

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT IN DISABILITY MANAGEMENT

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Review paper

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### Abstract

To date, disability is one of the main social, health and economic problems worldwide, in fact it's estimated that more than a billion people in the world lives with some form of disability. Consequently, the purpose of this research contribution is to highlight the major determinants able to define the importance of sport in the management of disability. In this regard, through a careful analysis of the reference literature, were identified two important considerations: The ability of sport to represent an efficient tool inside of the famous model of disability management, and the need to organize sports activity so that it can express the potential inclusive in respect of disability. In this way has been demonstrated the importance that sport can play to management of important social and health problems, such as disability.

**Key words:** sport, disability, inclusion, disability management.

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### Introduction

The disabilities today represent one of the main social criticality that need to be addressed in order to ensure a development without discrimination. More and more often the concept of disability is related to the sports activity, because it is assumed that sport is capable of generating multiple benefits for disabled people (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016). Surely it is not correct to say that sport possesses at its interior an automatic factor capable of improving the social, educational and psycho-physical welfare of disabled people (Dowling et al, 2012). In this respect, the purpose of this paper is precisely the desire to investigate the main determinants able to make sport a fundamental factor for the optimal management of disability.

### The relationship between sport and disability

To date, disability is one of the main social, health and economic problems worldwide. It's estimated that more than a billion people in the world lives with some form of disability. At least one-fifth of them, approximately 200 million individuals, suffers from severe disabilities, and so they are forced to face a number of significant difficulties and problems in everyday life. In addition, the percentages of disability in the world are constantly increasing due to the progressive aging of the population, and the consequent increase in individuals suffering from chronic-degenerative diseases (Oecd, 2007; WHO, 2011). Sports activity can often be an important tool to enable social inclusion for the disabled person (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Raiola, Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016). On the other hand, the concept of sport is more and more frequently associated with that of disability. In fact, the link between sport and disabilities is inherent in the social nature of the first, and in the possibility of improving the psycho-physical status in the disabled subject (Mitchell, 2007; Nixon, 2000; Legg

& Steadward, 2011). The "adapted" sports activity originated in the relatively recent period (in the Forties), and provides a valuable aid to promote independent living and the social inclusion of people with disabilities; for years the Paralympics Olympics are performed right after the most popular Olympics, and include an always-increasing number of disciplines, federations and athletes (Mitchell, 2007, Legg & Steadward, 2011, Luongo, 2007). But it needs to have projects managed optimally in order that, through sport, effective and efficient objectives (both in socio-health, economic and even athletic terms) able to contribute to the improvement of the conditions of disability worldwide can be pursued. In fact, sports management does not only concern the mere economic aspect of this sector, but includes the will to plan, organize and control activities and projects concerning sport itself. In support to this hypothesis, it is also worth remembering that sport over time has increasingly structured itself according to business policies with profit targets, through managerial organizations, and extending the market logic to activities previously set according to completely different criteria (Caselli, 2003; Di Palma, 2014; Gratton & Taylor, 2000). It is thus correct to assume and support the adoption of managerial settings also for the disability sport sector, so that it can turn into an asset in which to invest.

### Materials and methods

The study is started from the relationship between sport and disability and by the need to manage the sport in order to it plays a decisive role in support of disability. In this regard the research methodology used was based on a study of the literature of reference with the objective of identifying the main determinants of the importance of sport for the disabled persons.

## Results and discussion

Some of the main sources of literature analyzed are inserted in the following table.

Table 1 – Source of literature

TITLE	YEAR	AUTHORS	REVIEW
Social inclusion throughout physical education.	2016	Raiola, G., Di Palma, D. & Tafuri, D.	Sport Sciences
Disability Management. Sport as inclusive element.	2016	Di Palma, D. & Tafuri, D.	Idelson-Gnocchi
Development and validation of the motivation scale for disability sport consumption.	2014	Cottingham, M., Carroll, M. S., Phillips, D., Karadakis, K., Gearity, B. T., & Drane, D.	Sport Management Review
The use of public sports facilities by the disabled in England.	2014	Kung, S. P., & Taylor, P.	Sport Management Review
What Little Do We Know: Content Analysis of Disability Sport in Sport Management Literature.	2014	Shapiro, D. R., & Pitts, B. G.	Journal of Sport Management
Examining the participation patterns of an ageing population with disabilities in Australia.	2014	Sotiriadou, P., & Wicker, P.	Sport Management Review
Infusing Disability Sport into the Sport Management Curriculum.	2012	Shapiro, D. R., Pitts, B. G., Hums, M. A., & Calloway, J.	Choregia
The Paralympic Games and 60 years of change (1948–2008): Unification and restructuring from a disability and medical model to sport-based competition.	2011	Legg, D., & Steadward, R.	Sport in Society
Volunteer motivation in special events for people with disabilities.	2010	Surujlal, J.	African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation & Dance
Strategies and Methods for Coaching Athletes with Invisible Disabilities in Youth Sport Activities.	2009	Beyer, R., Flores, M. M., & Vargas-Tonsing, T. M.	Journal of Youth Sports
Development through sport: Building social capital in disadvantaged communities.	2008	Skinner, J., Zakus, D. H., & Cowell, J.	Sport management review

