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# SWIMMING AS A LEISURE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING THE 2020-2021 PANDEMIC COVID-19 IN CLUJ-NAPOCA

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**ABSTRACT.** The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the global community, leading to restrictive measures in all areas of activity, including sports. Starting with March 2020, most physical activities have ceased, due to the establishment of the state of emergency in Romania. Swimmers were restricted from accessing their main training facilities and were no longer allowed access to the pools. After a more sedentary period, in which each of us tried to adapt to the existing situation, the need to be involved in sports, the need for movement, and the need for socialization was growing. Thus, the instructors tried to find out alternatives to continue athletes training, so they do not completely lose their physical fitness. Some managed to continue their training in the water, at other pools, others organized workouts outside the pool, maintaining their physical condition at an optimal level. In fewer cases, coaches continued training with athletes online. The purpose of this study was to discover the training strategies applied by swimming coaches during the pandemic, during the State of emergency and the Alert state, in Cluj-Napoca. The results of our study can be used, in the future, by students, teachers and instructors to better reorganize their physical activities, especially swimming, when a special situation arises again.

***Key words:*** *Covid-19, swimming, training, methods, management, physical activity, leisure.*

**REZUMAT.** ***Înotul ca activitate fizică de timp liber în perioada pandemiei de Covid-19, în Cluj-Napoca, pe durata anilor 2020-2021.*** Pandemia Covid-19 a avut un impact negativ asupra comunității la nivel global, ducând la impunerea unor măsuri restrictive în toate domeniile de activitate, inclusiv în sport. Începând cu luna martie 2020, majoritatea activităților sportive au încetat, instaurându-se starea de urgență pe teritoriul României. Înotătorilor le-a fost restricționat accesul la principala lor modalitate de antrenament, deoarece nu a mai fost permis accesul la bazin. După o perioadă mai sedentară, în care fiecare dintre noi am încercat să ne adaptăm situației existente, nevoia de a face sport,

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nevoia de mişcare, nevoia de socializare creşteau. Astfel, instructorii au încercat să găsească alternative pentru a continua antrenamentele înotătorilor, pentru ca aceştia să nu-şi piardă complet condiţia fizică. Unii au reuşit să îşi continue antrenamentele în apă, la alte bazine, alţii au organizat serii de antrenamente pe uscat, menţinându-şi condiţia fizică la un nivel optim. În puţine cazuri, antrenorii au continuat antrenamentele cu sportivii chiar şi în mediul online. Scopul acestui studiu a constat în descoperirea strategiilor de antrenament aplicate de antrenorii/instructorii de înot în timpul pandemiei, atât în timpul stării de urgenţă cât şi în timpul stării de alertă, în Cluj-Napoca. Rezultatele studiului nostru pot fi folosite, în viitor, de studenţi, profesori, instructori şi antrenori pentru a se informa în legătură cu modalitatea de reorganizare a activităţilor sportive, în special a înotului, când o situaţie deosebită apare din nou.

***Cuvinte cheie**: Covid-19, înot, antrenament, metode, gestionarea activităţii, activitate fizică, timp liber.*

## Introduction

Swimming is one of the most special physical activities, as it offers a varied and complex range of exercises from the simple entry into the water with immediate effects on adaptation of the major body functions (Ceontea, 2010). It is a sport with many benefits, the main beneficial effect being the harmonious physical development by involving the whole body in the activity.

When it comes to swimming training, there are basic, preparatory exercises that fall into two main categories: inside the pool and outside the pool (Pop, 2014). We believe that valuable results are inconceivable today without a specific training. Thus, by combining static and dynamic exercises we will have the effect of toning muscles, with a positive effect on body posture, which will significantly reduce back pain and lead to the formation of correct body postures (Vasile, 2007).

By March 2021, one year after the start of the pandemic, the SarsCov2 virus had infected more than 121,174,001 people and caused more than 2,701,543 deaths (Who.int. 2021). Thus, every athlete or individual, active swimmer of various physical activities, every sports organization, had to redefine themselves to a certain extent and find ways to minimize as much as possible the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed to prevent its spread.

The general need to reduce the transmission of the disease has had a major impact on all sports. Moreover, restrictions on outdoor exercise and the need to stay home have led to a reduction in physical activity and an increase

in sedentary behavior (Yeo, 2020). Thus, training outside pool has become essential during this period, as a way to maintain performance, it helps athletes to continue training, becoming an alternative to the usual training method.

