



## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL GYMNASTICS IN ROMANIA

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### Abstract

Gymnastics can be considered as one of the world's oldest sports, appearing since the ancient Olympic Games, and the benefits of practicing gymnastics are well known and documented throughout the world. In Romania, artistic gymnastics (especially feminine artistic gymnastics) represents the sport that brought us the most medals at international competitions, but especially at the Olympic Games, where the number of medals won in gymnastics (72 in total) is almost double (37 medals), comparing to the discipline ranked second in the Olympic medal standings won by Romania. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania\\_to\\_Olympic\\_Games](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romania_to_Olympic_Games)).

We have to make reference to artistic gymnastics around the world, in many countries, such as The United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia, which has developed and practiced in two directions:

1. performance gymnastics
2. recreational gymnastics.

In our country, performance gymnastics has a downward trend, generated by various current social and economic problems. Recreational gymnastics is an untapped field that could bring great financial and human benefits to gymnastics clubs.

### *Motivation of choosing the theme*

The choice of this theme was determined by the passion of the authors for artistic gymnastics and the desire to promote the value of this sport not only as a sport of performance but also as a recreational sport accessible to all children regardless of their age and potential.

*The working methods* used were the method of control samples but also the method of the questionnaire, in order to know and understand the point of view of the children.

*The results* of the handstand are really impressive, all children except one, progressing not just by a few seconds, but by 20, 30 and 40 seconds, 6 of the 10 children succeeding to double the time taken to the initial testing.

*Question No. 2* of the questionnaire asked several reasons why children enjoy gymnastics. Many children appreciated the fact that artistic gymnastics develops certain motoring qualities, and other children impressed us by the fact that they like the level of effort and concentration needed for this sport.

The main conclusion is that we should not forbid children to practice artistic gymnastics just because of the wrong age or other reasons that would lead to arejection by a performance club. Performance should not be reserved only for those who have the potential to get to the Olympic Games one day.

*Keywords:* recreational gymnastics, sports, children, gymnastics club.

### Introduction

1. Gymnastics is viewed as one of the oldest sports in the world, being a staple even in the ancient Olympics programme.

([https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gimnastic%C4%83\\_la\\_Jocurile\\_Olimpice](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gimnastic%C4%83_la_Jocurile_Olimpice), 23.043.2018, 15.10).

The evolution of gymnastics in the modern age is attributed to the philosopher J. J. Rousseau who, in his treatise "Emile: Or On Education" (1973) suggests that a child can best develop through

freedom of movement (Rousseau, 1973).

Niculescu (2012) argues that of all systems of physical education and gymnastics, those of Ling and Jahn have been "most prevalent in the world, generating schools, institutions, competitive activities" and, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gymnastics has become "one of the most widespread, loved and practised activities in the world". (Niculescu, 2012).

Gymnastics is recognized as a sport of

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fairness and beauty, as movements must meet various requirements of amplitude, speed, rhythm and tempo, certain degrees of tension or relaxation, coordination, while strictly observing the axes and planes as well. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.02.237> (Gavojdea, Corlaci, 2014).

In 1906, the Romanian Gymnastics Federation was established and affiliated to the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG) a year later. According to several authors (Vieru N., etc.), Gheorghe Moceanu (1835 - 1909) is the founder of gymnastics in Romania. (Vieru, 1997).

In Romania, artistic gymnastics (especially women's artistic gymnastics) is the sport that has brought Romania the most medals in international competitions, particularly the Olympic Games, where the medals won in gymnastics (a total of 72) are twice as many as in rowing (37 medals), a sport that comes second in the ranking of Olympic medals awarded to Romania. ([https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rom%C3%A2nia\\_la\\_Jocurile\\_Olimpice](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rom%C3%A2nia_la_Jocurile_Olimpice), 26.03.2018, 17.10).

In Romania, artistic gymnastics is an "exclusivist" sport in which only those children that have been selected and admitted to a professional club can participate, which means that that particular child must be age-appropriate and have the ideal body size and necessary motor skills; in addition, they must be perfectly healthy and have the genetic heritage guaranteeing that their height will not increase too much as they grow up. Investing in coach training, equipping gyms and training children are mainly directed towards performance, which means that, except school activities, children who are "unfit" for performance in gymnastics have scarce opportunities to get involved in this sport. (Duncan, 2016).

