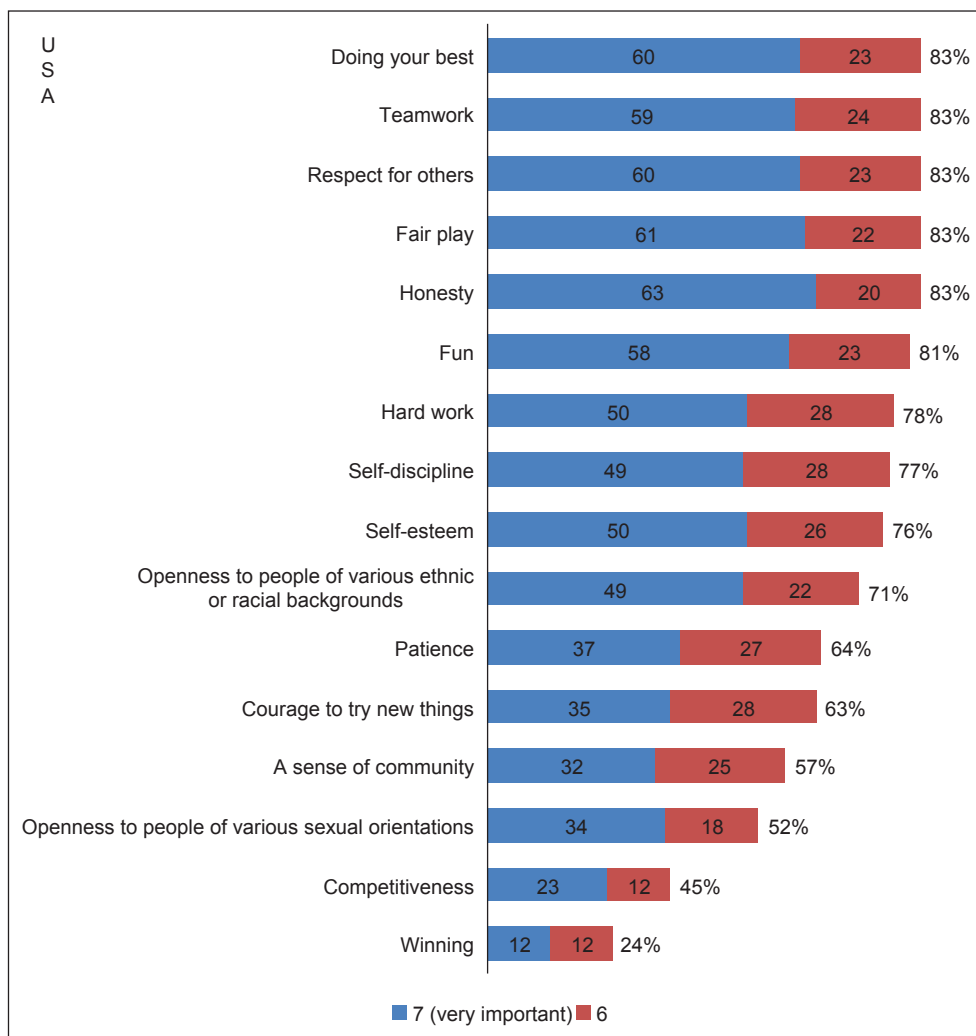


Figure 7. Importance of values in sports (U.S. adult opinion)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p.16, f. 8

