QUALITY OF LIFE AND STUDENTS` SOCIALIZATION THROUGH SPORT

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Abstract

Sport, among other factors, can be responsible for the wellbeing of adolescents life, contributing not only to their physical health but to a better socialization as Coakely (2011) and Giulianotti (2004) underlined. They consider sport activities having a large potential to contribute to problem solving and the enhancement of life quality of individuals and communities. Therefore we should militate for sport formal activities in schools and encourage extra-curricular sport activities for all children and young people.

Keywords:: quality of life, socialization, sport

1. Introduction

If we consider quality of life as general well-being of an individual or society and we try to analyse the benefits of sport practicing in a person`s life or in the life of a community/society, it is obvious the direct relationship between sport and the level of quality of life.

One of the definitions of the quality of life consider that there are four domains that we have to analyse when we measure it, respectively the ecological one, the economical one, the political and the cultural domains.

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(Magee et. al., 2012), the cultural domain being divided into 7 sub-domains. One of these sub-domains refers to the wellbeing and health, and a great contribution here can be attributed to sport.

If we consider Eurostat (2013) research concerning quality of life, they emphasise on 8+1 indicators that measures wellbeing, one of them being health, which is an essential part of the quality of life of citizens, as the report underlined. Poor health, both physical and mental, affects individuals' quality of life, and it can even modify their life expectancy. According to WHO (2013), if we estimate remaining life expectancy not only at birth, but also at various stages of a person’s life, available data show that countries that joined the EU after 2004 have the lowest remaining life expectancy at 65. From this point of view Romania is situated under the EU average for this age.

At a macro-level, poor health it holds back economic and social development by reducing the available human capital of a society. Thus health is not just an important personal aim, but also an indication of societal wellbeing and success (Eurostat, 2013). Hagan et. al.(2008) elaborated the guide Bright Futures. A Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children and Adolescents funded by US Department of Health and Human Services in which they proposed Bright Future Themes, a number of issues of overwhelming importance to overall health and well-being in children and adolescents’s life (Hagan et. al., 2008). Among the ten themes of key importance to families and health care professionals in their common mission to promote the health and well-being of children from birth through adolescence there is the issue of promoting physical activity.

Since it has been shown that factors like people’s lifestyles, culture and living environment affect health outcomes, it is obvious why we have to stress upon sports’ involvement, importance in providing a better life quality.

2. Sports in adolescents’ life

Socialization on and through sport is responsible for the role of sport in any society. It is obvious that this role can be developed if the society has the economic resources necessary for investments in sport (for coaching, sport fields, clubs, players etc.) and the willingness to invest in it. High life standards create variety into the family life style, sport practicing at any age being an indicator of the quality of life. Our investment in children’s formal, informal and non-formal education has an obvious importance. We have to stress here not only on the formal-institutional approach but also on the values induced by family, other scholar activities etc. Among the values directly and indirectly cultivated through sport activities we can consider the following ones: fair-play, the capacity to organize and coordinate activities, knowledge of and following the rules (Baciu, A., 2006).

As Coakley (2011) underlined, it is widely spread the idea that sport contribute to young people development due to the fact that induces a general well-being state and other positive outputs for those who are practicing sport.

Sport promotors consider that sport inevitably leads to multiple forms of development including facilitating socialization/resocialization, community revitalization through human bonding enhancement and commitment in relationship with others. (Giulianotti, 2004). Comming from this perspective sport is seen, according to Giulianotti (2004), as a problem-solving activity meant to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities.

As we already stated, there are many benefits of sport practicing but, in what concerns adolescents and young people, sport promotors consider three major categories of positive outputs as following: personal development, positive influence upon at-risk populations (for instance juvenile delinquents, children at risk of social exclusion) and fostering social capital that leads to successful civic engagement (Coalter, 2007).

Coakley (2011:308) highlighted the following outputs that sport participation can deliver: creates motor-specific skills convertible into physical capital, improves general physical health, enhance self-esteem an self-confidence inducing a positive body image, forms well shaped characters by encouraging discipline and team work.

If we take into consideration that socialization can be defined as a complex process through which individuals, in their interactions with others, accumulate skills, knowledge, values, norms, attitudes and desirable behaviours for their existence into the society frame, we can understand the socialization role of sport.

Activities structured around generally accepted values, alternative activities conducted by adults in controlled environments, teaching them self-control, authority recognition, conformation to rules, positive adult role models, are some of the expected outcomes of sport, for at-risk populations of teens (Coakley, 2011:308).

