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CONTENTS

SMALL SPORT ZONES AT HOME: INTERIOR AND DESIGN	5
Stela Tasheva, Desislava Angelova, Pavlina Vodenova	
SOCIAL INNOVATIONS DESIGN – THE VIEWPOINTS OF TEACHERS, EXPERTS AND STUDENTS	12
Pavlina Vodenova, Ophelia Kaneva	
INVESTIGATION OF THE QUALITATIVE DEPENDENCE BETWEEN THE CHARACTER OF WEAR AND THE MUTUAL LOCATION OF BEARING SUPPORTS.....	23
Aleksandrina Bankova	
COMPUTING THE AVERAGE MOISTURE CONTENT OF WOOD MATERIALS SUBJECTED TO STEAMING IN AN AUTOCLAVE	29
Nencho Deliiski, Natalia Tumbarkova, Dimitar Angelski, Pavlin Vitchev	
INFLUENCE OF COMPONENTS (UV + VIS) OF SOLAR RADIATION ON THE COLOR CHANGE OF UNSTEAMED AND STEAMED BEECH WOOD.....	36
Ladislav Dzurenda, Michal Dudiak, Adrián Banski	
EFFECT OF LIGNOSULFONATE CONTENT ON THE ADHESIVE STRENGTH AT VENEERING OF MEDIUM DENSITY FIBREBOARDS.....	45
Viktor Savov, Dimitar Angelski	
PROPERTIES OF PARTICLEBOARDS WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF HEMP AND VINE PARTICLES IN THE CORE LAYER – PART II: OPTIMISATION OF THE COMPOSITION	51
Viktor Savov, Rosen Grigorov, Slavcho Alexandrov	
EXPLOITATION RESEARCH OF A CABLE SKIDDER TAF 690 PE FOR TIMBER SKIDDING IN THE WESTERN STARA PLANINA	61
Dimitar Peev, Dimitar Georgiev, Konstantin Marinov	
TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF PNEUMOSEPARATOR FOR FOREST SEED EXTRACTION	70
Konstantin Marinov, Milen Ivanov, Dimitar Peev	
EXPLOITATION RESEARCHES ON FORESTRY MILLING MACHINES FOR SOIL PREPARATION AT THE TERRITORY OF SHUMEN NORTH-EAST STATE FORESTRY	82
Konstantin Marinov, Konstantin Kostov	
SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL „INNOVATIONS IN WOODWORKING INDUSTRY AND ENGINEERING DESIGN“	96

SMALL SPORT ZONES AT HOME: INTERIOR AND DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

The report examines a growing phenomenon: (sport) exercising at home. The reasons for the ever-wider spread of this, can be found in the consequences of the Covid pandemic, but also in the changed everyday culture of society (including the digital revolution and the possibilities for remote work).

The purpose of the research is to track the current needs and appropriate solutions in the creation of sports areas in small spaces, or in zones not originally meant for exercising processes. Comparative analysis and survey research are used.

The expected outcomes are in the fields of design theory, contemporary design and architecture.

Key words: sports at home, sports equipment, home furnishings, design for sports, home office.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sport (exercising) at home is widespread nowadays. Still the analysis of this phenomenon needs some retrospective and clarification of the terms and the scope.

A popular understanding of sport is the one of by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Government of Western Australia (2022), which says that sport is “A human activity involving physical exertion and skill as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition or social participation where rules and patterns of behavior governing the activity exist formally through organizations and is generally recognized as a sport”. At the same portal there is a second term – Active recreation, defined as “activities engaged in for the purpose of relaxation, health and wellbeing or enjoyment with the primary activity requiring physical exertion, and the primary focus on human activity”. These two definitions reflect on major, well known cases of (physical) exercises and final results, that were developed in time, and the first one

bears the sense of a “true sport”. Still each and every exercising activity cannot be placed in only one of these cases. It is hard to tell for example: when a whole football team goes together on a running, what are they doing: a group training of physical exertion or a joyful active recreation? Or both?

That is why we here use another, broader definition in the paper – the one of Recommendation No. R (92) 13 Rev (2001: 2, 1, a) on the revised European Sports Charter which says that “‘Sport’ means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”

Thus, for the purpose of this paper, sport (exercising) will not be divided on organized or individual, competing or non-competing activities.

Still we acknowledge that a key element of sports is: expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being. Where-ever and how-ever sport activities are implemented these are also the final goals aimed:

expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being.

LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to track the current needs and appropriate solutions in the creation of sport areas in small residential spaces. Therefore, public spaces demonstrating sport, collective or team sports arenas and gyms, and also specially designed game rooms (billiards, video, etc) and are not in the scope of this paper. The used perspective is of design theory, contemporary design and architecture.