The concept of artistic gymnastics practised as a recreational sport is unexplored and undeveloped in Romania, as compared to other countries, where the selection for elite sport is among the recreational gymnastics groups.

2. As can be seen, nowadays high-performance clubs can hardly survive in the absence of a recreational gymnastics department. The explanation is the following: performance groups are made up of those children that have been chosen according to the abovementioned criteria, hence a smaller number of children admitted to the club. Therefore, the development of recreational gymnastics classes is very important so that all children should have access to them, thus ensuring the financial survival and continuous development of the club. In addition,

recreational gymnastics groups serve another purpose as well – that of selecting talented children for high performance groups. (<http://www.heathrowgymnastics.org.uk/>, <http://gymmissauga.org/>, <https://www.santabarbaragymnasticsclub.com/>).

In Romania, a famous club located 50 km from the town where we have been conducting our study, namely CS Petrolul Ploiești, which has all the equipment needed for international competitions, fails to develop financially, technologically or in terms of human resources as it lacks updating and adjustment to social requirements. So, at this moment, the club functions with a group of 10 high-performance athletes and 20 children in the initiation stage, 2 coaches. (<http://www.cspetrolul.ro/gimnastica/gimnastica-petrolul-ploiesti.html>).

#### **Conducting the study**

Our study has been conducted in Târgoviște, Romania. It is based on the establishment of Phoenix Gymnastics, which has a department of artistic gymnastics (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/586071898238668/>). The club was founded in 2016.

From October 2016 to May 2017, the first group of recreational gymnastics was organised, consisting of 14 children, 8 girls and 6 boys, aged between 9 and 11. All children are primary school pupils.

The group practises twice a week, for 1.5 hours.

#### **Motivation for choice of this issue**

The choice of this issue has been prompted by the authors' passion for artistic gymnastics and their wish to promote the value of this sport not only as a high performance sport but also as a recreational sport that is accessible to all children, regardless of their age and potential.

The **working methods** used have been the test method, the questionnaire method and management analysis within the club.

#### **Objectives of the study**

1. drawing children to recreational artistic gymnastics (RAG) and developing motor skills through weekly lessons
2. analysing and interpreting the questionnaire
3. management in club organisation

#### **Research methods**

In our case, a RAG group is organised within Phoenix Gymnastics in Târgoviște, Romania. This group is led and coordinated by Coach Annemarie Margaret Duncan, a university-educated

high performance athlete.

To demonstrate the sustainability of organising this group, we have conducted two tests in order to study and interpret the evolution of children following these practices.

Moreover, a questionnaire has been applied to both parents and children with a view to understanding their view of this group.

**Results obtained:**

Table no.1 – Group of children

No.	Name:	Age:	Height:	Town:
1	Teodora O.	10 yrs.	150 cm	Târgoviște
2	Tania E.	10 yrs.	160 cm	Târgoviște
3	Iulia S.	9 yrs.	156 cm	Târgoviște
4	Daria N.	10 yrs.	141 cm	Târgoviște
5	Stefi C.	10 yrs.	158 cm	Târgoviște
6	Emma S.	9 yrs.	120cm	Târgoviște
7	Alexia M.	10 yrs.	123 cm	Târgoviște
8	Daria T.	10 yrs.	130 cm	Târgoviște
9	Claudiu L.	10 yrs.	135 cm	Târgoviște
10	Sebi L.	9 yrs.	134 cm	Târgoviște
11	Andrei P.	9 yrs.	154 cm	Târgoviște
12	Ionuț	10 yrs.	132 cm	Târgoviște
13	Matei	9 yrs.	135 cm	Târgoviște
14	Andrei	9 yrs.	128 cm	Târgoviște

**Tests**

**1. HANDSTAND**

- Description: the subject performs the handstand leaning against the wall or the fixed ladder, arms and legs stretched, while time is measured in whole seconds. It should be specified that handstand is NOT an element to be taught in primary school, according to the school curriculum; children perform this element in their free time or in other sports activities [13]

**2. TRUNK LIFTS**

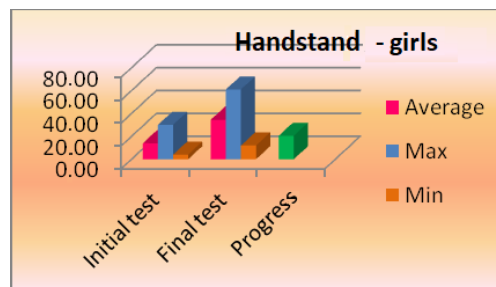
- Description: trunk lifts are performed starting from the prone position to the sitting position having the knees bent, hands behind the neck and feet placed

under the low beam or the fixed ladder. With each trunk lift, the subject must touch his/her knees with the elbows. The number of correct repeats performed in 30 seconds is recorded.

