

## SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN THROUGH SPORTS

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**ABSTRACT.** Sport offers more than physical health benefits, for many children and adolescents contributing to their successful personality shaping, to a better socialization and social development. There are more and more studies that offer data that support the idea that sports have an important role in the well balanced development of young people. We consider that sport sociology researches have the role to future emphasize even more the importance of sports into children lives.

**Keywords:** *children, sport, personal development, social development*

**REZUMAT:** *Dezvoltarea socială și personală a copiilor prin sport.* Sportul oferă mai mult decât beneficii referitoare la starea de sănătate fizică, pentru mulți copii și adolescenți implicarea în activități sportive contribuind la formarea și modelarea armonioasă a personalității lor, la o mai bună socializare în general. Sunt din ce în ce mai numeroase studiile care vin să ofere argumente pentru rolul benefic al sportului în dezvoltarea echilibrată a sinelui la copii și adolescenți. Considerăm important ca cercetările din domeniul sociologiei sportului să pună un accent sporit pe aspectele ce reliefează aceste contribuții ale sportului la o bună dezvoltare personală și socială a copiilor și tinerilor contribuind astfel la promovarea practicării lui.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *copii, sport, dezvoltare personală, dezvoltare socială*

### Introduction

Sport offers more than health benefits for children; it is more than just a form of exercise to reduce the risk of developing lifestyle diseases. For many children and young people, sport represents a significant part of their lives, contributing to shaping their development into members of society and the kind of people they become.

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There are a significant number of empirical studies that have been conducted on the personal, moral, and social learning as outcomes from children's participation in sport and on the nature of their experiences of it (MacPhail, Gorely, & Kirk, 2003).

## **Children social and personal development through sports**

Child development refers to the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur between birth and the end of adolescence. Physical activities, sports, can contribute to the holistic development of children and adolescents, fostering their physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

If the role of curricular activities in schools is well enough established, the relevance of extra-curricular activities for children's human capital formation is not yet well understood. As we know, one of the most popular extra-curricular activities is sport. According to the National Alliance of Youth Sports (NAYS) around 65% of children from all over the world are involved in sports activities (Felfe, Lechner, Steinmayr, 2011)

The role that sport can play in the social, personal, and moral growth of children and young people it is better highlighted in countries such as Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom where many children are involved in community-based and commercial club sport (Light, 2008). While 55% of American children are involved in youth sports, among German children this number is higher: about 70% of all children aged 6-14 are engaged in sports activities (Kutteroff & Behrens, 2006).

The results of a study conducted in Germany indicated as positive effects of sports the fact that both cognitive skills, measured by school performance, and overall non-cognitive skills improved statistically significant (Felfe, Lechner, Steinmayr, 2011).

Light (2010) underlined the contribution that sport can make toward the social and personal development of children on a case study of an Australian Swimming Club. The study was focused on children aged 9 to 12 years of age, and explores the range of social, personal, and cultural development that occurs through their participation in the activities of the club. A range of important social learning, enculturation, and the development of identity arises from participation in the practices of the swimming club.

Ronnie Lidor and Boris Blumenstein (2011) underlined the importance of adults that support sports activities like coaches and sport psychology consultants in children overall development. They described the consultation approach of one sport psychology consultant (SPC) in fostering relationships among adolescent

soccer and basketball players coming from conflicting cultures. The article also highlights the fact that in order to foster relationships among the players, the SPC used a three-dimensional approach - working with the coaches of the teams, the players, and the parents of the players.

Other researches that proved the positive impact of sports in children's life, conducted in US, underlined as well that extracurricular activities of children have been positively associated with other aspects of children's life such as academic achievement and social adjustment (Eccles et al, 2003).

The claims of sport promoters are many, but, in the case of youth sports, they can be organized into three major categories, including personal character development, reforming "at-risk" populations, and fostering social capital leading to future occupational success and civic engagement (Coalter, 2007).

In the United States, participation in organized sports activities represents a prominent aspect of middle class children's life. In surveys and interviews parents expressed the belief that sports activities in particular foster qualities children need in order to be successful, well-adjusted people, and respectable members of society (Kremer-Sadlik, Kim, 2007). As authors suggested, there is not only the fact that children are encouraged by parents to practice sports but there are also cultural, social and historical messages which signal that children should participate in sports.

There are a significant number of reasons to promote sport activities for children and adolescents. It is necessary for the state to create formal opportunities to practice sports in curricular school activities but it is also important to have an overall perspective of the society that is sports-practicing oriented.

## **Conclusions**

In a day by day more complex world of rapidly changing meanings, as Alvin Toffler (1991) underlined, and at a time when many children and adolescents are struggling to form a sense of who they are, membership in the sport club provides important opportunities for them to develop their own identity and a sense of belonging. In terms of physical and health aspects of children and adolescents development, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that focuses on the positive effects of sport and exercise on physical health, growth and development. Through participation in sport and physical education, young people can also learn about the importance of key values such as: honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect for themselves and the others, and adherence to rules. For instance, victory in competition may raise children's self-esteem while defeat can teach them how to deal with such a situation. Therefore, we have to focus, as well, onto these aspects that also represent a contribution of sports to young people development.

Despite of the popularity of sports as a leisure activity for young people there is not enough empirical evidence on the relation between sports participation and children skills formation. It is necessary to identify the conditions under which particular outcomes are likely to occur, and there is also a need for critical research and theory that identifies the processes through which sport participation is linked with subsequent forms of civic engagement as Coakley (2011) suggested. That is why sports deserve more consideration from researchers in sport sociology for the part that sports can play in the development of children.

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