MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT
DOCTORAL SCHOOL
ISDP – UNEFS BUCHAREST

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

IMPROVING THE SOCIAL CLIMATE IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT THROUGH SPORTS ACTIVITIES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

PhD Student: PRISĂCARU GH. CIPRIAN

Scientific coordinator: Prof. PhD VIRGIL TUDOR

BUCHAREST
2024

Introduction

Physical education and sport are particularly important nowadays, as they can become a link between societal values and the formation of civic attitudes by strengthening interpersonal relationships. Due to its major role in fulfilling the objectives of general education, the achievement of physical education objectives has a positive influence on building the motor, intellectual, affective and volitional dimensions of human personality. At this level, physical education and sport contribute to the stimulation and development of intellectual activity in terms of imagination, memory, observation and thinking. Also, affective processes, through emotions, motivation, respect, a sense of justice, a sense of responsibility and more are stimulated and trained through physical education and sport. The formation of socialisation skills fosters cohesion in both society and the world of sport.

As regards the education of responsibility in contemporary society, it seems to be of vital importance, especially care and responsibility for others. Social coexistence involves participation in many processes that take place in society. Civic engagement is a component with a major role in regulating social mechanisms and democracy, which is based on the intervention of citizens in the process of developing public policies that directly affect their lives. The more the citizen is rooted in the problems of their community and the more developed their civic sense, the stronger their involvement will be.

Motivation for choosing the topic

This research aims to implement, initially at local level and subsequently at national level, a system of motor activities practised in local communities.

My motivation for choosing the research topic is the acute lack of a system of sports activities in urban communities, which would help to voluntarily engage in motor activities, eliminate sedentary lifestyles, reduce the criminal phenomenon, build appropriate civic behaviour, improve moral values and popularise mass sports activities.

It is worth mentioning that such a topic has not so far been addressed in our country, therefore this issue is not very developed and promoted at national level.

Structure of the PhD thesis

Part I, which consists of one chapter, represents the theoretical background of the thesis and provides information about the way of improving the social climate in urban environments through sports activities practised in local communities.

This chapter presents detailed information on the social climate and civic behaviour, the characteristics of contemporary society, the concepts of sport and sports groups, the role of sport in society, the value of sport at European and national levels, as well as the influence of sport on social learning.

In conclusion, physical education and sport are part of the general culture of society, contributing to individual and social development and offering young people an alternative to the temptations of modern society (drugs, alcohol, sedentary lifestyles etc.)

Part II, with two chapters, includes research studies related to the topic addressed.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Study 1, which aims at identifying the relationship between participation in mass physical activity and involvement in social/civic life in urban areas. At the same time, we tried to determine the suitability of creating a platform to guide and support sports activity in the 12 neighbourhoods of Târgoviște Municipality.

The study was conducted between October and December 2022 with 368 participants (84 males and 284 females) aged up to 18 and over 60 years.

To identify the level of civic/social behaviour, the Social Involvement and Civic Attitude questionnaire was applied, and then the scores for items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11 and 12 were added up. Participants were asked to respond to the following statements: 1. I am aware of the problems that arise in my neighbourhood; 2. I participate in cleaning and sanitation activities in my neighbourhood; 3. I volunteer in community-based activities; 6. I am proud to live in this neighbourhood; 7. I intend to change my current residence as soon as possible; 11. I react when someone is in a degrading situation; 12. I intervene in an ongoing conflict. The response options were: a) always; b) sometimes; c) never.

To identify the level of involvement in sports activities, the Sports Activity questionnaire was applied, and then the scores for items 1, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 were added up. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions: 1. Do you practise sports activities?; 4. If your local government or an NGO organised sports activities in your neighbourhood or city, you would participate as...; 6. I practise sports activities; 8. How

much time would you devote to these activities if they were in line with what you wanted?; 9. If sports activities and inter-neighbourhood competitions were organised in your neighbourhood, would you get involved in their development?; 10. Would you involve your family/friends in such sports projects? The response options were very different, covering a wide range of possibilities, from a simple "yes/no" to "not interested".

The correlations made between items have revealed that:

- a high level of involvement in sports activities is accompanied by a high level of civic/social behaviour;

- there are no significantly different levels of civic behaviour or involvement in sports activities depending on respondents' level of education;

- civic behaviour is at significantly lower levels in young people aged 19-30 and under 18 compared to older people;

- involvement in sports activities is significantly lower in people aged 19-30, under 18 and over 60 years compared to those in the 31-45 and 46-60 age categories;

- people who do not participate in sports activities at all have significantly lower levels of civic/social behaviour compared to those who are engaged in such activities.

Chapter 3 proposes strategies aimed at improving the social climate in the urban environment through sports activities practised in local communities.

The study was conducted between January and August 2023 with 111 people (males and females) aged up to 18 and between 19 and 30 years, who showed low levels of civic behaviour and involvement in sports activities, as revealed by their responses to the questionnaires regarding these two aspects.