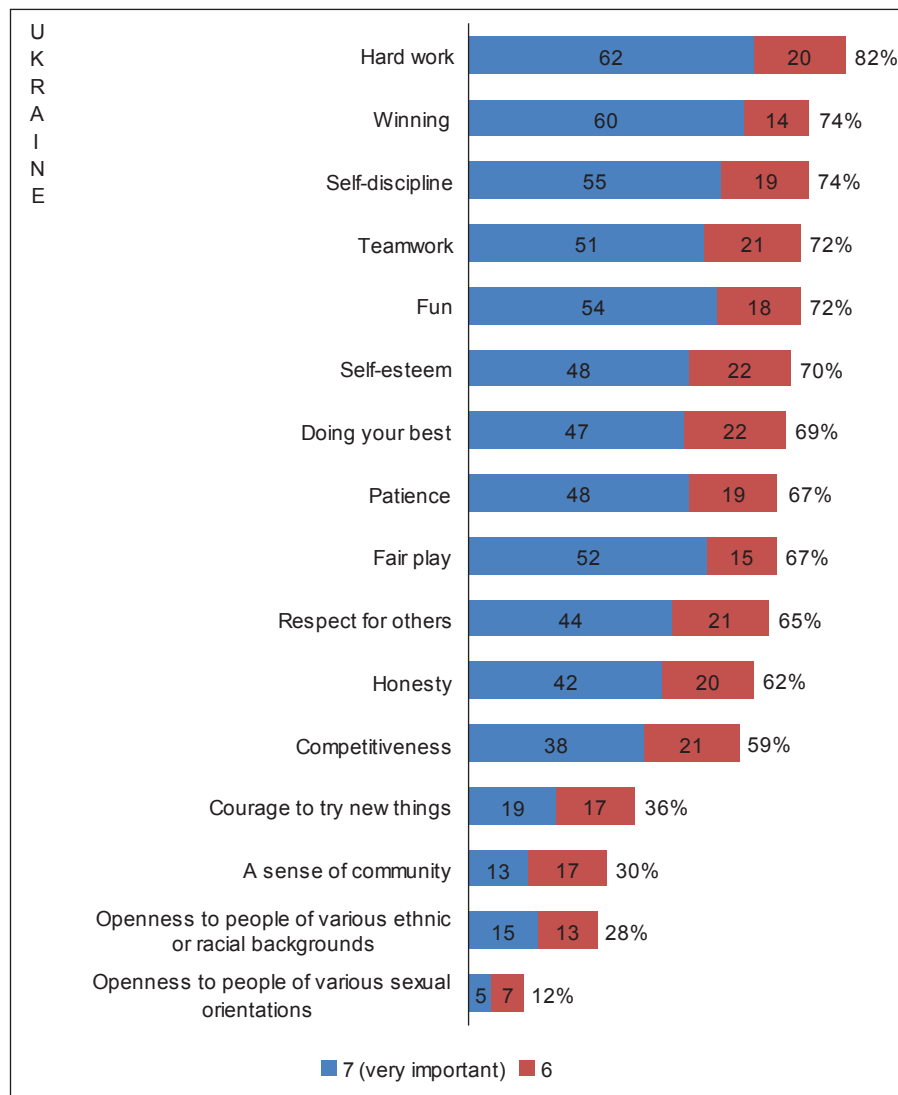


Figure 8. Importance of values in sport (opinion of Ukrainian adults)

Source: own study

The next block of questions was intended to clarify public opinion of the importance of values in sport and the extent to which sport actually shapes these values. It is revealed that the U.S. adult population as a whole (Fig. 7) believes that sports have values such as “the ability to show one’s best qualities” (83%), “teamwork” (83%), “respect for others” (83%), “fair play” (83%), “honesty” (83%), and “fun” (81%).

According to the survey in Ukraine, the most important qualities in sport are “persistence” (82%), “desire for victory” (74%), “self-discipline” (74%), “satisfaction” (72%), “teamwork” (71%), and “self-esteem” (70%) (Fig. 11).

Thus, we can see that the opinions of the populations on the important values in sports differ drastically. Only “teamwork” is a universal value, as teamwork is the only value chosen by both the American and Ukrainian adults. It should be emphasized that unfortunately for the Ukrainian population, such virtues as “honesty” and “fair play” occupy much lower positions in the ranking of values in comparison with the American population. At the same time, “the desire to win” is the most important for the Ukrainian respondents, while it places last among Americans (24%). It is also worth noting that the value of sport in terms of “openness to people with different sexual orientations” was selected by only 12% of the respondents in Ukraine (taking last place – 16th – by a big margin), with 52% of the Americans ranking it in 14th place. That is, the adults in Ukraine do not evidently see sport as having the potential to form a positive attitude towards sexual minorities.