We are not able to trace here the evolution of the concepts of sports involvements, types of proper activities or the ideas of minimum spaces needed. But it is known that a valid solution of the most sport needs has always been a dedicated zone – gymnasium, training place, arena, stadium, hall, etc. Some sports of course also need specific climate and environment (ice, water). So, it is expected the athletes to *share* their work and design equipment in the dedicated specially prepared zone.

But today, sport is also an individual experience. Declaration of doing sport is a sensitive topic, due to the escalating social pressure on subjects like: health, liveliness, body positivity, wellbeing, etc. Still, after Covid-19, but not only because of it (Arundell at all, 2022), sports have been happening inside homes, often increasing in time and frequency. Logically, due to the already existing limitations of living space, options of sport are usually ensured at home only for one person at a time.

In our research we are aiming to answer the following two questions:

- What is the attitude towards the sport at home?
- What are the types of designs and products supporting sport at home?

To answer the first question we used a survey, and for the second one we applied methods of classifications and comparative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. Sport attitude.

The survey “Sport at home” was conducted online, in June, 2022. There are 171 respondents from Bulgaria from various age, occupation, gender, etc. Here we provide highlights of the answers of the survey to outline the needs and the specifics of sport activities at home.

The first question was: “On the scale from 0 to 6 how appropriate is it to do sport at home?” Only 1 person chose that it is fully inappropriate and gave 0 points. 115 of the respondents gave more than 3 points of the appropriateness, and of them 51 believed it is very convenient and effective, giving 6 points.

We then asked some additional questions on the type and the frequency of sport activities at home for the respondents of the survey. Thus, 31 of the respondents marked “I have never checked” of how long is a typical home training for them, but another 130 answer they exercise for various periods (30 people do sport less than 15 minutes, 34 exercise from 15 to 25 minutes, 40 – from 25 to 40 minutes and 26 do sport from 40 to 60 minutes). And still, 68 of the respondents exercise once or twice in a month at home. (The others are working out at home more than once in a week.)

The basics needed at home turned to be as they were also in bigger sports areas, and included fresh air (marked by 117 people), climatization (43) music (66) and good light (49 people).

On the question “Where do you prefer to do sport at home?” 75 choose the living room, 46 go wherever an empty space is

available, 34 choose the bedroom, 20 have a dedicated space and 12 use the cabinet room.

A set of our questions was referring to the sport gears that the respondents already

possessed, or were willing to buy. The answers are summarized in table 1.

Table 1: Sport tools at home

	Sport mat	Elastic bands	Fitness ball – big	Dumbbells	Hoop	Step-per	Small gears	Exercise bike	Rowing machine	Power bench	Tread-mill	Climb-ing wall	Mas-sage chair
They have it at home.	86	77	46	106	13	12	40	34	11	17	9	15	8
They think to buy it soon.	4	3	2	5	-	1	2	3	-	3	1	5	3
They don't have it.	81	89	120	58	155	156	128	130	158	149	158	148	157

Our final questions were about “How much space do you need to do sport at home?” and “Do you have a sport–tools cabinet, commode, or other dedicated place?” 101 people marked they need 3-6 sq. m. free space to exercise, 15 needed less, and 55 – more than that. 38 of the respondents had just one cabinet dedicated for sport tools, and 108 marked that they do not have any special sport item place at home.

Looking at the survey results we saw that maybe half of the respondents bought a sport mat and dumbbells, and about a quarter of them had a fitness ball or other small tools. The more “exotic” sport tools were placed in the homes of 6 to 10% of the peopled who filled the survey.

Comparing to the number of people who declared doing sport at home, we may conclude that most home sport activities do not include that much of tools. Or, we might assume that most of the people mean to do sport, and sometimes they even buy tools. Then somehow later on they work out bare hands, or... even maybe not so often as they say. But although our survey couldn't quan-

tify the range of the actual interest, some contradictions of the claims of the respondents were revealed, we still can register a valid interest in sport activities at home.

RESULTS AND DISCISSION.

Design solutions.

When revising the existing design solutions and products, supporting sport at home, we confirmed that the contradicting attitude to sport, and the need to justify or express it is also well known between the sport designers. Thus, the design solutions and products, supporting sport activities could be logically classified in the next groups:

- Psychological: music, guidance, motivational elements
- Physical: space, sport gear and out-fits, and dedicated tool and suit storage
- Combined transformable and smart tools.

Psychological support and guidance are not always expressed by dedicated design. There are a lot of studies, investigating the links between the music and the sport performance¹. Yet, music at home is used not only

¹ See Karageorghis, Jones, Low (2006), Kellaris, Rice, (1993). or Hutchinson, Sherman, (2014).

in cases of sport. And it could be provided by many items – from the personal GSM to the installed home theater, etc. (The video guidance is another option that could be supported by many video-devices).

"Architecture is a polyvalent product," says Maria Davcheva, (Давчева 2015 :101), "it expresses the current state of the specific sociocultural environment... but also the metamorphosis in the very perception of the process and the product" Thus, visual expression of an athlete's determination to do sport activities is also often expected in the interior and it could be created in various ways. Visualization of goals is also an effective motivational tool².