At a closer look, the reality of sports’ influences among teens are more complex, the positive effects of
sports being influenced by a whole range on factors that can act individual or combined. Among these factors we can include the type of sport practiced (Crissey & Honea, 2006; Cote & Fraser-Thomas, 2007), norms and values associated with a particular type of sport, (Hartmann & Massoglia, 2007), socially significant characteristics associated to sport players, (Coakley, 2002), the cultural and material context under the sport activity occur (Hoffman, 2006) and other more. Sports help forge connections between children, it allows them to learn how to share, to negotiate and solve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills when necessary. It also teach them leadership as well as group skills that may be useful in adult life (Milteer & Gilsburg, 2012:205).

Therefore socialisation through sport, more precisely the social roles of sport are to support and consolidate human interactions, to create friendly, non-discriminative relations, and to enhance the general well-being of any person.

Milteer & Gilsburg (2012) underlined the fact that play enhances physical health by building active, healthy bodies. Also, physical activity beginning in early childhood prevents obesity and may be included as an important strategy in addressing the obesity epidemic. Play contributes to healthy brain development, as the authors stated, because through physical activity children engage and interact with the world around them from a very early age. In the academic environment, play foster school engagement, and enhances children’s learning readiness, learning behaviours, and problem-solving skills. Also is essential to developing social and emotional ties.

In a study conducted in Australia, aiming swimming clubs for teens, the coaches and parents both agreed that sports contribute to quality of life by developing personal discipline, setting goals, and striving to reach them and sacrifice for delayed benefits (Light, 2010:389).

A particular situation related to sport practicing can be considered that of African American adolescents and young people from United States. As Beamon (2009) underlined, African American teens are deliberately more intensively socialized into sports than their White counterparts and this can lead to a whole range of perverse effects. The author makes a qualitative analyse among African American students. She is questioning herself if, in this particular case, socialization through sport is not unwillingly changing the accent from academic performances to sport achievements. The consequences payed by these young people who have such an elevated sports socialization, as the author concludes, are lower levels of academic achievement, high expectations for professional sports careers that provide upward mobility, and lower levels of career maturity (Beamon, 2009:281).

Martin & Jacobson (2014), on behalf of American Academy of Pediatrics, stated that playing sports isn’t always fun for today’s youths who increasingly face injuries and pressure to perform. Therefore specialists have to help them they stay safe and collect al the physical, emotional and social benefits that sports can provide.

The discussion above is not meant to reduce the importance of sport in a successful socialization of children, adolescents and young people, but to present a through analyse of possible sport consequences in students life.

As for our country, although generally life quality analysis indicates a low or at most a modest life quality (Mărginean & Bălașa, 2002:81) the tendency is for up-going (Precupețu et al., 2007:199). Therefore we have legitimate expectations for sport socialization to be or to become an important element for the standard of living enhancement.

Quality of life diagnosis, a major program of the Institute for Quality of Life Research contains sets of relevant data for 12 years (1990-1999 and 2003-2006) using 54 quality of life indicators (Mărginean, 2010). The population wellbeing was measured using the concept of deprivation and the indicator for this was the economic capacity of a household to provide at least the basic needs. In this regard, data for Romania show that 27% for the total population has an income which doesn’t cover the basic needs (Precupețu et al., 2007:200).

We have to consider these data when we analyse Romanian adolescents’ participation to sports that enhance their quality of life. It is necessary to approach the subject not only in terms of „willingness“, „disposition to” but to take also into consideration the „affordability“.

A study conducted in Romania (Baciu, A., 2006) aimed 181 adolescents (a class from IX th grade and one from XII th grade) from two High Schools- „Emil Racoviță” (66 students) and „Onisifor Ghibu” (18 students) from Cuj-Napoca -, respectively, GSIU Cluj-Napoca (97 students). 83.2% were from Cluj-Napoca (a large town) 5.6 % from a small town, and 11.2 % from a rural area.

Rural areas do not provide major opportunities for sports activities and parents from those areas don’t
usually encourage their children to practice any sport. Baciu A. (2006) finds at least two explanations for this situation: lack of values for and through sports and institutional flaws in organizing sports activities (lack of specialized teachers, coaches, sport fields, and a variety of options not only for football and basketball in the school courtyard).

An important aspect that we should take into consideration when we talk about differences between urban and rural areas concerning sport activities for and with students is that of the discrepancies in school attending for these two areas. As a UNICEF study concerning school attending shows (Apostu et al., 2012:23), in Romania school dropout rate remains significant higher for the rural areas than for urban ones.