Source: Our elaboration

The review study highlighte two main determinants, particularly important to analyze the importance of sport to manage the disability:

- Sport can be an effective tool for the adoption of the model of disability management;
- Organize the sports activity in accordance with the principles of business management allow to maximize the potential of sport as a tool for inclusion of people with disabilities.

Both the previous determinants are closely related to each other, because sport, specifically that for disabled people, is organized according to the principles of business management and it favors the inclusion of disabled people in society, stimulating the mechanisms under the approach of disability management. In this regard, it is, first of all, essential to clarify what it is meant by disability management. The disability management takes shape from the need to reconcile the right to inclusion for disabled and chronically ill with business efficiency requirements. It has been theorized for the first time in the eighties, in different economic, management and organizational disciplines, and spreads mainly in Canada, the USA and some countries of Northern Europe. The model has the intent to reconcile the interests of the company with the disabled person's need to work not only for economic reasons, but also to satisfy an unquenchable need for identity and integration and, through the work, to ensure their proactive contribution to the community (Angeloni, 2011; Geisen, 2015; Shrey, 1996). The difficulties in reaching this goal are clearly linked to the vision and the wrong preconceptions often expressed about the working ability of sick and disabled people, as well as the mechanisms related to changes in the performance as a result of the disease (Roncallo & Sbolci, 2011).

According to a technical definition, the Disability Management is an active process of minimizing the impact of a disability (whether arising from disability, illness or injury) on the individual's ability to participate in a competitive socio-economic environment, business firstly, contributing at the same time to control the social costs, and to support employment and economic productivity (Shrey, 1996; 2011). Sport and the whole sport sector to be considered in both economic and social terms may represent a good instrument to achieve the above. Infact, sport, for its characteristics, reveals himself as one of the main activities inclusive for persons with disabilities, and is able to generate simultaneously social, psycho-physical and educational benefits (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Raiola, Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016, Cirillo et al., 2016, Gaetano A., 2016). Also the analysis of Cottingham et al. (2014) showed that sport is an opportunity for development for disadvantaged communities, like that of disabled people, and added that it should be organized and managed precisely in relation to this opportunity. In this regard it is highlighted the key role of public policies to support this sector in order to generate social and economic

benefits as they are trying to do in England, Canada and also Scotland and Northern Ireland, although in a less incisively way. In addition, the organized sport also represents an efficient strategy to achieve social outcomes for disabled young people. In fact, in the US young athletes with disabilities, have developed greater self-esteem and above all a higher degree of autonomy with respect to disabled people of the same age who do not practice sports (Beyer, Flores & Vargas-Tonsing, 2009). In perfect agreement are the results of the study on sport activities for people with disabilities in Australia, which reaffirmed the level of autonomy reached by athletes for the same disabling condition, sex, age and education level. Sotiriadou & Wicker (2014) add, also, the need to propose policies to encourage the practice of sport in relation to different forms of disability.

Further confirmation to the thesis supported emerges from the study of Surujlal (2010), which analyzes the main reasons why the volunteers agree to cooperate with sports events for the disabled, experiencing the full willingness to be part of the efficient management of the event and contributing to that social inclusion that sport is able to generate. Furthermore, Legg & Steadward (2011) show that a sporting event such as the Paralympic Games has created a strong sense of awareness that emerges both from the subjects with disabilities, and in their respect, about the condition and the possibility of achieving success in life through an "Olympic" sporting event. It transcends, thus, the concept of disability understood as a limit, and it gives the chance to the person with a disability to be a sports, and consequently, a social and economic resource, active and productive. Specially in reference to the second determinant, confirming the strong relationship among sports, disability and management emerged from the review, the newly analyzed literature has often led to evidence the need for performing management policies, so that they could generate and amplify the benefits that sport is able to give to disabled and consequently to the whole community, both socially and economically (D'Isanto et al., (2017), D'Isanto T., (2016) Cottingham et al., 2014; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2014).