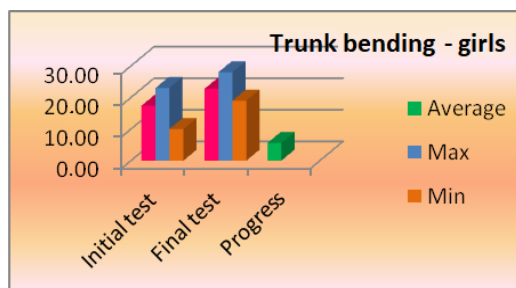
Event Name	1. Handstand (sec)			2. Trunk forward bending (cm)		
	Initial test	Final test	Progress	Initial test	Final test	Progress
Average	14.00	34.50	20.50	17.38	22.71	5.33
Max	30.00	61.00		23.00	28.00	
Min	4.00	17.00		10.00	19.00	

**Statistical results – GIRLS**

Table 2 - Statistical results



Graph 1 - handstand



Graph 2 – trunk bending

**The girls' group, handstand results:**

The arithmetic average value is 14 seconds for initial testing and 37.71 seconds for final testing.

It should be said that the average age for our group is 10 years and the children are primary school pupils. At this level, the educational system does NOT require learning and performing the handstand, which is an element that is taught in middle school.

In this context, we have obtained very good results for the evolution of the maximum value (30 seconds) and of the minimum value (8 seconds), given the fact that the element is not drilled during the physical education classes, but probably during other sports activities practised by children.

As regards the evolution of the girls' average, there is a progress of 23.71 seconds, which points to a good development of strength, courage and coordination skills as well as to the mobilization of children to control tests.

**With the girls' group**, we have obtained the following **trunk forward bending** results:

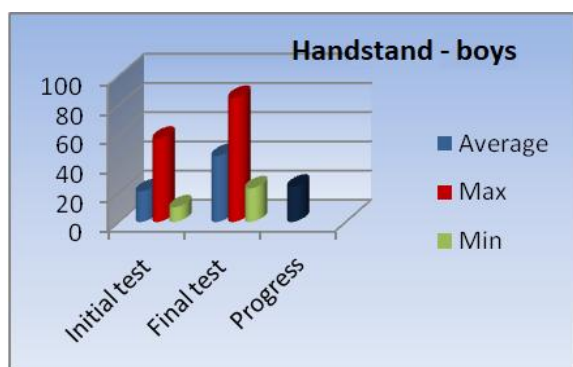
The arithmetic average value is 17.38 cm for initial testing and 22.71 cm for final testing. In this event, there is a progress of 5.57 cm for a period of training of approximately 6 months. For the maximum value, we notice a progress of 5 cm, while for the minimum value the progress is 9 cm.

As regards our group of girls, the 5.57 cm progress is very good, which, if repeated every 6 months, might lead to an extremely high mobility of the girls.

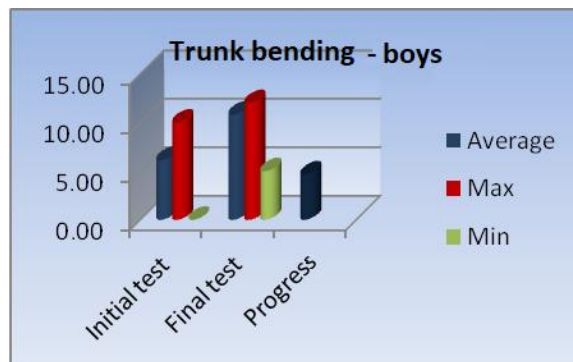
### Statistical results - BOYS

**Table 3 – Statistical results**

Event Name	1. Handstand			2. Trunk forward bending		
	Initial test	Final test	Progress	Initial test	Final test	Progress
Average	21	45.16	24.16	6.16	10.83	4.67
Max	57.00	85.00		10.00	12.00	
Min	10.00	23.00		0.00	5.00	



**Graph 3 – handstand**



**Graph 4 – trunk bending**

### The boys' group, handstand results:

The arithmetic average value is 21 seconds for the initial testing and 45.16 seconds for the final testing, with a recorded progress of 24.16 seconds. The average age of the boys' group is 10 years and all boys are enrolled in the primary education system which does NOT require learning the handstand.

