

MANAGEMENT OF SPORTS ACTIVITY AND DISABILITY IN ITALY

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Review paper

Abstract

The objective of the paper is to highlight the importance of sport for the disability, contextualizing this theme in the Italian system. Sport, in time, has become an increasingly important element in order to pursue the objective of social and school equality. At the same time, this activity can generate a series of both physical and psychological benefits for all disabled people. In this regard, the planning and organizations that, in Italy, are involved in the management of disability through sports activities in order to promote a social, cultural and educational development.

Key words: *sport; disability, management, education, school.*

Introduction

The process of inclusion of people with disabilities in Italy and the acknowledgment of its "diverse" potentialities, resources and skills has required a very long path of socio-cultural transformations. Although the succession of laws has determined the transition from institutionalization of people with disabilities to their inclusion at school, for a long time in Italy, it has legally supported the existence of differential classes, neglecting the right to integration in school and society, and the real needs of integration of people with disabilities.

This has led to an analysis of how the management of disability may need sport as an instrument suitable to the pursuit of a social benefit sustainable over time. Sports for the disabled, in addition to contributing to a better employment and a possible improvement in motor skills, contributes to the development of all dimensions of personality by promoting active and alternative learning processes.

Agonistic and amateur sports and motor activity facilitates the integration and acquisition of personal autonomy in the disabled through the enrichment of physical, intellectual, and sensory-perceptive experiences (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016).

Sport, in fact, is inclusive as it is not only a purely therapeutic factor, but whenever it becomes an opportunity for recognition of one's own identity potentialities within a group or community, thus it needs also national and international organizations protecting and promoting it (Dowling et al, 2012).

In this regard, in relation to the Italian context, realities dealing with the management and the development of sports project were analyzed; these realities, through organized sporting activities, aim at the satisfaction of multiple psycho-physical, educational and didactic purposes for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Disability and sport in a social context

The right to equal opportunities and equality of people with disabilities is always among the main issues dealt with by the United Nations and other international bodies. In 1981, the celebration of the "International year of disabled persons", promoted by the General Assembly, contributed to the spread of the "World Programme of action concerning disabled persons", one of the first laws in the field of social inclusion. This document represents the first step in a regulatory path increasingly structured and oriented to the promotion of standards, the establishment of permanent working teams on disability and the design of specific plans of action aimed not only to raise awareness, inform and educate the international community on critical issues related to disabilities, but also to identify management tools and educational and training contexts useful for the acquisition and maintenance of physical and mental capabilities (Baratella & Littamè, 2009; Giancaterina, 2010).

A further critical step in the desire to awareness-raising and social inclusion of disability was the "United Nations Decade of Disabled Person" (1983-1992) that, through the experience gained during this period, resulted in the spread of the 1993 resolution called: "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities". This act, in fact, stressed that the States should have taken measures to raise awareness, in the whole social context, of people with disabilities, their rights, needs, potential and contribution; Moreover, every state should have had to ensure that the programs for public education and sport reflected, in every aspect, the principle of full participation and equality (Baratella & Littamè, 2009; Giancaterina, 2010; Griffo, 2012). In addition to the promotion of political initiatives, useful to the increase in the level of awareness on

the rights of subjects with disabilities, there was a moral duty of the social community to enhance and support in every person, regardless of the different abilities, the confidence in their abilities. This was done through the development of management and operational policies designed to ensure equal opportunities for everyone, especially in recreational and sports activities. In this regard, for any social context, it becomes fundamental to develop management decisions and operational actions that make places and infrastructure for sports activities accessible to disabled subjects. These decisions and actions should include an important support to the personnel in programs for sports activities, including education projects related to the development of inclusive didactics skills and methods to develop a level of knowledge and professionalism (Ianes, 2006; Kung & Taylor, 2014; Roncallo, C., & Sbolci, 2011).

In addition, sports organizations should be encouraged to develop opportunities for participation in sport also for the disabled (Sotiriadou, P., & Wicker, 2014). This sensitivity to motor and sports practice represented an important stage of a slow path of psycho-pedagogical, philosophical and managerial reevaluation of the possible corporeal and kinesthetic potentialities of the disabled (Farinelli, 2005; rancot, 2016).

The adaptation and communication-relationship function of the body in its different dynamic and static forms had already been highlighted within the international classifications of the World Health Organization, which had stressed its importance in the process of psycho-social growth and development process of the disabled, and its role in the processes of interaction with the social context (Angeloni, 2011; Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016).