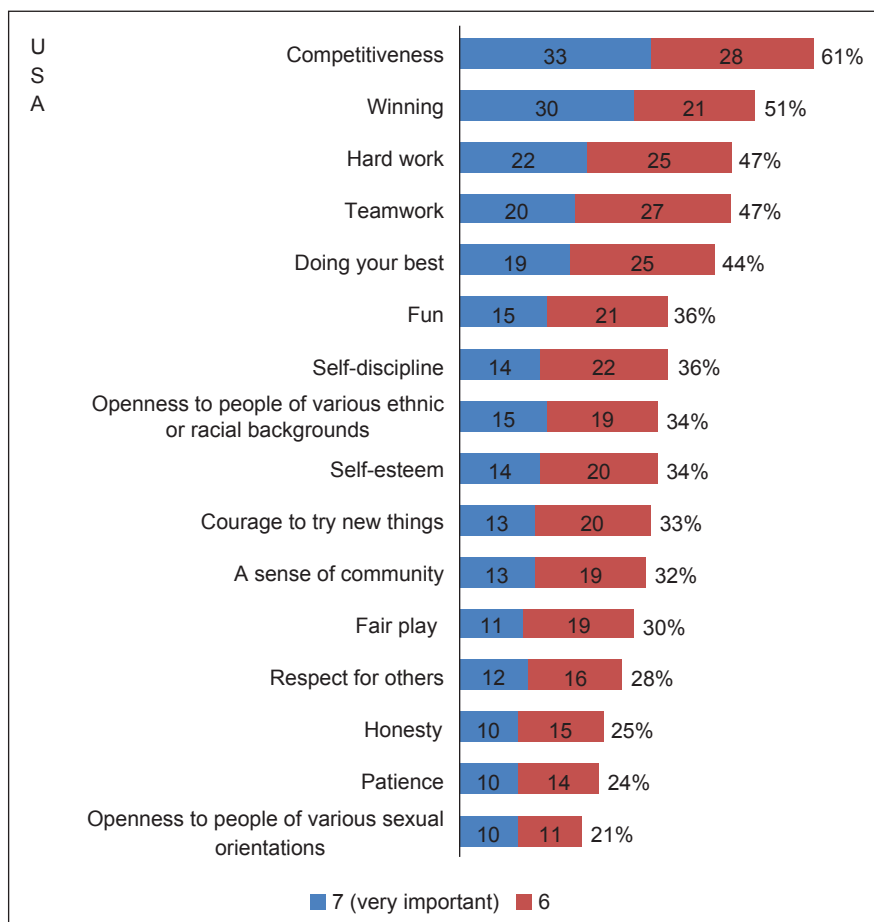


Figure 9. Formation of values by sports (opinion of adults in the USA)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 16, f. 9

The next question was to find out to what extent sport actually shapes each of these values in children (Fig. 9, Fig. 10). The adults used a 7-point scale for evaluation. We took into account only the highest rankings, namely 6 and 7.

Therefore, “competitiveness” and “the desire to win,” which were selected in the previous question by the U.S. adults as the least important qualities in sports (ranking in the last two places among 16 values), took the radically opposite positions in leading the ranking (competitiveness 61%) and second place (desire to win 51%). Third and fourth place were occupied by “persistence” (47%) and “teamwork” (47%), whereas 44% of respondents said the “ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” took fifth place. At the same time, “honesty” and “fair play” were among the important qualities, but unfortunately the U.S. adults do not believe sports shape them sufficiently (Fig. 9).

It is worth noting that the adult citizens of Ukraine (Fig. 10) identify practically the same leading values as the Americans – the values that in their opinion sport actually forms in children. Among the top five were “aspirations to win” (75%), “perseverance” (70%), and “ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” (68%). Such important virtues for life as “honesty” and “fair play” received quite low results.

Thus, we see that the U.S. adults differentiate values more often. They highlight the values they consider to be important for sport and the ones sport actually shapes in young people. Often, these do not coincide. Meanwhile, these are practically the same values for Ukrainians. Only their placement in the ranking differs.

The next block of questions was answered only by those respondents whose children were involved in sports systematically.

Adults were asked to choose the five values (out of fifteen) they considered to be the most important for children to learn in the process of participating in sports and to indicate how well their expectations were fulfilled (Fig. 11, Fig. 12).