Under these circumstances, we have obtained very good results as regards both the maximum value, 18 seconds, and the minimum value, 13 seconds.

Thus, the results obtained show that, in their free time, children perform other sports activities that require their strength and coordination, as they are children with high motor abilities.

Following these results, we may conclude that training sessions have been well coordinated, leading to a significant progress in the performance of the handstand element.

### The boys' group, trunk forward bending:

The arithmetic average is 6.16 cm for the initial testing and 10.83 cm for the final testing, with a progress of 4.67 cm. For the maximum value we have recorded a progress of 2 cm, while for the minimum value the progress is of 5 cm.

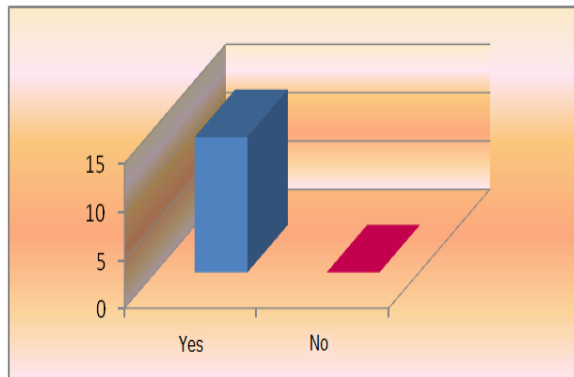
Given the fact that the period of training has been of about 6 months, the progress of nearly 5 cm of suppleness is very good for the boys' group, showing that the recreational gymnastics group can develop mobility with rarer practices as well.

### The questionnaire

**Table 4 – Parent questionnaire**

No.	Parent questionnaire	Yes	No
1.	Do you agree to take your child to the RAG classes if this involves less effort than high performance artistic gymnastics?		
		14	0
2.	Do you agree to pay a monthly fee as in other free-time sports disciplines ?	Yes	No
		14	0

Question 1 has been put forth after discussing with the parents about the fact that we want to conduct only recreational gymnastics classes, which involve a more relaxed schedule, simpler and

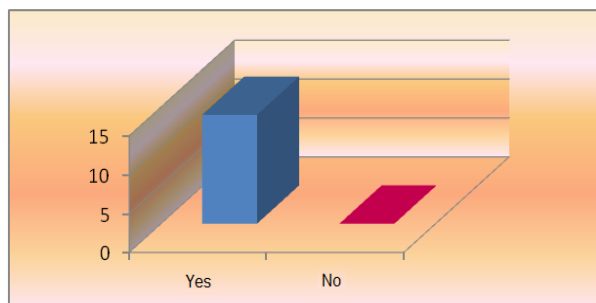


**Graph 5 – Question 1**

more accessible elements. We told parents that there would be only 2 training sessions a week and the children would have a very good motor evolution.

Following discussions with the parents, we have applied the questionnaire and they have informed us both verbally and scriptically that they agree to and wish only recreational gymnastics, being aware that high performance gymnastics entails several negative aspects: daily training and less time for school, great physical strain upon growing children, food restrictions, limited free-time activities, financial efforts for equipment, travelling, competitions, small incentives for children (prizes).

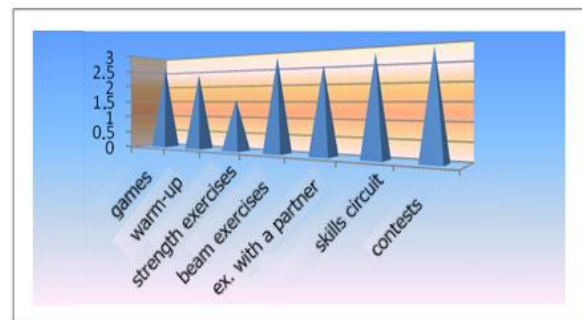
**Graph 6 – Question 2**



As regards question 2, parents have told us that they completely agree to pay a monthly fee, as is customary with other sports activities, for the 2 weekly training sessions, i.e. for 8 training sessions a month.