As a consequence, this social context should be able to allow for the expression and promotion of different abilities and the full integration by developing "environmental contexts" like those motor-corporeal ones by ensuring, on a preliminary basis, the elimination of structural barriers that can prevent both adapted educational paths and the practice of sport and physical activities. So sports may represent a valuable tool for social inclusion to the world of disability, by allowing for the effective participation of subjects with disabilities in training and integration paths characterized by specific procedures, tools and contexts (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2016; Nixon, 2000).

The benefits of physical activity for people with disabilities

The importance of sports activity for people with disabilities is also noticeable in the ability to generate a series of physical, mental and social benefits. In fact, sports practice helps people with disabilities develop greater balance, useful when walking and to strengthen the muscle tissue by enabling them to handle tools more easily.

Moreover, through the movement, disabled individuals improve their endurance, speed and strength, facilitate the decrease in heart rate and optimize respiratory rate. A disabled athlete will be able to move properly in space by acquiring and enhancing the spatial-temporal organization skills, and will reach a high level of voluntary motor autonomy ((Beyer, R., Flores, M. M., & Vargas-Tonsing, 2009; Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Altavilla, Tafuri & Raiola, 2014). In addition, on a psychological level, motor activity allows the disabled athlete to become more confident towards the things he does and towards himself, helping him restore confidence in his potentialities. The athlete is able to test his abilities and skills, his possibilities and limitations, thus acquiring greater self-knowledge (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008; Winnick & Porretta, 2016).

Through a running or a match the disabled learn to react to strain by going beyond and challenging his limits, trying not to surrender to the first difficulties he finds and emerge stronger than before. He experiences the value of a defeat, whether it concerns the outcome of the competition or it's as a bad individual performance, and learns to accept and overcome this difficult moment, reflecting it also in everyday life situations. Just like how fundamental it is to realize a defeat, it is essential, especially for athletes with mental disabilities, to enjoy the meaning of victory. These people, throughout their lives, have suffered continuing and heavy defeats; just think of the problems they have had at school, in friendship relationships, and in those sexual and affective ones.

Sport can represent for them the main context in which to feel fulfilled and satisfied in order to achieve a goal and/or for having been part of a team (Canevaro, 2007; Francot, 2016; Russo, 2004). When we speak of the benefits of sports on the psychological conditions, we cannot ignore its effect on the state of inner tension. Sport is an occasion for relieving tension and aggressiveness which, if not relieved, may lead the subject to sudden and violent reactions against people or things. So, especially for people with mental disabilities, sport represents a new experience to address by themselves without the help of parents on whom they usually depend. Through this experience they learn, little by little, to take care of themselves by developing a series of autonomies and independences that will be useful in everyday life, such as taking a shower, getting dressed, tying on shoes, remembering the days and hours of training (Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Mitchell, 2007; Perenboom & Chorus, 2003).

Finally, sports practiced is very important for subjects with disabilities as it allows them to integrate or reintegrate in a social context. By getting in touch with the outside world, a disabled athlete discovers a healthy collaboration, one that goes beyond personal gain, and enjoys human relationships. Within the sporting world, in fact, the established interactions are manifold and of

different type; for example, the athlete comes into contact with his coach, his teammates, in the case of team sports, and with his opponents. This complex panorama of connections allows the subject to experience a wide range of feelings and emotions, to handle possible relational conflicts and learn to adapt the relationship to the persons with which he interacts. In the interpersonal relationships, the subjects are recognized goals and a specific role, thus enhancing the process personal identity building (Cirillo et al., 2016, Guiggi, 2012; D'Isanto et al., 2017, D'Isanto, 2016, Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2016, Gaetano, 2016, Gaetano 2012ab). Special attention should be paid to the practice of team sports and the fruits that this activity could provide. To speak of team sports, it is critical to refer to the concept of group. The group can be defined as a non-random ensemble of people with shared values, needs and motivations, who are in a relationship of positive interdependence with each other in order to achieve a common purpose (Di Nubilia, 2008). Being in a positive interdependence means that each member of the group depends on one of his companions and, at the same time, constitutes a resource for him. For a person with disabilities, being part of a team is a huge satisfaction as it plays on his need to feel accepted and integrated in a social reality.

Management of disability through sport in Italy

In Italy, in accordance with the European directives, one of the main social objectives to be pursued is the full respect for human dignity and the rights of freedom and autonomy of the disabled subjects with their full integration in the family, at school, at work and in society, through preventive actions for eliminating the invalidating conditions impeding the development of the human person and the achievement of maximum possible autonomy (Canevaro, 2007; Ianes, 2006; Istat, 2010). More specifically, at school, it is considered a priority that the education of the disabled is fulfilled through their inclusion in the common classes of the educational institutions of all levels and in universities, in order to achieve a sustainable development of the potentialities of the disabled in learning, communication, relationships and socialization (Canevaro, 2007; Daita, 2009).