In fact, the same Legg & Steadward (2011) identified in Paralympics the first example of how a sports event for the disabled, organized following the event management principles typical of the non-disabled sport world, can lead to the pursuit of social and economic objectives. Thanks to an organization characterized by the presence of professional managers able to attract sponsors, media and private investment, this event has become the second largest sporting event in the world, and represents the pinnacle of sporting success for athletes with disabilities. It is clear that this has only served to amplify the benefits of sport described above, for disabled students. Efficient and effective management should not be limited only to sports events, but should be used in all

those sports and expressions of physical activity that can, and must, involve individuals with disabilities. For example, the various sports facilities should be free from architectural barriers and organized and managed by a professionally adequate staff to support disabled people. Furthermore, in order to increase sports participation a series of measures could be taken, both private and public, including, for example, discount promotions through systems or cards for leisure, or even free transportation to sports centers situated within the territories whose population has a certain percentage of disabled people.

Kung & Taylor (2014) argue that if all this were real, the propensity to sports by persons with disabilities would be even higher than that of non-disabled. The statement is confirmed in the study by Shapiro et al. (2012) which shows that the disability sport is a "movement" in continuous growth that absolutely needs structure and workforce with the right managerial skills specific to support this development in both economic and social terms. These management and organization "developments" can, and must, be the first step to increase the "consumption" of disabled sports by increasing the number of viewers and fans of the relevant disciplines.

In fact, Cottingham et al. (2014) have developed a rating scale to identify the main factors that will attract new viewers / consumers who are not only patients themselves, but also people without disabilities attracted by the sporting spectacle offered by the event. It is enhanced, thus, the performance of the disabled athlete extolling the potential social benefits and increasing, at the same time, the economic value of disability sport. Finally, it is important to stress that, through a content analysis of disability sport in sport management literature, Shapiro & Pitts (2014) noted the lack of contributions, in sports management literature, related to disability sport. Only 0,016% of reviewed articles in this study looked at this issue. Despite this, however, the few reported cases demonstrate the possibility of obtaining positive results both from the economic and social points of view through a sports management approach also in the field of disability sport.

## Conclusion

The importance that sport can play in the management of important social and health problems, such as disability, was highlighted. The analysis of the literature led to the evidence that sport for persons with disabilities can be the means through which pursue social and economic objectives of the model of disability management approach. In line with this managerial model, the literature revised considers disability in sport a valuable resource in which to invest and for which different socio-economic support policies are needed. Disabled athletes reach a level of self-esteem and autonomy significantly higher than

those who do not practice sports, which significantly ease social inclusion and, as a result, "economic" inclusion. At the same time it has been observed that through the adoption of business management principles, which already govern the sport for non-disabled, we can enhance the benefits that the sector is able to generate towards the disabled. The role of management in the disability sport is to make individuals with disabilities,

through sport, as much active and productive human resources as possible for the community and for economy itself. The present review analysis of the literature has also revealed a substantial lack of contributions that examined the issue in question, which, even in relation to the continuous increase of the disability sport movement in the world, proposes it as an interesting starting point for future research work.

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## **VAŽNOST SPORTA U UPRAVLJANJU KOD INVALIDITETA**

### **Sažetak**

*Do danas, invalidnost je jedan od glavnih društvenih, zdravstvenih i ekonomskih problema širom svijeta, u stvari procjenjuje se da više od milijardu ljudi na svijetu živi s nekim oblikom invaliditeta. Slijedom toga, svrha i doprinos ovog istraživanja je isticanje glavnih odrednica koje mogu definirati važnost sporta u upravljanju invaliditetom. U tom smislu, pažljivom analizom referentne literature, identificirana su dva važna razmatranja: sposobnost sporta da predstavlja učinkovit alat unutar poznatog modela upravljanja invaliditetom, te potrebu organiziranja sportske aktivnosti kako bi mogla izraziti uključivi potencijal u pogledu invalidnosti. Na taj je način dokazana važnost da sport može igrati u upravljanju važnim društvenim i zdravstvenim problemima, kao što je invalidnost.*

**Ključne riječi:** *sport, invalidnost, uključivanje, upravljanje invaliditetom.*

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