Riewald & Rodeo (2015) in the book "Science of Swimming Faster" proposes the following ways of training outside the pool: elastic resistance bands, swimming bench and suspension system-TRX. In addition, (Haddad et al., 2021) also mentioned as important the following methods: running, cycling and circuit training.

On the same note, the communication between the athletes and the coach became a fundamental aspect during this difficult period. A very important principle in communicating with athletes is that of awareness and active participation, which involves "appreciation of the individual as a subject of their own development" (Dragnea, 2006, p.143). Training involves listening and active participation from both, the coach and the athletes. There must be a very good communication so that the athletes do not lose their motivation. Otherwise, athletes will have a low interest in their own training, will not stimulate the development of psychological traits such as will and perseverance (Bompa, 2001).

"The COMPASS model" proposes the following strategies that can maintain success and professional communication between athletes and coaches (Bateman & Jones, 2019): conflict management, openness in communication, motivation, positivity, advice, support and social networks used to maintain communication.

During the pandemic, people tend to be less physically active, leading to weight gain and loss of fitness (Yeo, 2020). Also, deconditioning, partial or complete loss of training-induced adaptations, have negative effects on cardiovascular adaptation, muscle function and energy metabolism (Mujika, 2001), which leads to one of the most important health problems among students, a decreased in ability to move (hypokinesia), accompanied by obesity (Pavlović et al., 2015).

Given these considerations, it is essential that swimming instructors know how to manage an extraordinary, crisis situation, an atypical situation in such a way as to maintain the highest possible pace of training for their students.

## Study objectives

As a first objective, we checked if the sports activity of the swimmers continued after the pandemic situation in Romania started.

The second objective of the research was how the coaches managed to reorganize, as a matter of urgency, the training of swimmers so that they can continue physical activity in order to maintain, first of all, an optimal physical condition.

With the ultimate goal, for this research, we aimed to find out the most effective methods of preparation for swimming, used by coaches in Cluj-Napoca, through which students develop their qualities and motor skills specific to swimming, in special situations when they can't perform at the pool.

## Material and methods

For this study, 25 instructors were chosen, aged between 21-52 years, the period spent as swimming instructors being between 2 to 27 years. The participants are part of the category of swimming instructors from Cluj-Napoca, having groups of children engaged in swimming, as a leisure activity. The research took place between March 2020 and March 2021.

As a method of data collection we chose the sociological survey (questionnaire), the analyzed period being from the beginning of the state of emergency March 16, 2020, for one year, until March 16, 2021. The questionnaire includes two sections: state of emergency and state of alert. The same set of questions was used in both periods.

## Results

In the state of emergency, the swimming instructors had to completely interrupt their activity, and the data they provided us were not conclusive, so the results of our research refer only to the activity during the alert state.

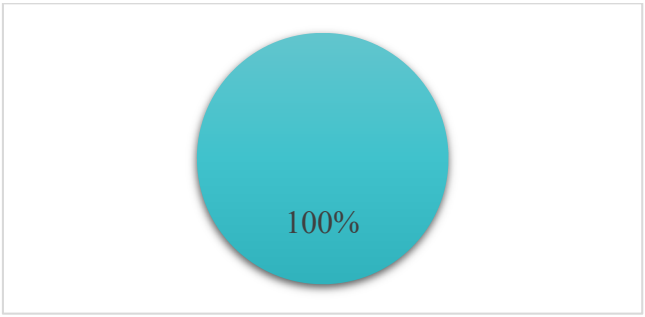


**Chart 1.** Swimmers whose workouts have been affected

This first chart shows that all athletes' workouts were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