In this perspective, by aiming at the affirmation of the individual rights of the disabled, a fundamental point is the one concerning motor and sports practice and the access to sports facilities, requiring that physical activities and sports are supported without limitation. Local and regional authorities, associations of municipalities and the Italian National Olympic Committee, in fact, develop management actions aimed at the elimination of architectural barriers and at promoting accessibility and usability of sports facilities and their services for people with disabilities (Baratella & Littamè, 2009; Giancaterina, 2010; Griffo, 2012; Legg & Steadward, 2011).

Sports practice, in all its complexity, which cannot be reduced to the mere competition, has always tried to meet the needs of a diverse community, showing its responsibility and commitment to promoting and implementing processes of inclusion of disability. In extra-school contexts, among the main expressions that deal with the promotion and management of sports events and competitions for the disabled, there are: the Italian Paralympic Committee (IPC); The Special Olympics - Italy. The IPC, through its various territorial and national organizations, allows people with disabilities to have access to sport according to the different needs and motivations: as a therapy, as a means of socialization and integration, as competitive practice. The analysis of the data on the practice of competitive sports observes a progressive increase in the number of members of the Italian Federation of Disabled Sports with respect to the number of staff prepared to the training of these subjects, suggesting that the quality of services offered to people with disabilities is continuously improving. Sports activities promoted by the IPC are developed in provincial, regional and national agonistic competitions and championships between sports clubs affiliated with it. Another relevant fact is the average increase of a 10% in the affiliations with the Committee, which further emphasizes the importance of being able to manage problems related to the disabling conditions through physical activity (Coni, 2010; Francot, 2016; Pioletti, 2013, Raiola 2015ab, Raiola 2014ab, Raiola 2011ab).

It provides an opportunity for the disabled to experience moments of participation and socialization thanks to sport that, instead, is the main purpose of the Special Olympics, which focuses its attention not only on the importance of physical, athletics and sports training for the disabled, but also on the possibility to experience moments of sharing and emotional involvement in sports competitions (Kersh, Siperstein & Center, 2012; Özer et al, 2012). The Special Olympics, in fact, is an international educational program that promotes and organizes training sessions, events and competitions for disabled people aged from 8 years on, in order to encourage physical and social improvements. The pedagogical principle characteristic of the Italian section of the Special Olympics is that every performance is a personal victory regardless of the final classification and their skills level; in fact, sports events are open to all and reward all, and are recognized by the IOC like the Paralympics. This organization conditions for the development of activities, also implements information, training and awareness-raising initiatives aimed at families, technical operators, teachers and volunteers who care for the disabled athletes (Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Kersh, Siperstein & Center, 2012; Özer et al, 2012). Although different in organization and management modalities, both the IPC and the Special Olympics are two realities that, through sport, can manage the problems of disability by promoting and fostering social inclusion, development of autonomy and self-esteem.

Conclusion

The need to manage effectively and efficiently the critical issue of disability has always been one of the main social objectives on which the main State organizations have focused more attention. In this scenario, a global awareness of how sports can be a valuable resource in order to achieve an improvement of the welfare of disabled persons was highlighted. In fact, there are many benefits

that sports can bring to such persons from a social, physical and psychic viewpoint. In this regard, this contribution wanted to analyze the two main Italian organizations involved in the management of disability through sport. Both the ICP and the Special Olympics identify two examples of how sport is an optimal instrument able to promote simultaneously a social inclusion process, sustainable over time, and increased autonomy and self-esteem for people with disabilities.

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UPRAVLJANJE SPORTSKIM AKTIVNOSTIMA I INVALIDITET U ITALIJI

Sažetak

Cilj rada je naglasiti važnost sporta za invaliditet, kontekstualiziranje ove teme u talijanskom sustavu. Sport je, kroz vrijeme, postao sve važniji element u cilju postizanja cilja društvene i ravnopravne škole. Istodobno, ova aktivnost može generirati niz fizičkih i psiholoških prednosti za sve osobe s invaliditetom. U tom smislu, planiranje i organizacije koje u Italiji sudjeluju u upravljanju invaliditetom kroz sportske aktivnosti imaju za cilj promicanje društvenog, kulturnog i obrazovnog razvoja.

Ključne riječi: sport, invaliditet, upravljanje, obrazovanje, škola.

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