

SPORTS, GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

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ABSTRACT. Nowadays, especially in the more developed countries, people are discussing the importance of sports not just in maintaining a healthy life and a balanced development, but also in shaping the identity and social integration of individuals. By running through a vast series of the most recent articles, we have succeeded in summarising several positive aspects of the sports phenomenon. We have tried to bring to attention some reasons for which young people take part in sports activities and at the same time, we have underlined a list of reasons that determine the young people to quit on sports. In the specialised literature, a series of reasons stand out for which the involvement of people in sports activities is also determined by gender differences.

Key words: Sports, gender, social integration, identity, young people

ABSTRACT. Sportul, genul și incluziunea socială. În zilele noastre, mai ales în țările dezvoltate, se vorbește despre importanța sportului nu doar în menținerea sănătății și a dezvoltării armonioase, ci și în formarea identității și a integrării sociale a indivizilor. Parcurgând o serie vastă de articole, dintre cele mai recente, am reușit să sintetizez câteva aspecte pozitive ale fenomenului sportiv. Am încercat să aducem în atenție câteva motive pentru care tinerii participă la activitățile sportive și, totodată, am subliniat o serie de motive care-i determină pe aceștia să renunțe. În literatura de specialitate, se evidențiază o serie de motive pentru care participarea subiecților la activitățile sportive este determinată și de diferențele de gen.

Cuvinte cheie: Sport, gen, integrare socială, identitate, tineri.

Due to its valences, sports are oftentimes the essence of different programmes created by different organisations/institutions, being related to teaching and developing skills in young people, which will be necessary to them all throughout their lives.

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Sports, dance, music, theatre are all important aspects of living one's life, while being at the same time a real support for building the individual identity (Aittola, 1998, apud Telama et al., 2005, p. 116). Through different sports-related reunions in young people communities, the goal is not just that of building certain social and cognitive competences which will be later on applied in other fields of life, but also that of developing the initiative and intrinsic motivation, which sometimes school activities lack in (Eccles and Gootman 2002). Gradually, pastime activities including sports activities start to complete or take over a series of tasks that in the past used to belong to the school or to the family.

By making a reference to leisure time activities which include sports, we underline the fact that, through this, young people have the possibility of gaining a range of competences, which can increase self-esteem, can lead to forming new friendships, while having the opportunity of manifesting their individual identities as well as that of evaluating the identities of those around them (Kely and Godbey 1992, apud Telama, Nupponen, Pieron 2005, p. 117). The benefits of practising physical activities on the individual (Kimm et al., 2002, apud Arteaga and Maureen, 2004), are manifold, including positive social development, as well as a decrease in the risk of chronic diseases. Young people who are active from a point of view of physical effort present a better general state of health, as the risk of becoming overweight is greatly reduced.

Studies show the fact that in Western countries young people, especially boys, build their own identity in relation to physical activity and/or sports, which was used initially as a shaper or character, of moral values or as a means of military training. Through sports, among others, young people build their body image, which has become a reflection of wealth nowadays.

Through its particularities and at the same time, sports promote competition, ever so present in capitalist societies, which teaches the participants to become strong, competitive, and eager to attain success.

On the other hand, by means of sports, young people can learn working in a team, by practising at the same time their decision making ability. Creating a specific context as close as possible to that of the community is essential for the development of young people communities, therefore "when young people are working collectively with other colleagues and adults to reach a common goal, they are in fact practising problem solving, by developing at the same time their decision making ability" (Perkins and Noam, 2007, p. 77).

According to Havighurst (1972), physical activities and sports, together with other fields, have a determinant role in the process of development and socialisation of young people, contributing to the accomplishment of the educational process by "creating new social relations; adopting the gender role; accepting one's own body; gaining emotional independence towards parents and other adults; preparing for marriage and family life; preparing for work; developing a perception/ideology on the world; adopting a responsible social behaviour" (apud Telama et al., 2005, p. 117).

