

Sport as an instrument of social development - the example of London

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Abstract:

In the last several years, an increase in the importance of sport in the implementation of public policy has been observed. On the one hand, it is expressed, for example, in involving children and young people in sports initiatives and clubs, improving cooperation between charities, non-profit organisations, clubs and creating more opportunities for participation in sports and recreation for adults and seniors. On the other hand, however, states, regions and cities strive to host major sports events. Apart from economic benefits, they also bring positive social effects. They are related to social inclusion, building national/local pride and increasing the level of social capital. All of the above-mentioned sports-oriented activities translate into an improvement in physical and mental health and have a positive impact on social ties, relationships, and social attitudes. The principles and mechanisms on which sport is based have an educational, upbringing, and motivating value. Therefore, sport has become a factor in social development. Social development strategies are implemented at various levels - from micro, through meso to macro. This means that, on a large scale, they involve governments, international organisations and, on a smaller scale, local communities. The initiatives undertaken at the local level are particularly important, as their effectiveness is usually higher than that of national programs. The purpose of this article is to identify sports initiatives undertaken by London authorities that have social implications. London is a city that is recognised as the world's sports capital. For many years, the authorities of London have been actively supporting sport (local initiatives and mega sports events) and physical activity to reduce the risks related to the rising costs of healthcare, ageing of the population, social inequalities, and crime among young people. Moreover, the concern for social development brings tangible benefits in the economic aspect. The results of the sport-oriented policy are disseminated through Active Citizen Worldwide, which London is a member of. In this way, other cities can benefit from experiences and best practices to improve their social policies.

Keywords: sport initiatives, social development, community sport programmes

Introduction

Social development is often identified with social change. It is planned and aimed at supporting the well-being of the entire population (Midgley, 1995, p. 25). The change may mean an improvement in health, level of education, living conditions (quality of living, earnings), access to culture, and a decrease in crime. Moreover, an important aspect of social changes is the improvement of the level of social capital, including the strengthening of relationships, tolerance, trust, and the level of integration. In recent years, an increasing role of sport and physical activity in creating social change can be observed.

In most cases, sport is seen as a social activity. It is a way of spending free time and helps maintain a healthy condition. However, it has more roles assigned. For example, sports events, from local to international mega sports events, have a different impact on the society and economy of the country/city of the organiser (Misener, 2015). Therefore, they are recognised by public authorities as an important instrument of socio-economic development (Cornelissen, 2008). Research conducted among European Union countries confirms that there is a dependence between public sport policies and health status (Szczepaniak, 2020).

Thus, sport is a phenomenon with socio-economic implications. It plays a vital role in shaping many areas of social life. It is recognised as a strong socialising factor (Barbu *et al.*, 2020). It teaches children various roles in team games and helps mature people to renew contacts in society. It also allows competing and overcoming own limitations. Sport creates opportunities to meet other people, communicate, acquire new values in the form of fair play, tolerance and respect. The aspect of socialisation is also present during sports events. They evoke psychological reactions, experiences, emotions and behaviours typical of athletes among observers. Consequently, sport promotes positive behaviour and reduces anti-social attitudes among young people.

It should also be emphasised that sport affects the improvement of social capital and social inclusion (Lawson, 2005; Skinner *et al.*, 2008). The impact of sport on social development is multifaceted. It has been identified in the following areas: physical health, cognitive and academic development, mental health, crime reduction, and reduction of truancy and disaffection (Bailey, 2005). Moreover, it turns out that sport also

contributes to community bonds and active citizenship (Delaney & Keaney, 2005). Participation in sport increases the level of social trust and well-being. Dependences between physical activity and social development concern the level of the individual as well as local communities and society as a whole.

London is a city that places great emphasis on sport and physical activity. It is visible in numerous programs, initiatives and projects that are implemented in this city. Moreover, the London authorities have been trying to attract large sports events for many years. In the prestigious Burson Cohn & Wolfe’s ranking, London was recognised as the top sports city in the world from 2012 to 2019¹. Therefore, it is worth exploring the sports supporting activities of the London authorities in more detail, especially in the context of their social effects.

The article aims to identify public initiatives supporting sport and physical activity in London that influence social development. Two methods were used in the article: literature studies to determine the importance of sport and sports events, especially in the area of social development, and case studies to present sports supporting activities undertaken by the London authorities.

The role of sport in the development of an individual, community and society

Social capital is a unique determinant of economic development (Wosiek, 2016). This capital can be created through sport. Involvement in league games, in the organisation of sports clubs, and sports volunteering helps to improve the effectiveness of local communities. The benefits of such activities are greater coordination, increased trust, and concern for the common good (Coalter, 2007).

It should be emphasised that sport also promotes values that are characteristic of the education system. It is about, for instance, personal growth, a dialectic of the individual and the group within the team, participation in a social reality which has its own rules and that one must learn and apply later, the feeling of belonging to a community (Palma *et al.*, 2018). They translate into team spirit, respect for the rules, friendship, self-control, respect for others, and educational growth. Therefore, it can be argued that sport can affect children and youth in a similar way that school does.