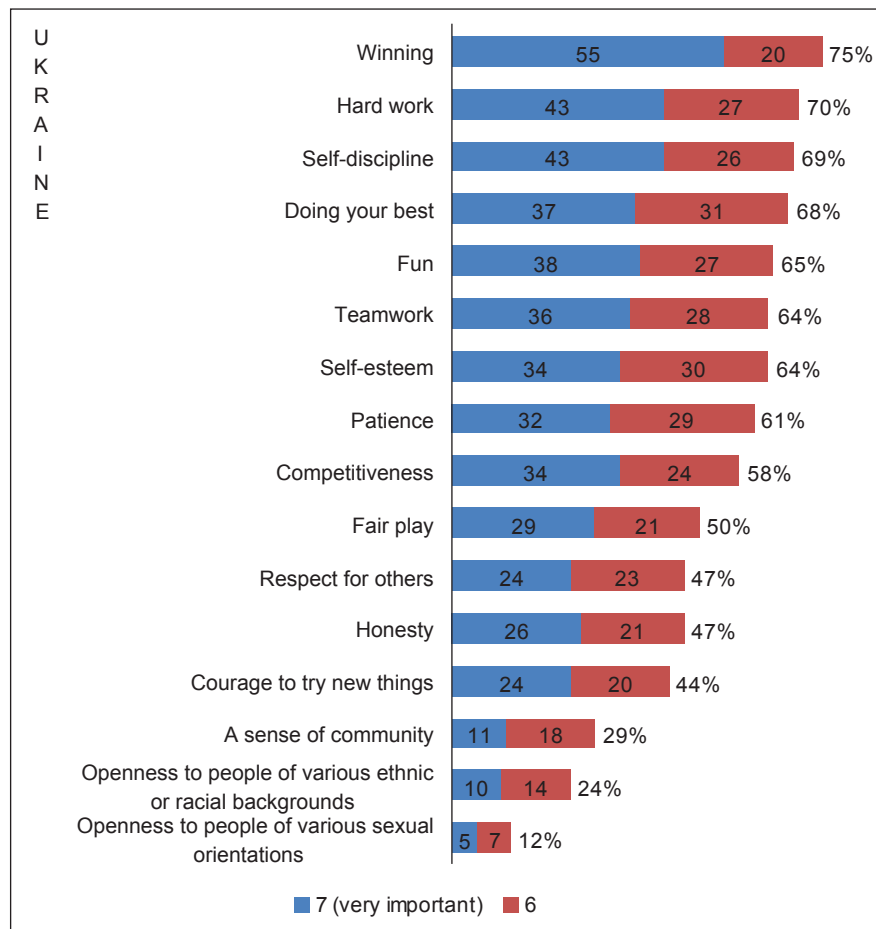


Figure 10. Formation of values by sports (opinion of adults in Ukraine)

Source: own study

According to the results of the survey, similarly to their American counterparts, the Ukrainian parents also believe that sports should teach a child to have fun (47%). Also, the top five values in Ukraine were “self-discipline” (43%), “perseverance” and “self-confidence” (39% each), and honesty (29%). The last places were occupied by “the feeling of belonging to the community” (4%) and “competing without going beyond the rules” (10%) (Fig. 12).

Therefore, the common values chosen by the largest number of respondents in both countries were “satisfaction” and “self-confidence.” It is worth noting that values such as “adherence to the rules of fair play,” “honesty,” “respect for others,” “learning to work as a team,” and “developing self-discipline” took equally high positions in the responses of adults in both the U.S. and Ukraine. The biggest differences related to adults’ views on such values as “learning to be persistent” (Ukrainians ranked it 3rd, Americans ranked it 11th) and “the ability to demonstrate one’s best qualities” (10th for Ukrainians and 2nd for Americans).

Another question was answered only by respondents who participated in sports on their own. The purpose was to find and compare the opinions of the U.S. and Ukrainian adults about the importance of certain factors in sports (Fig. 13, Fig. 14). The adults had to rate the importance of each of the factors listed in the questionnaire on a 7-point scale (where 7 is very important, 4 is medium, and 1 is not important). We took into account only those factors that were rated/assessed/judged to be very important (this means respondents considered these factors to be the most significant).

As we can see, the U.S. adults found that it is important for them to be satisfied/have fun (82%), while 81% had the ability to demonstrate their best qualities. “Positive impact on health” (72%) was ranked only third, followed by “improvement of physical and volitional qualities” (70%) and “decent performance” (69%). Thus, all five factors received more than 60% of the responses of U.S. respondents (Fig. 14).