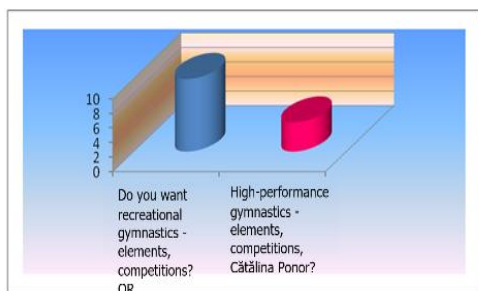
**Table 5 – Children questionnaire**

No.	Children questionnaire	Average
1.	What do you like about gymnastics? Please rate each: 3 – like very much 2 – like 1 – not like	
	- warm-up games	2.64
	- warm-up (on mats)	2.35
	- strength exercises	1.57
	- beam exercises	2.78
	- exercises with a partner	2.5
	- skills circuit	2.78
	- contests at the end of the class	2.85
2.	Do you want recreational gymnastics – elements, competitions? OR	10
	High-performance gymnastics – elements, competitions, Cătălina Ponor?	4



**Graph 7 – Question 1 – children**

As regards question 1 for children, we have obtained the following results: the children have given the grades 3 and 2 for exercises they like and a few 1's for strength exercises or with a partner. Most exercises are pleasant and attractive and make the gymnastics training become enjoyable and not stressful or demanding. It is to be noticed that children generally enjoy recreational gymnastics classes. The fact that there are also exercises they do not like is justified by them being more difficult, more demanding and necessary for gymnastics practices.



Graph 8 – Question 2 – children

Question 2 for children has the following results:

10 children out of 14, i.e. 71.42%, have answered that they want to practise only recreational gymnastics, while 4 children, i.e. 28.58%, say they would like to do gymnastics and be like Ponor Cătălina. When subject to the questionnaire, the children were not previously explained the difference between recreational and high-performance gymnastics, because we wanted an instinctive response based only on their knowledge and information. Being like Ponor Cătălina is a beautiful answer, but children are not aware that reaching the elite group and taking part in important competitions require 4-6 years of intensive, demanding, daily training and a lot of sacrifices.

### 3. Club management

3. In order to be able to develop and organize recreational gymnastics groups in a town with NO tradition or culture of gymnastics groups, we needed to promote the activity, which can be very easily and quickly done via the Internet and social platforms. Thus, we have created a Facebook page of the club where the following are posted (<http://www.heathrowgymnastics.org.uk/>):

- professional information – photos and videos of training sessions and competitions, training classes, schedule changes, parent consultations, social events (anniversaries, visits, awards);
- feedback – likes, various opinions, mobilizing parents for various situations, solutions from third parties.

Moreover, the club organizes independently the financial resources received from monthly fees by purchasing all the specific equipment (mats, springboards, balance beam, sponge blocks, uneven bars, magnesium carbonate) and for various expenses (utilities, rent, phone, office supplies).

Due to good management and constant

promotion, the gymnastics department that started with 14 children currently has a number of 100 children in the recreational artistic gymnastics.

### Conclusions:

1. Following motor tests, we have recorded progress in all the targeted elements.

- Girls:

- in handstand, arm strength, balance and coordination have improved, resulting a 20-second progress.

- in trunk bending, posterior mobility has improved and the progress is of 5.33 cm.

Following these results, we can talk about a very good evolution, which shows that we can also positively influence motor skills by recreational gymnastics practised twice a week.

- Boys:

- in handstand, arm strength, balance and coordination have improved, resulting a 24.16-second progress.

- in trunk bending, posterior mobility has improved in the boys' case as well and the progress is of 4.83 cm.

In the boys' case we can also speak about very good results, which prove that we can develop motor skills by recreational gymnastics, too.

2. Following the application of the questionnaire, we have understood that parents want a recreational gymnastics group and totally agree to pay a monthly fee, just like any other free-time activity the child can practise.

3. The questionnaire applied to children has revealed that they enjoy the recreational gymnastics class, enjoy gymnastics in general, and are familiar with the great athletes of Romania.

4. Good management and adjusting the supply of sports activities to social requirements makes us conclude that a good manager must have vision, adjustment skills and initiative in the activity he/she undertakes.

The **main conclusion** is that we MUST NOT forbid children to do artistic gymnastics just because they may be at an inappropriate age or for several other reasons that may lead to their NOT being admitted to a gymnastics club. On the contrary, children should be able to practise any sport in their free time and should be able to choose to be part of high-performance groups only after a few years of relaxed training.

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