Starting from Popitz's theory (1987), according to which the individual seeks recognition in five types of social subjectivity, Weiss (2001) underlines the fact that the individual can also find social acceptance through sports. The five types of social recognition are the following: recognition in an attributed role (behaviours of this type include features determined by age, gender, social class); recognition as member pertaining to a group (in this case the individual wishes to be like the others, developing a sense of belonging, this happening mostly in team sports); recognition in an achieved role (the success in sports is ensured by achieving performance); recognition in a public role (the public expects performances which he later on recognises); recognition of personal identity (each individual manifests the desire to be recognised as an individual in the society). This can be pointed out by individual sports, inaccessible to the majority of the people, such as horseback riding, golf, ski, tennis or by those sports in which the elite tries to differentiate itself from the vast majority. (Weiss, 2001, pp. 393-395)

Sports, especially team sports, support the development and integration of individuals into the society. As demonstrated by various studies, the involvement in team sports of minorities enables the feeling of belonging to the traditional communities, due to the direct contact with the members of the community, therefore facilitating their integration into the community. In this way, the participants/ players, who are often placed in the circumstances of solving together some game-related situations, get to the point of mutual acceptance. They learn to communicate with the goal of adopting viable solutions, which later on can translate outside of the sports field, allowing for quality social relationships to be formed (Weiss, 2001, apud Walseth, 2006, p. 451).

Sports, through their particularities, give young people the chance of relating to each other, to get to know the other better, therefore creating friendships or affiliations to various groups and at the same time proving that those who participate in different sports activities/ sports are more sociable even outside of sports (Gavriliuță, 2010, pp. 36-42). A series of social symbols, such as values, norms, principles can be experienced through sports which are more than a micro cosmos of the society (Weiss, 2001). For the majority of people, sports are an ideal form of communication, which functions based on some symbols (Olympic circles, emblems, flags, Olympic flames, grades, records etc.). Gaining emotional independence from one's parents or other adults as well as accepting one's own body and its functions contributes to the development of one's personality and individual identity. "Sports are an ideal means for enforcing the identity" (Weiss, 2001, p. 395). For some sociologists, sports are perceived as a "support, means and context of accomplishing the socialisation process" (Gavriliuță, 2010, p. 73).

Regarding the involvement of young people in physical activities/sports, there are a variety of studies (Biddle et al., 2004; Caspersen, et al., 2000; Telama and Yang, 2000) which highlight a decrease in participating in such activities proportional with aging; it has also been established that individuals coming from ethnic minorities or from less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds, take part in physical activities/sports in a far lower number (Lee et al., 2009, p. 59). Regarding the involvement of students in sports activities, the decrease is partly owed to transitioning to the teenager period in which we should point out gender and ethnic differences (Kimm and Barton, 2002, apud Arteaga and Maureen, 2004). Young people who are less active during this stage and do not form the habit of engaging in different physical activities have every chance later on to become sedentary people. According to Arteaga and Maureen (2004) the decrease of the participation rate of teenage girls in physical activities is owed to several factors, out of which we can mention the lack of time, a weak motivation, the lack of skill or of opportunities to practise a certain sports branch. A series of studies have shown that young girls who have a low participation rate in sports activities spend more time in front of the TV/PC, ingesting at the same time high-calorie products, which leads to gaining weight. Apart from this, seasons also influence the participation in sports activities, a well-known fact being that in seasons with higher temperatures young people are more inclined to physical efforts.

Studies conducted on women as ethnic minorities in their relationship with sports have highlighted the poor involvement of these in sports activities. Surveys done in Europe with relation to women who are part of ethnic minorities and their participation in sports activities show that the number of those involved in sports is far more reduced than that of men pertaining to ethnic minorities as well as lower than the number of indigenous women. Other statistics conducted in the USA have pointed out that girls of African origin in America are less active than European girls who also live in the US.

Some researchers perceive cultural and religious boundaries as a potential obstacle in involving women belonging to minorities in sports activities (Walseth, 2006). Gender differences, the socio-economic status, transitioning from high school to college, are all factors which lead to the decrease of the participation rate in physical activities/sports (Kilpatrick et al., 2005, p. 87).

In another interpretation, the low rate of participation in physical activities of girls can also be explained by the fact that girls are more sceptical towards their inclination for sports, attributing at the same time a less important meaning to sports results (Fredericks and Eccles, 2002, apud Pedersen, 2004). Unlike boys, girls do not wish as much to create an identity by means of sports, as they are more study-oriented, desiring to prove themselves by accumulating knowledge in various fields.

Conclusions

Starting from several articles, which approach the domain of sport, we can emphasize the role of sport in the development of subjects' identity. The Sport offers to the young people the possibility to be involved in making decisions, developing also their capacity to work in a team. Speaking about the integration of individuals, especially minorities, the sport represents a real support in this sense, even there is a lot to do in this way. As we get older, the participation in sport activities diminishes, the same fact being observed at the level of families with lower incomes. The women attendance in sport activities is weaker regarding the men being involved in this kind of activities, but the articles emphasized that the women are not so preoccupied to reach the performance, in different contests, as the men are.

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