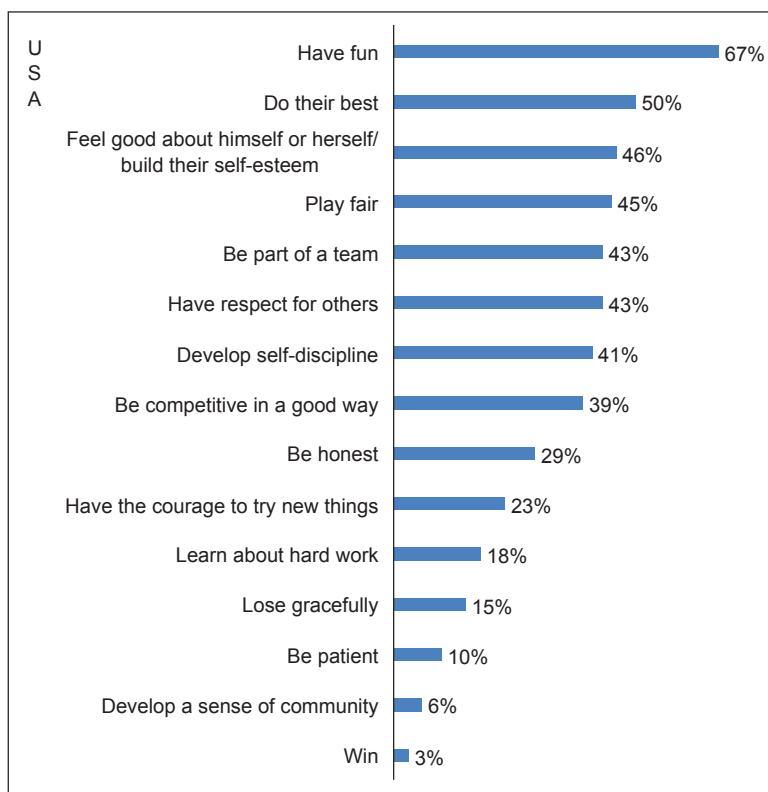


Figure 11. Values parents expected their children to learn while participating in sports (opinions of adults in the U.S.)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 32, f. 23

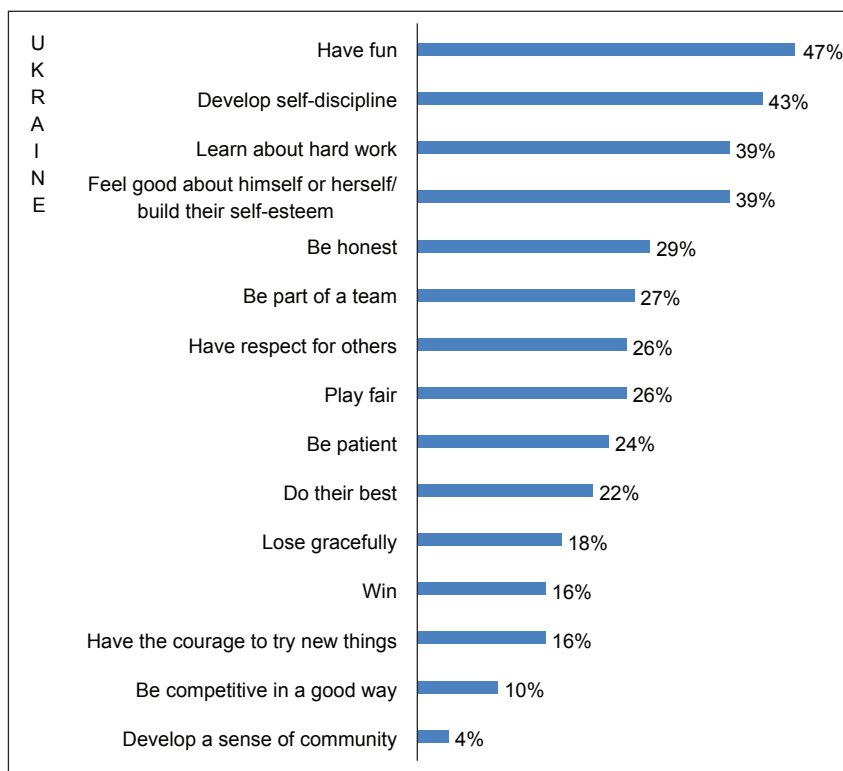


Figure 12. Values parents expected their children to learn while participating in sports (opinions of adults in the Ukraine)

