

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY: THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN FORMING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

The constant practice of sports leaves traces beyond the physical plane: it changes the way people cooperate, relate to rules and assume responsibilities towards a group. This article starts from this observation and attempts an interdisciplinary reading of the link between physical activity, education and community safety. It is a conceptual research paper, based on the analysis of literature in physical education, developmental psychology, sociology, public management and studies on the prevention of risk behaviors. A special space is occupied by the contributions of some Romanian authors who have treated these topics from complementary angles, and the analysis includes, along with the documented benefits of sports, a discussion on the limits and social risks that sports practice can generate when it is not well managed.

KEYWORDS: *physical activity; physical education; community safety; prosocial behaviors; social inclusion; risk prevention; institutional quality; social capital; adapted physical activities; cooperation.*

J.E.L. Classifications: I21, I12, I18, Z13, H41, D71

1. INTRODUCTION

Sport is no longer seen only as a source of health. More and more research treats it as an educational and social factor, with effects on individual development and the functioning of communities. Regular participation in sports activities is associated with better health, the development of socio-emotional skills and a higher level of civic engagement (WHO, 2020; Bailey, 2006; Eime et al., 2013). From this point of view, physical education goes beyond the role

of a simple school discipline and becomes part of a broader process of training active and responsible citizens.

From a sociological perspective, the link between participation in collective activities, interpersonal trust and social capital has been analyzed since **Putnam (2000)**, who shows that involvement in organizations and community activities strengthens social cohesion and favors cooperative behaviors. **Bandura (1977)** adds an important piece to this puzzle through social learning theory: much of social behavior is learned through observation, interaction, and participation in shared experiences. Sport provides exactly this type of context—one in which rules, collaboration, and responsibility are learned through direct experience, not through memorization.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model goes further and shows that a child's development is simultaneously influenced by family, school, peer group, and community. Anyone who has worked with children knows that the playgroup can, at some point, weigh more than any institutional structure. Organized physical activity is one of the few spaces where all of these levels meet and interact, contributing to both motor and social and emotional development.

In recent years, these perspectives have been complemented by research that emphasizes the role of physical activity in inclusion and in reducing social vulnerabilities. The studies of Adrian Maniu and his collaborators show that programs designed according to the particularities of children with disabilities produce benefits not only at the functional level, but also in terms of social participation and autonomy. A complementary perspective comes from the works of Adrian Sorin Marian on risk management, institutional quality and the efficiency of public systems — a field that the author of this article also knows from the inside, from the experience of continuous training specific to the public order system. These works show, in essence, that prevention works better when educational institutions, public administration and the community act in a coordinated manner, with stable mechanisms of collaboration and early intervention. Transposed into physical education, the idea suggests that well-organized sports programs can become, in turn, components of local strategies for community development and the prevention of risk behaviors.

However, the specialized literature still treats the relationship between physical education and community safety as a complex social process to a limited extent. Typically, health, sports performance and social inclusion are analyzed separately, without being integrated into a common conceptual model. This article aims to do just that: an interdisciplinary approach that relates

physical education, the formation of prosocial behaviors, institutional quality and the prevention of social risks.

From a methodological point of view, the work has a conceptual character and is based on the critical and comparative analysis of the specialized literature, being, therefore, a documentary-theoretical research, not an empirical one. The ultimate goal is to outline an explanatory model that can underpin both future research and educational and community policies oriented towards healthier, more inclusive and safer communities.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A FACTOR OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY CAPITAL

Bailey (2006), in a broad analysis of the benefits of physical education, shows that constant participation in sports produces positive effects not only in terms of physical health, but also in cognitive, emotional and social development. Other syntheses that review research on participation in organized sports reach similar conclusions: group membership, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships are better developed, and mutual trust and cooperation between members are stimulated by this type of experience.

A plausible explanation of these mechanisms also comes from **Bandura's (1977)** social learning theory: social behaviors are learned by observing and imitating models in the living environment. In sports, children and adolescents constantly interact with teachers, peers and coaches, and these interactions facilitate the internalization of norms such as respect, discipline, collaboration and responsibility. Unlike other educational contexts, rules are not perceived here only as imposed obligations, but are experienced in concrete situations, in which individual success directly depends on the functioning of the group — anyone who has ever played in a team knows how quickly this lesson is learned. The “gang” can be more important than any institution. The teacher, the family and especially the group of friends together contribute to experiences that influence the child’s autonomy, self-control and social skills.

International organizations such as UNESCO (2015) and the World Health Organization (**WHO, 2020**) have recently expanded this perspective, emphasizing that quality physical education programs must aim not only at motor performance, but also at inclusion, active participation and respect for diversity.