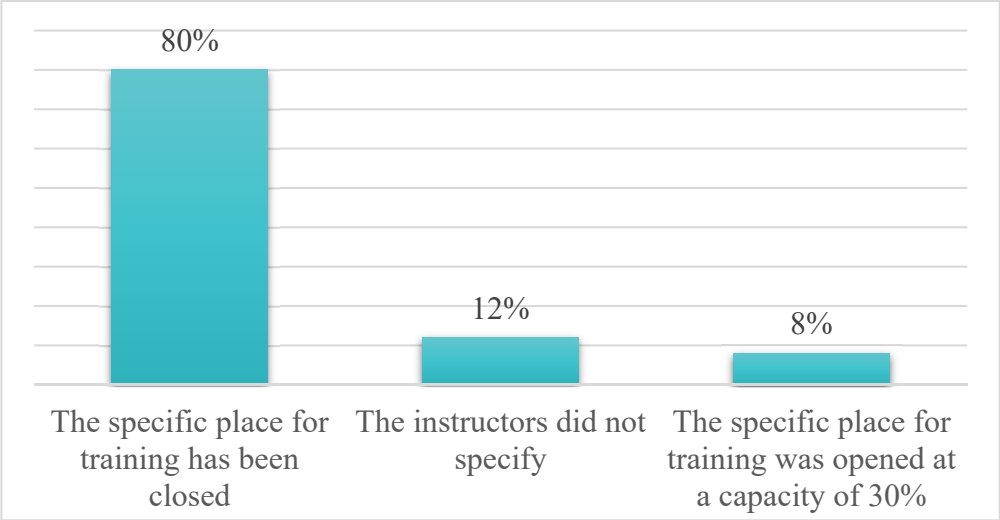


**Chart 2.** The extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic affected swimmers' training

Chart 2 shows that for 80% of the swimming instructors the pool closed, 12% of them did not specify, and 8% of those interviewed could work at a capacity of 30% at their pool, when legal regulations allowed them to do so.

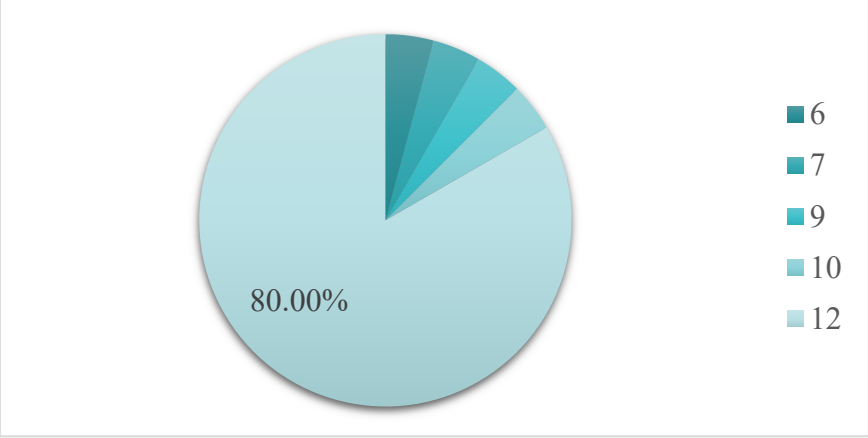


**Chart 3.** Period during which the pool was closed (months)

In Chart 3 it can be seen that for 80% of respondents the pool was closed for a period of 12 months.

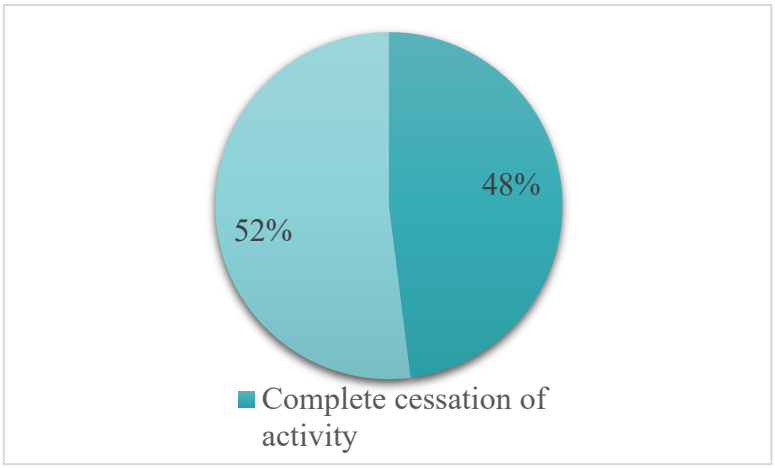


**Chart 4.** Alternatives for continuing the activity

Chart 4 shows that 48% of instructors completely stopped working in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, while over 52% found alternatives to continue their work.