Source: own study

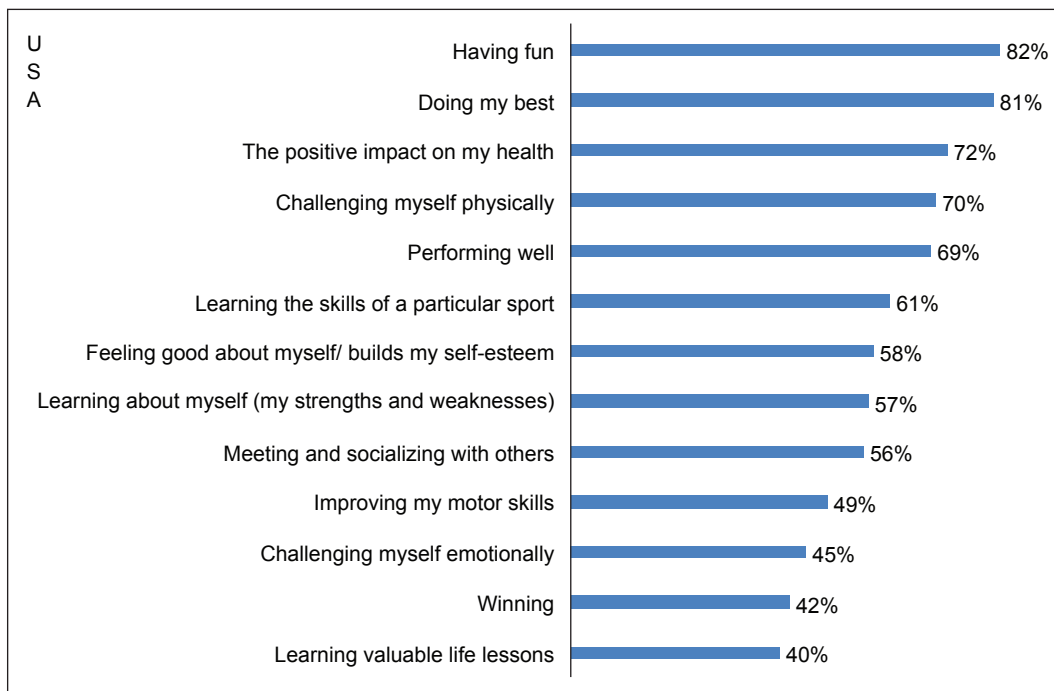


Figure 13. The importance of factors (values) in sport (opinion of U.S. adults who participate in sports)

Source: U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, “What Sport Means in America: A Survey of Sport’s Role in Society,” 2010, p. 26, f. 16