In Romanian literature, the direction opened by Adrian Maniu complements and contextualizes these international results still precisely for special groups of participants. His research shows that adapted sports programs improve the functional and respiratory capacity of children with visual impairments, confirming that physical activity can become a real tool for recovery and social integration. Studies by the same team go further and analyze the relationship between the level of physical activity and the development of mindful attention, as well as behavioral self-regulation in students — relevant results, because self-regulation is one of the important predictors of school adaptation and socio-emotional development. Physical activity therefore contributes not only to the motor plan, but also to the consolidation of psychological mechanisms that facilitate social integration and stress management.

These observations are in line with the international literature on the development of socio-emotional skills through sport, but **Coalter (2007)** draws attention to an essential aspect: positive effects do not appear automatically, but depend on the quality of the educational intervention. Mere participation in sport does not guarantee the development of character or the reduction of risk behaviors; the results depend on how the activities are organized, on the teachers' skills and on the relational climate in the group. It is an observation that keeps the discussion away from idealizing sport and places responsibility where it should be — on the educational institutions that capitalize (or not) on this formative potential.

The role of the physical education teacher goes beyond, in this framework, the strictly technical dimension. The teacher facilitates cooperative experiences, shapes relationships between students and creates contexts in which individual success is linked to responsibility towards the group. The differences between groups are not only related to the level of motor skills, but also to the way in which mutual trust, respect and communication are cultivated — aspects that are difficult to quantify in regular school assessments, but which directly influence the educational climate.

3. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PREVENTION OF RISK BEHAVIORS IN THE COMMUNITY

The prevention of antisocial behaviors remains one of the major concerns of current public policies. Institutional interventions are essential in the management of risk situations, but their effectiveness depends, to a large extent, on the preventive mechanisms developed directly in the

community. School and organized physical activity programs can become privileged spaces for the formation of prosocial behaviors and the reduction of vulnerability factors.

Consistent involvement in sports is associated with higher levels of self-control, discipline and responsibility.

Coalter (2007) points out, however, that sport reduces social vulnerabilities only when it is integrated into a coherent educational project. Participation in sports, taken in isolation, does not guarantee the reduction of risky behaviors; the effects depend on the quality of the programs, the teacher-student relationship and the educational climate of the group.

From the perspective of the management of public order systems, **Adrian Sorin Marian** develops a related idea. Analyzing the mechanisms for preventing social risks, the author shows that the effectiveness of institutional interventions depends on the ability of organizations to act proactively and build functional partnerships with the educational environment. From our experience of continuing education in the field of policing, the principle is familiar: late intervention always costs more than prevention built in time, and the same logic applies, without much modification, to community sports programs - which are no longer viewed only as an educational tool, but also as a resource for local prevention strategies and strengthening community resilience.

Consistent participation in sports fosters relationships based on trust, collaboration, and mutual respect—elements that **Putnam (2000)** considers fundamental to a functioning community. Physical activity does not directly eliminate antisocial behaviors, but it contributes to the formation of skills that reduce the likelihood of their occurrence.

It must be said, however, that the relationship is not univocal. The practice of performance sports shows, just as clearly, that the very same ingredients that generate cohesion—competition, hierarchy, result pressure—can also produce the opposite effects when not managed properly: rivalries that slide into aggression, forms of exclusion of the less talented, or a group culture in which the unwritten rule becomes "win at any cost." The risk of overuse injury, the mental exhaustion associated with early competitive pressure and, in more serious cases, the temptation to resort to doping are part of the same picture and should not be treated as footnotes in a discussion of the benefits of sport. A realistic prevention policy takes into account both the prosocial potential of sport and these risks, treating them as part of the same phenomenon, not as marginal exceptions.

4. INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY SPORTS PROGRAMS

The concept of institutional quality is frequently used in the analysis of the performance of public organizations and refers to their capacity to provide efficient, transparent and needs-oriented services to beneficiaries. In physical education, this perspective presupposes stable programs, well-trained teachers, functional evaluation mechanisms and constant collaboration between school, family and community.

Adrian Sorin Marian's work on quality management in the public order and safety system provides a useful framework for understanding these processes: institutional performance is not only about the available resources, but also about the existence of coordination, evaluation and continuous improvement mechanisms. Although his analysis directly targets public safety, the principles formulated are easily transferred to community sports programs, where efficiency essentially follows the same organizational logic — something visible to anyone who has seen, from the inside, how both a performance sports structure and an institutional public order system work.

The physical education teacher occupies a central position in this process. His role is not limited to the transmission of motor skills, but includes organizing a climate favorable to cooperation, adapting activities to the diversity of students and promoting active participation. The teacher-student relationship remains one of the important predictors of school involvement and continuity of participation in sports.