May be the simplest approach towards creation of sport inspiring visuals is the marking some spaces with encouraging inscriptions, photos, paintings, posters (Figure 1), etc., put temporary or permanent on the surrounding surfaces and/or walls.

An interesting design solution is the integration of playground marking and equipment into home interiors, such as: white and yellow lines, wall surfaces in loft/industrial stylistics (Cornwell 2022), dressing room elements and lights, tables of "START", etc. A motivational contrast is easily achieved when they are applied in living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms and so on, connecting the gym reality with the home environment.



Figure 1: Sport at home flowchart. Image by macrovector on Freepik. Could be used as poster, decoration, etc.

Visualization of workout goals and emotions could be also created by dedicated hobby or award show-cases. Even when created as budget elements, these items are usually made with glass doors, and shining, metal surfaces, often illuminated. Thus, they are working towards the glorification of the sport actions.

Although it is usually of too big scale for some living places, it is possible even to dedicate a room, or some rooms to a kind of sport museum, commemorating special achievements, chosen athletes and/or equipment. People also create shared spaces ("fan cave", etc.) for watching and commenting sports. (Jameson 2021).

² See for example Cheema, Bagchi (2011).

Still obtaining a sport themed interior does not mean mandatory conducting sport activities. A key requirement for workout is the free space.

Although pretty simple as constitution, free space in a given interior is limited. And often ensuring free space means deprivation of some other functionality, and/or the use of smart (transformable) furniture. But the deep rearranging and redesigning of home interior to free more space will not be examined here, as there are too many factors that are involved in. A lot of samples of various design solutions in such cases are to be found in many interior design magazines³.

It is worth mentioning, that even the existing free space itself is often “marked” or signed as special, sport-oriented location, expressing the specifics of the use. And these marks and decorations are to be placed carefully, not diminishing the free space size and ways of use.

If there is already some free space, the rest physical design solutions are about the sport tools and outfits and the dedicated tool and suit storages that are keeping them. Of course, the sport tools and the storage size needed for them are strongly linked.

Looking at our survey, maybe the most preferred tools are the ones of smaller size (except the exercise bike). Many of the respondents willingly bought a sport mat and dumbbells, and this could be assumed as wide-spread trend all over the world. On the

online market place there are available now a lot of solutions of cupboards and shelves specially hosting mats and dumbbells⁴. Often, they are of a simple but stable structure, and applying textile or perforated outside panels, thus ensuring visibility and also the fresh air and proper humidity to the sport gear. But it is hard to say that sport tool storage furniture (for small tools) is of a special outlook or differs a lot from any other home storage elements.

The last group of sport tools that is to be tracked here is the group of combined – transformable and smart equipment that could be used for sport at home. Such items often provide multifunctionalities, compact size and even motivational support at the same time.

As a partially valid solution of transformable furniture we here will show a “yoga ball”, used as a chair (Figure 2). Although not really transforming type of product, it is still combining a sport tool and a seating.

The yoga ball seating marks an interesting class of products, aiming on exercising while seating. Some of them are just facilitating the healthy movements⁵ and others are even meaning to produce energy or electricity. Exercising on various movements with one combined sport tool is may be reaching the limit of a standard living space with the all-in-one workout equipments like these of Reaxing 'One-Infinity-One'⁶.

³ See Love Property (2022) for example.

⁴ See DeBella (2022), Elfa Solution (2022), Marty Sports (2022) and many others.

⁵ See Eunice, Ashley (2022) and many others.

⁶ See this kind of product in Hemsworth (2020).



Figure 2: A lady on a yoga ball in a living room. Image by DCStudio on Freepik

The exercise bike's (ergometer's) potential is fully achieved with adding music, guidance and motivational scenography (Saris 2022). Some tools today are now combining all of this requisite in one design solution. And the trend of combining displays while enhancing the core sport movements is of course valid not only with ergometers⁷.

CONCLUSION

Various researches and studies, tracking the history of sport, the meaning of sport in the human civilization and the maybe strongly growing interest of it as a vital part of our life in the 20th and the 21st century. The paper is registering a very small part of the sport paradigm, as here we deal mostly with the home interior inclusion of sport, as of design solutions and various tool and motivational modifications. In Bulgaria, there is a valid interest in sport activities at home, but it is not fully supported with market demands – of equipment, tools, etc. Still the constantly enlarging variety of gears and motivational support are a trend that should be reflected in most new home plan designs or when rede-

signing the existing ones. The commonly expected 3–6 sq. m. free space for sport are just the beginning of the new types of health and lifestyle requirements that are going to shape our future residential facilities.

Of course more detailed studies in the topic are yet to come.

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⁷ See the products of Soul Cycle or Nordic Track for example.

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