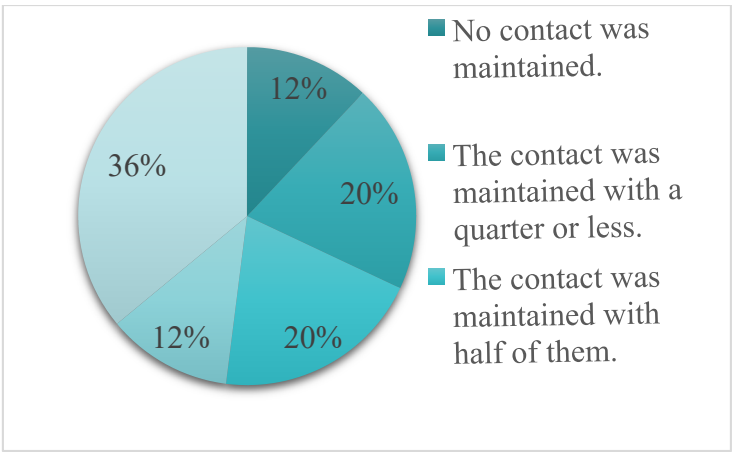


**Chart 5.** Maintaining contact with swimmers during the alert state

In the previous Chart it can be seen that 36% of the instructors kept contact with all swimmers, while 20% kept contact with half of them, and 12% did not kept contact with any swimmer, during the Covid-19 pandemic alert state.

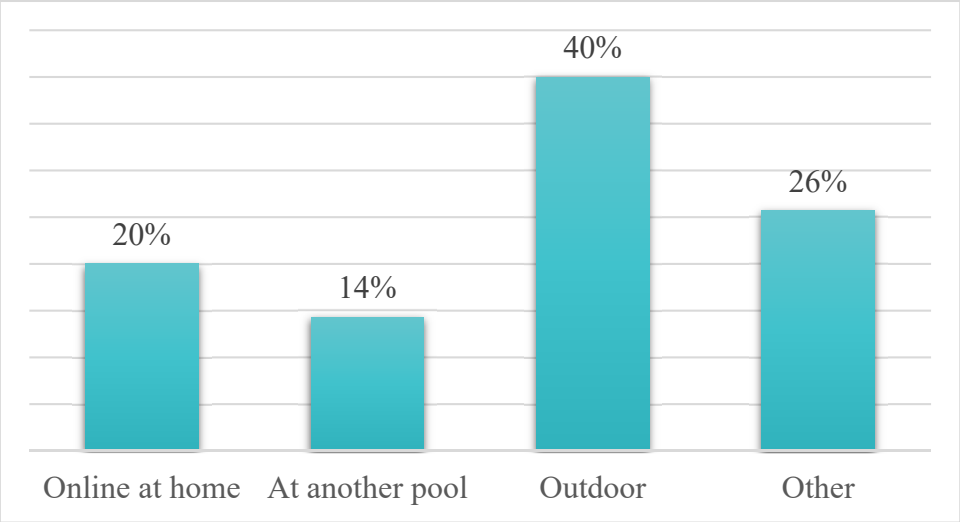


**Chart 6.** Training variants during the pandemic

In the Chart 6 it can be seen that 40% of the instructors chose to conduct their training outdoors, 20% online, and 26% specified other options for continuing training. Only a percentage of 14% opted to train to another pool.

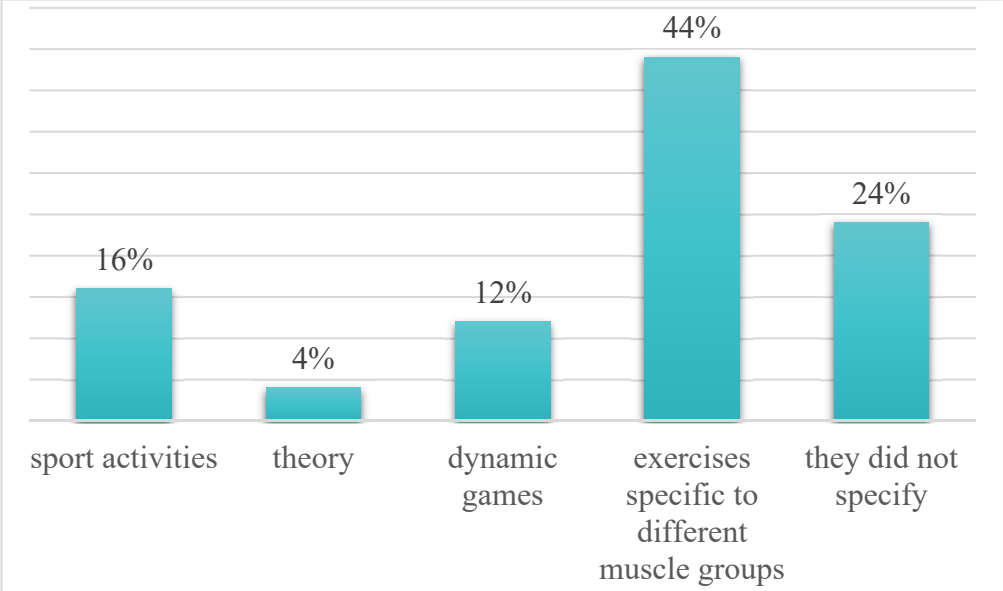


**Chart 7.** Proposed activities

Chart 7 shows the categories of activities that instructors used as complementary alternatives to continue training. Specific exercises to train different muscle groups were used by 44% of instructors, 16% of instructors involved swimmers in various sports activities, 12% of instructors used dynamic games, while only a percentage of 4% opted exclusively for theoretical training.