According to the National Report on the State of the Education System in Romania (2008) – MoERY, in 2006/2007 the cohort dropout rate for primary education was 9.8% and for lower secondary education 12.4%. Moreover, the National Report also underlined significant disparities in the dropout rates when comparing urban and rural communities. A special situation is the one of Roma pupils. The Roma Inclusion Barometer (Bădescu et al., 2007) indicates that 23% of Roma respondents have no education whatsoever, 27% attended primary school and 33% graduated from secondary school without going further – as opposed to 2%, 11% and 24% respectively among other ethnic groups taken as a whole. Furthermore, 95% of Roma have no high school education, compared to 60% among the other respondents.

If we take into consideration the dropout school rate we find that children and young people from deprived areas are frustrated even of the minimal sport activities organized in schools as compulsory activities/classes, the most affected groups being here teens from rural areas and Roma ethnics.

Studying sport practicing, sport preferences, knowledges about sports among teens in Romania, Baciu A. (2006) underlined that there is a relevant positive association between parents level of education, income and teens sport attendance.

Another interesting finding for Romania (Baciu, A., 2006:131) refers to the sports that teens appreciate most: there were mentioned voleyball, football, handball, gymnastics, basketball and tennis on the first 6 places out of 19 sports indicated by teens. As we can see, they seem to like, among other sports, those ones on which our country had/has good performances presented in media as football, gymnastics and tennis.

Teens first choices in sport practicing are a little different from those they consider valuable, as follows: basketball, football, voleyball, handball and swimming (Baciu, A., 2006: 132). We have to take into consideration the fact that these are the sports offered in the first place in our school, most of them being team sports with less costs that others.

Although half of the teens from the study consider that they are practicing sports „as much as on other countries”, 71% of them think also that this is not enough for them. (Baciu, A., 2006:136).

One of the measures took by the Romanian Ministry of Education, to stress the importance of sport for a complex development of children and teens, was to propose/promote form 2013 a future framework plan that includes minimum of 2-3 hours of Sport and another 1-2 hours of Music and movement as compulsory disciplines for primary schools and an enhancement of the number of Sport classes from 2 hour/week at 4 hours/week on gymnasium and high-school. In other words, sport should be an integral component of school engagement because school engagement is best realized when the educational setting attends to the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive development. The challenge here is to give children the opportunity to feel competent in a school setting, because the experience of success forms positive associations with school attendance (Miltier & Gilsburg, 2012:205). Also sports allow for peer interactions that contribute both to school engagement and social-emotional learning.

3. Conclusions

No matter what sport teens are practicing it is obvious that it contributes to their physical, psychological and emotional development, and also to their capacity to develop functional relations with others.

The general improvement in health conditions in Europe for instance, does not mean that the EU doesn’t face potential threats to its future health situation. For example, obesity, among the main causes of premature deaths, is regarded as a major threat to individual health. Data, although available only for a group of countries –Romania was part of the study-, show that in almost all of them, more than half of the population were overweight or obese in
2008 or 2009 (Eurostat, 2013). Romania had around 50\% population with obese and overweight people aged 15 and over no matter their income situation.

As a difference from the Romanian situation, in USA, because of the sedentary lifestyle associated with obesity, children from low income and minority families are disproportionately at risk. Another finding of the AAP and others is that children who are obese in early childhood are more likely to be obese adults and to be at risk for the comorbidities associated with obesity, including type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, coronary artery disease, hypercholesterolemia, hyperlipidemia, asthma, and sleep apnea (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012:208).

Children who are not engaged in physical activity outside of school hours spend time engaged in sedentary activities, such as viewing television, playing video games, or listening to music. This way of spending time is often associate with isolation, lack of social interaction and no adult supervision.

If we take into consideration parents’ panic over a perceived obesity epidemic in developed societies we can understand the importance given to regular physical activity among children for their physical health. This offers a convincing rationale for sport, but it cannot diminish the contribution that sport can make toward the social and personal development of children. Besides health benefits for children, sport offers more for their development than just a form of exercise to reduce the risk of developing lifestyle diseases. For many children and young people, sport forms a significant part of their lives, shaping their development into members of society and determine people they become (Light, 2010:380). This idea is stressed also in the concept of <sport for social development> as method of bringing social change through the use of sport.

Today there are numerous volunteers all over the world trained to develop sport activities for children, adolescents and young people under the name <sport and development>. They are trying to intervene through sport, as key element, to enhance quality of life for people in need, and we talk here about children and adolescents that live in poverty, have physical or psychological health problems, social problems or live in war zones.

No matter if sport is practiced by an elite who aims to enhance the quality of life or if it is done through standardized governmental programs, for children and adolescents in need, it is obvious its contribution to their positive general development.

4. References:


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