Effective community programs also require collaboration between educational institutions, local authorities, sports organizations and public administration structures. Such an interdisciplinary approach allows for the optimal use of existing resources and the development of interventions adapted to the needs of each community.

Institutional quality can therefore be understood as one of the factors that mediate the relationship between physical activity and community development. It is not physical activity, taken in itself, that produces change, but the way in which it is designed, organized and supported through coherent educational and social policies.

5. SPORTS TEAMS AS SOCIAL LEARNING MICRO-COMMUNITIES

Organized sport provides one of the most appropriate contexts for understanding the mechanisms by which cooperation and collective responsibility are formed. Sports teams function as social systems in which individual performance is inseparable from the quality of relationships between group members. Anyone who has played competitively knows that a good team is not the sum of the most talented players, but the result of clearly assumed roles and functional communication — which is why many authors believe that the experiences lived in teams form transferable skills to other social contexts. The example of the French football team PSG, which did not win internationally when it had the biggest world stars at one time, **Mesi, Mbape, Neymar, Di Maria, Ramos**, s.a. but after they left.

In the group dynamics literature, the effectiveness of a team is explained by the complementarity of roles, communication between members, and the existence of common goals. These principles also apply in school sports, where success does not depend exclusively on individual performance, but on the ability of students to cooperate and adapt their behavior to the demands of the group.

Adrian Sorin Marian also develops this perspective, analyzing the functioning of effective teams in contemporary organizations and emphasizing the importance of clearly defined roles, communication and continuous evaluation. Although his research focuses on organizational management, the findings translate well to physical education, where the sports team remains a privileged environment for developing leadership, responsibility and collaboration.

However, these positive effects are not guaranteed. The specialized literature shows situations in which excessive competition, performance pressure or the exclusion of some participants produce exactly the opposite effect to the educational one pursued. From my own practice related to performance sports, the phenomenon is easy to recognize: the pressure of the result can quickly turn a cohesive group into a hostile one, especially where the responsible adult — teacher or coach — puts the competitive result before the development of the person.

6. ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: FROM PARTICIPATION TO DEVELOPING AUTONOMY

Inclusion is one of the fundamental principles of contemporary education, and physical activity has a special place in this process. Unlike other school subjects, physical education offers

direct participation, collaboration and non-verbal communication, facilitating interactions that can reduce social barriers and foster a sense of belonging.

Documents developed by **UNESCO (2015)** and the World Health Organization (**WHO, 2020**) emphasize that equitable access to quality physical activities is an essential component of the right to education and health. Inclusion does not only mean the presence of children with disabilities in sports activities, but their active participation in an environment that respects individual differences and capitalizes on each person's potential.

The benefits of adapted physical activities go beyond functional recovery. These programs contribute to the development of personal autonomy, the strengthening of self-esteem and the improvement of social relationships — effects that directly influence the quality of life and participation in the community. Shared experiences lived within sports activities also favor the development of empathy and the reduction of stereotypes among all participants, not just those with disabilities.

In the Romanian literature, **Adrian Maniu** and his collaborators have made important contributions to the understanding of these mechanisms. Research on the influence of adapted sports activities on children and adolescents with visual impairments has shown the improvement of functional and respiratory parameters, demonstrating that adapted interventions produce measurable benefits on physical development.

Another relevant direction of research by **Maniu** and his collaborators concerns the relationship between physical activity and mindful attention.

Authentic inclusion ultimately involves the transformation of the school's organizational culture. Adapting exercises, using differentiated teaching methods, and collaborating with physical education teachers, rehabilitation specialists, and families contribute to an environment where each student can participate according to their own abilities. The success of such a program is not measured by athletic performance, but by the degree to which it succeeds in stimulating participation, autonomy, and the development of social relationships.

7. PUBLIC SYSTEM EFFICIENCY AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

In the literature on public administration and organizational management, efficiency is usually associated with the optimal use of resources and the achievement of institutional

objectives. Efficiency cannot be reduced to administrative or economic indicators. The capacity of a community to prevent social vulnerabilities, to stimulate citizen participation and to create opportunities for children and adolescents is, in turn, a dimension of institutional performance.

Adrian Sorin Marian's works on the efficiency of the public order and safety system offer a complementary perspective. The author shows that prevention is an essential component of institutional performance and that the efficiency of public systems depends on cooperation between institutions, coordination mechanisms and policies oriented towards risk anticipation.

School, local authorities, sports organizations and public administration structures do not act independently, but together form a community intervention system. The quality of collaboration between these institutions influences children's access to sports activities, the continuity of programs and their capacity to respond to the real needs of the community.