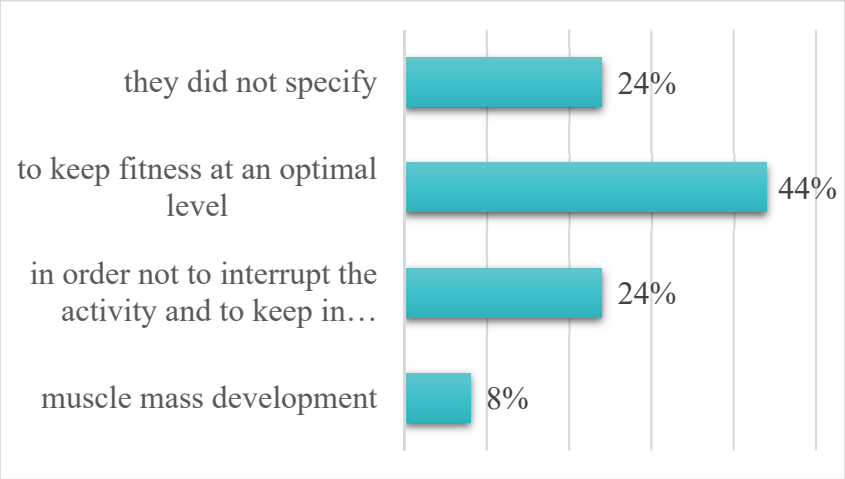


**Chart 8**. Reasons for choosing the implemented activities

As can be seen in the chart above, a large part of the interviewees chose categories of exercises that would keep the athletes in an optimal physical condition.

## Discussions

As of March 2020, most sports activities have ceased, swimmers lost access to their main training establishment because they were no longer allowed access to the pool. It was expected that the swimming pools would be closed for a longer period of time given the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, affecting training with athletes 100%.

For most athletes (80%) the pool where they trained was closed for a period of 12 months starting with the beginning of the state of emergency in Romania, and for the rest (20%), the pool was closed for 6, 7, 9 and 10 months, respectively. During the state of emergency, all sports clubs had to stop completely their activities. During this time the instructors had to give the best advice to the athletes for maintaining mental and physical health.

Although the pools were closed, continuing the activity through various alternatives was essential to maintain fitness at an optimal level. Coaches and athletes had to find the best alternatives to continue their training. Therefore, 48% of respondents found alternatives to continue the activity, while the rest stopped activities completely.

The alternatives found by the instructors are very interesting, being mentioned the following: sports activities, dynamic games and exercises specific to different muscle groups. They are very effective for the continuous development of motor skills, for maintaining physical fitness at an adequate level and for strengthening the immune system which is crucial in this pandemic period. Thus, upon re-entering the swimming pool, the athletes will be physically prepared to start training and will be able to return to their original form as soon as possible.

Maintaining communication during this period between the instructor and the athlete or parent is essential to maintain the swimmer's motivation. The fact that 12% of swimming instructors did not keep in touch with their athletes during this period, or 20% with a quarter or less, indicates that these athletes could have chosen to go to other swimming clubs that continued their activity. When the swimming instructor decides not to keep in touch with the athletes, there is a good chance that he will lose his clients and the connection with them, and when he will be able to resume his activity it will be difficult for him to gather the groups of children again.

## Conclusions

More than half of the study's respondents found no alternatives for continuing physical activity during 2020-2021 pandemic Covid-19. About half of the instructors (48%) found complementary alternatives for maintaining fitness through which swimmers developed their qualities, skills and motor skills specific to swimming, for different periods of time, when they could not perform the usual training at the pool. The most commonly used activities were activities performed outdoors, whether we are talking about physical activities, dynamic games or exercises specific to some muscle groups.

Last but not least, even though a large part of the swimming instructors completely stopped the activity, they continued to communicate with the athletes during this period.

Finally, the above recommendations could help swimmers maintain an optimal level of physical activity and improve other skills in the event that in the future they will face special situations again, during which they cannot perform the usual workouts at the pool.

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