The research objectives were: to determine the influence of physical exercise on civic and social behaviour; to identify the types of sports activities that could influence civic and social behaviour; to identify the level of citizens' willingness to enagage in mass sports activities; to determine the relationship between the levels of formal education, civic behaviour and involvement in sports activities.

To facilitate interaction with participants via the Internet, in 2021, we purchased a website where young people can find information, register, access the schedule of proposed sports activities and interact with neighbourhood leaders and even the organising board.

The implemented programme, called "Sport in the Neighbourhood", was addressed to all those interested, regardless of age, gender, social status, physical condition, etc., and its goal was to create a favourable climate for good coexistence.

Participants were monitored to see in what sports activities they engaged, considering that the programme included football, football-tennis and basketball. The average volume of activity per week/month was calculated by age, and the frequency of sports activities was comparatively analysed between the initial assessment (resulting from Study 1) and the final assessment (resulting from the research).

After completing the sports activities offered by our programme during the 8 months, the questionnaire on civic/social behaviour and the questionnaire on respondents' satisfaction with the implemented sports programme were applied. Finally, in order to assess the quantity and quality of the sports programmes offered, participants' responses to the satisfaction questionnaire were correlated with those from the questionnaire initially applied to the 111 people selected for the experimental study.

The collected data show that respondents participated between 1 and 3 times per week in the sports activities offered by the programme, with the total time (volume) ranging from 270 to 900 min/month. It should be mentioned that most of them were interested in playing football.

It was found that participation in the "Sport in the Neighbourhood" programme was perceived differently, depending on what people learned through sport. The majority saw sport as a way to relax and socialise, and satisfaction with the length of the programme varied from one category to another, but not enough to be statistically significant.

Chapter 4 presents the general/final conclusions of the research.

The data clearly show an improvement in both civic/social behavior and engagement in sports activities from the initial to the final assessment. Thus, at the end of the study, most respondents:

- were more aware of the problems arising in their neighborhood;
- were more involved in cleaning and sanitation activities;
- voluntarily participated in a greater number of community-based activities;
- were able to nominate an increased number of neighbours;
- had friendly, supportive or leisure relationships with a larger number of neighbours;
- were more proud to live in their neighbourhood;
- no longer intended to change their current residence;
- believed that the way people get involved in civic activities could be influenced especially by better communication of local and neighbourhood projects, followed by additional funding;

- said that the main causes they would support in their neighbourhood would be stray animals and homeless people;
- reacted more frequently when someone was in a degrading situation;
- intervened more often in an ongoing conflict;
- participated in neighbourhood sports activities on a daily or at least weekly basis;
- were convinced that sport could help overcome social barriers;
- believed that sport could play a very important conciliatory role in conflicts;
- stated that the length of the "Sport in the Neighbourhood" programme was totally insufficient or insufficient, meaning that, in their opinion, the programme should have lasted longer;
- said that their participation in the programme played an important role in improving their own civic behaviour;
- claimed that they really enjoyed the sports programme in which they participated;
- would participate in a similar sports programme in the future;
- primarily enjoyed socialising with people from participating neighbourhoods.

Research findings suggest that the "Sport in the Neighbourhood" programme is effective in attracting and retaining participants by offering a variety of activities and by well-managed social interactions. The organisation of the programme should continue to focus on improving social interaction and the diversity of sports activities in order to meet the needs and preferences of the local community.

The working hypothesis that "participation in sports activities practised in local communities and organised on the 'Sport in the Neighbourhood' platform contributes to the formation of civic and social behaviour and to increasing the degree of satisfaction and involvement of citizens in this type of sports activities" is confirmed.

In conclusion, the means of physical education and sport can be used to develop strategies for attracting a larger number people to participate in sports activities, get socially involved in their neighbourhoods and form a civic attitude appropriate to contemporary society.

Research limitations and openings for further investigations

Given that this study aimed to improve civic behaviour only for a specific age group, we would like to improve this type of behaviour for other population groups. Taking into account the results obtained, we would also like to analyse civic behaviour in rural areas as well, not only in urban areas, as was the case in this research.

Elements of novelty and originality

- Development and presentation of a platform for the promotion of sports activities practised in the local communities of Târgoviște Municipality.
- Implementation of the "Sport in the Neighbourhood" project and its sub-programmes for the citizens of Târgoviște Municipality.
- Application of a questionnaire to assess civic/social behavior and sports activity for the citizens of Târgoviște Municipality.
- Determining the social behavior profile of respondents by neighborhood, according to their level of participation in the "Sport in the Neighbourhood" programme.
- Determining the impact of knowing the programme/platform on citizens in the neighbourhood/municipality.
- Determining the relevance of the level of change in the civic/social behavior of respondents, depending on the amount/volume of participation.