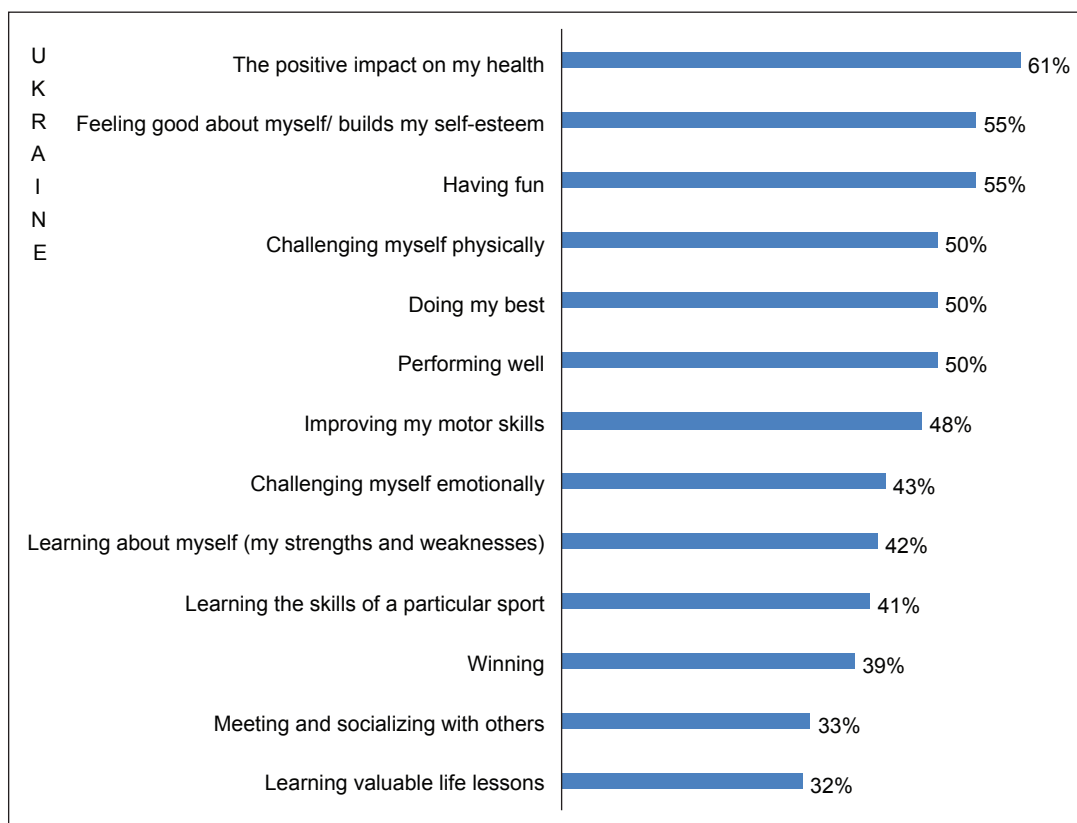


Figure 14. The importance of factors (values) in sport (opinion of Ukrainian adults who participate in sports)

Source: own study

The analysis of the Ukrainian respondents' answers showed that the only factor receiving a little more than 60% was "positive health impact." All others were almost equally important to Ukrainians: "well-being (improvement in self-esteem)" received 55% and "satisfaction" received 50%, as did "improvement of physical and volitional qualities," "ability to demonstrate one's best qualities," and "decent performance" (Fig. 14).

Therefore, as you can see, the adults who participated in sports identified almost the same dominant factors in sports. The main difference is that for Ukrainians, the most important were the factors related to the promotion and preservation of health, although having fun was also important. For Americans it is somewhat to the contrary, as they placed the hedonistic motive of pleasure first by a significant margin.

Discussion

The results of cross-cultural comparisons show that adults in both the United States and Ukraine believe the impact of sports on children have a greater potential than their actual impact.

The universal value is that the citizens of both countries agree on the importance of playing sports for pleasure and joy and understand that sports bring people together and shape the community. However, for Americans more than Ukrainians, it is also important that playing sports is an effective way to reduce crime among the youth, as is evidenced by the large number of state programs in place in the country. In addition, for Americans, unlike Ukrainians, sport remains a cradle of history and tradition, probably linked to the efforts of immigrants to preserve their identity through sport.

Parents in both countries believe that different kinds of sporting activities have considerable potential for forming positive values in their children, but in the opinion of the respondents, they so in different ways.

Unfortunately, unlike the Americans, our Ukrainian compatriots do not see the potential of school and university sports, as well as sports activities organized by the community, in forming positive values (axiosphere) in young people, which may explain the low level of popularity of these types of sports in the country in general.

The cross-cultural analysis conducted revealed the difference between the views of the citizens of both countries on the importance of certain values in sport. As can be seen, such virtues as "honesty" and "fair play" are less important for Ukrainians compared with Americans, but "the desire to win" was ranked higher by Ukrainians (and took last place with Americans). In addition, the Ukrainians do not see the importance of sports in shaping the perception of sexual minorities, which can be accounted for by the high level of religiosity in Ukraine.

Another universal value is teamwork, which ranked among the top five in both countries.

Similarly, both the U.S. and Ukrainian adults highlighted the values they would like to be instilled in their children. High places were also taken by "pleasure" and "self-confidence." The greatest differences were about values such as "learning to be persistent" and "to show one's best qualities."

Also, it should be noted that in both cultures, the adults who are systematically engaged in sports generally point to the same factors that are important to them during exercise. However, the hedonistic motive, to a greater extent, is more important for Americans than for Ukrainians, for whom the factor of "health promotion" prevails.

Conclusion

In today's multicultural society, each nation has its own models of culture, including physical education and sport, with its unique value-oriented structure. Thus, the results of the cross-cultural study among adults in the USA and Ukraine indicate that there is both an identical idea of certain values in sports and a different vision due to, in our opinion, the divergence of cultural traditions and the status of sports in the countries. We believe that these results can serve as a basis for various domestic educational initiatives to promote and increase the participation of the Ukrainian population in sports and to broaden their understanding of the potential of sports, particularly in schools, to form positive values in the youth.

The next challenges are to conduct cross-cultural comparisons with other countries and to identify universal factors influencing the formation of values among the youth.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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