

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: ANALYSIS OF THE GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTATION AT LOCAL LEVEL THROUGH THE CASE STUDY OF PIEDMONT

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Abstract

Introduction

The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health ('the Strategy') (WHO, 2004) represents a considerable effort undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO) to assess the promotion of Physical Activity (PA). In a context of extensive cooperation, the Strategy recommends the active participation of the sports system to realize the Strategy's goals. To facilitate this, the Strategy's guidelines advise the use of public funds to (WHO, 2004): "promote access among poor communities to recreational and sporting facilities"; and "ensure that (...) sport and recreation facilities embody the concept of sports for all". However, the implementation of these guidelines raises two problems of governance, defined here as "the activity of coordinating communications in order to achieve collective goals through collaboration" (Willke, 2007). The first problem involves the steering of partners towards the goal of promoting PA. The second problem regards policies with top-down characteristics, which need to cross several organizational levels in order to be implemented at the local level.

Research question and theoretical framework

By using a framework based on the systems theory, this research addresses the question: "How have sports organizations been supported in the region Piedmont to offer sport-for-all activities and to involve risk groups?" From a systems theory perspective, the needs of society are fulfilled by independent functional subsystems which act according to their almost incommensurable logic. The subsystems involved in this inquiry are the sports system with the logic "performing/not performing" (Stichweh, 1990)

and the political system with the logic "power/no power" (Luhmann, 2002). To promote PA for risk groups and following the sport-for-all philosophy, sports organizations have to modify their typical orientation towards performance. This is ensured by the intervention of the political system, which has steering capacities and the power of making binding decisions.

Methodology

The case study "Piedmont" is particularly interesting because the region received important sporting impulses the past decade by having organized and hosted several important sports events (e.g. 2006 Olympic Winter Games and the 2007 Universiade). To address the research question, the inquiry performs a structurally-aimed (Mayring, 2003) content analysis of legislative documents and a quantitative analysis of public expenditure involving the promotion of PA in the region Piedmont. These analyses are specifically focused on aspects of sport promotion within risk groups and on how the sport-for-all philosophy is supported in sports organizations. Regarding the legislative documents, three document typologies have been analyzed: regional laws, their implementation documents, and the regional resolutions. For the analysis of public expenditure, the inquiry performs a quantitative analysis of the resources spent for the promotion of PA from 1995 to 2010 through a statistical comparison of annual revenue activity.

Results

The document analysis demonstrates that the Piedmontese legislation on sports has a long history, starting after the post-WWII and consolidating during the 70s. In 1995, the regional law no. 93 repealed many previous laws on sports and assessed the recommendations of WHO. This law is still in force and sets out financing plans for sports organizations for the attainment of ten different goals related to promoting sports and PA. Within these objectives, the facilitation of the access of risk groups to PA and the support of sport-for-all philosophy are expressly assessed. The quantitative analysis inquired the public expenditures, paid out in accordance with law no. 93 from 1995 to 2010. These reveals that the revenue activity has been characterized by slightly changes regarding the rules dictating its distribution and by a fluctuating but increasing trend, which peaked in 2006 (almost 8,000,000 €), and has progressively decreased since.

Conclusion and discussion

In summary, it can be stated that the WHO's recommendations for ensuring the access of risk groups to sports and support for the sport-for-all philosophy have been actively implemented in the region Piedmont through dedicated legislation and government financing of sports organizations since 1995, hence long before the endorsement of the WHO's Strategy. From a systems theory perspective, money and law are typical political means for steering functional subsystems. In this case, they are used for directing the sports system towards the goal of promoting sports activities not only with competitive aims, but also promoting sports activities explicitly directed to the enhancement of public health and social inclusion. Further research is needed in order to establish a direct relationship between the hosting of the Winter Olympic Games in Piedmont and the increase of public funding supporting sport-for-all activities. On a more general level, the impact of large-scale sporting events on funding for

sport-for-all activities presents an interesting field for future inquiries.

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