International experience shows that prevention strategies based exclusively on coercive interventions have limited effects when they are not accompanied by educational and social measures. Investments in education, health, recreational activities and the development of social capital contribute, in turn, to strengthening community resilience and reducing vulnerabilities in the long term. Organized physical activity can be considered, in this sense, a component of preventive policies, complementary to interventions specific to public order systems.

This approach does not imply attributing an exclusive role to sport in preventing antisocial behavior. Resilient communities result from the interaction of several factors — educational, economic, cultural and institutional — and physical activity is just one of these elements, the effectiveness of which depends on how it is integrated into coherent public policies and supported by the collaboration of local actors.

The contribution of physical education to community safety must therefore be understood systemically. Sport does not replace institutional interventions nor does it, by itself, eliminate the causes of social vulnerabilities. However, it creates educational contexts in which skills and social relationships are formed that can support the functioning of communities and their capacity to respond to future challenges.

8. DISCUSSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE WORK AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The interdisciplinary perspective adopted here allows for the integration of fields that are usually analyzed separately. Contributions from physical education, developmental psychology

and sociology are complemented by research on institutional management and social risk prevention — a combination that shows that sports programs can become relevant components of community development strategies when supported by coherent public policies and real institutional collaboration.

The analysis also confirms the weight of the contributions of Romanian authors in this field. Adrian Maniu's research on adapted physical activities supports the use of movement as an educational and social inclusion tool with solid arguments, and Adrian Sorin Marian's works on institutional quality and prevention management clarify under what conditions community programs can produce sustainable effects. Put into dialogue with international literature, these contributions show that the Romanian experience can complement and nuance existing debates at the international level.

However, critical analysis of the literature shows, equally clearly, that sport should not be idealized. There are many contexts in which excessive competition, the absence of appropriate pedagogical practices or the exclusion of some participants diminish or even nullify the educational effects of sport. Beyond these pedagogical issues, the discussion should also include the broader risks associated with sports practice — from the psychological pressure on young performance athletes and the phenomenon of sports burnout, to the normalization of violence in certain contact disciplines, episodes of harassment or initiation rituals in teams, or the temptation of doping where the stakes of the result become excessive.

The early commercialization of children's sports talent, with financial and image pressures placed on the shoulders of minors, is another phenomenon that prevention literature cannot ignore. From the perspective of someone who has been active in performance sports, these risks are not theoretical hypotheses, but are part of the everyday reality of competition — which is why the success of a sports program cannot be evaluated exclusively through competitive results or quantitative indicators of participation, but also through the impact on personal development, social relationships and community climate. The results of the analysis support, overall, the need for an integrated approach.

Limitations of the paper. The present paper is conceptual in nature and is based on a critical and comparative analysis of the specialized literature, without its own empirical research. The conclusions should therefore be read as a theoretical framework intended to facilitate the

understanding of the relationships between physical activity, prosocial behaviors and community safety, not as experimental evidence of causal relationships.

Another limitation is related to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. Physical education, psychology, sociology and public management use different concepts and methodologies, which can generate varied interpretations of the same phenomena. Integrating these perspectives inevitably involves a certain degree of generalization.

Future research directions. The results of this analysis show the need for empirical research that tests the relationships between physical activity participation, the development of socio-emotional skills, and community safety indicators. Longitudinal studies could provide relevant information about the long-term effects of sports programs carried out in school and community settings.

An important direction concerns the evaluation of the effectiveness of adapted physical activity programs in developing the autonomy and social inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities. Comparative studies are also needed between communities with different levels of institutional involvement, in order to identify the factors that favor the implementation of sustainable sports programs.

Another area of research, which is currently insufficiently explored, should systematically document the risks of intensive sports practice — burnout, overuse injuries, excessive psychological pressure, doping — so that they can be integrated, along with the benefits, into a complete model of the effects of sports on the development of children and adolescents.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between physical education and community safety, integrating perspectives from education, psychology, sociology and public management. The contributions of Romanian authors are analyzed here together with the international literature, showing the complementarity between research on adapted physical activities and that on institutional quality and prevention of social risks.

One of the central arguments of the paper is that the effects of physical activity are not automatic results of practicing sports — and, equally important, that sport is not without its own risks. Its impact, in both directions, depends on the quality of educational programs, the skills of teachers and coaches, the involvement of the family and the collaboration between community institutions. Public policies oriented towards education, inclusion and active participation can amplify the

social benefits of physical activity and, at the same time, reduce the risks associated with uncontrolled sports practice, thus contributing to healthier, more resilient and safer communities. Paraphrasing the saying "mens sana, in corpore sano", we can say that healthy communities only have healthy minds. The growth, cultivation and maintenance of these healthy and harmonious minds deserves a combination of national priorities and efforts with lasting and invariably beneficial effects.

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