Therefore, public investments in sport seem to be an appropriate instrument for solving social problems. Research conducted in Australia has shown that they contribute to national identity building, community development, integration, health improvement, education improvement, crime prevention and economic benefits (Australian Sports Commission, 2005). Sports activity at a grassroots level is particularly important, as it has the potential to motivate, inspire and prevent social diseases (Zakus, 1999). It can be used to activate people at risk of social exclusion and facilitate social revitalisation (Ignasiak-Szulc, 2020).

City authorities are grappling with an increasing number of challenges. It is worth mentioning the social ones which include: overweight leading to diseases that require long-term treatment, ageing of society, civilisation diseases (stress, depression, mental problems), social inequalities, and intolerance. Physical activity helps to reduce the negative impact of these phenomena. It causes positive changes at the individual, community, and society levels (Table 1).

Table 1. Multilevel impact of physical activity on the social, health, and economic spheres

| | Social | Health | Economy |
|------------------|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Individual Level | Stronger Values, Empathy and Resilience | Improved Health and Wellbeing | Happier and more Productive Workforce |
| Community Level | Integration with Communities | Healthier Communities | New Jobs and Opportunities |
| Society Level | Cohesion between Communities | Healthcare Cost Savings | Stronger Economy |

Source: Active Citizen Worldwide (2018).

Taking into account the contents of the table above, it can be concluded that physical activity and sport have broad social and economic consequences. Therefore, they contribute to an increase in the level of social development, which can be defined as a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development (Midgley, 1995, p. 25). Thus, the consequence of physical activity is not only mental and psychological but also economic changes, which can be expressed in terms of value.

The effectiveness of sport in creating social development depends on many factors. In order to develop social capital and social inclusion, especially within disadvantaged communities, appropriate actions of local

¹ It was only in 2020 that London fell to the second place behind New York. The ranking list includes the top 50 sports cities from around the world. The ranking of cities is mainly based on the organization of sports events. The functioning of sports clubs in the highest league is also important. International Federations (IFs) and sports media, combined with an analysis of the association between sport and a city in the digital environment provide their rating. In the latter aspect, it is about how many times a city is mentioned in the context of sports in social media, blogs, and websites (Burson Cohn & Wolfe, 2020).

authorities and the entire pro-social environment are necessary. These actions should meet the following criteria (Skinner & Zakus, 2008):

- support programs should take into account local resources (infrastructure, people, cooperation networks) available to the target group;
- sport-based social inclusion programs should take place where the target groups live and reflect their specific needs;
- social programs from conception to implementation should be monitored and evaluated;
- sports programs should be analysed in terms of sustainable funding opportunities.

When commencing the implementation of the social development strategy, city authorities should also take into account the potential of modern sport, the growing popularity of the 'fitness' culture and care for physical condition. The effective use of this potential allows the reduction of many social problems.

The impact of sports events on social development

Many publications are presenting a very different profit and loss account of organising major sports events. On the one hand, sports events can have negative consequences: economic losses, corruption, public budget deficit, excessive consumption of socially harmful goods, or social unrest. For example, an *ex-post* analysis of the 1994 World Cup in the USA showed that host cities suffered cumulative losses of between \$5.5 and \$9.3 billion. The *ex-ante* estimate indicated a profit of \$4 billion (Baade & Matheson, 2004). The labour market in the host cities also showed no positive changes in relation to the cities where no matches were played (Baumann *et al.*, 2011). Other negative effects of sports events related to the labour market include the offering of mostly temporary jobs (Hiller, 2000) and part-time and low-paid jobs (Schimmel, 1995). On the other hand, however, there are studies showing the benefits of organising sports events. For example, investments in preparation for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics cost about \$2 billion but contributed to the creation of 680,000 jobs in 1991-1997 (Malfas *et al.*, 2004), and the cumulative economic impact amounted to \$5.1 billion (Stevens & Bevan, 1999).

When analysing the effects of organising sports events, it is worth paying attention to social aspects. The newly created sports infrastructure may motivate residents to practise sports and, consequently, improve their health. Thus, it is an external effect that has the characteristics of public good and prevents social exclusion (Solberg & Ulvnes, 2016). There is also an influence of sports events on people's attitudes and beliefs. Sports achievements generally evoke feelings of pride and a sense of belonging and identity, both on the local and national level, among participants, tourists, volunteers, even among groups of people unrelated to the event. They belong to the intangible effects. Research confirmed that the events produce the following sociological benefits (Inoue & Havard, 2014):

- they allow the sharing of emotions between the participants of the event, which leads to a higher level of community excitement;
- stimulate interactions between participants, which strengthens the attachment to the local community;
- they allow the exchange of information about sports and events, which results in an increased level of event excitement;
- they enable local communities to find out about visiting fans' opinions about the city and the event, which contributes to their sense of pride.

It should be added that watching sports events is a consequence of the occurrence of specific stimuli. These include (Solberg & Ulvnes, 2016):

- group affiliation motive – willingness to spend time with friends;
- family motive - the need to spend time with family;
- self-esteem motive - individual willingness to participate in the event due to the performance of your favourite team/athlete.

The above stimuli reflect social needs. Satisfying them can take place through a sense of belonging to a group and interaction with another person. The self-esteem motive is quite specific. As a result of identifying with a favourite team, along with their successes, the fan's self-esteem improves. The team's success becomes the observer's individual success. Thus, the mere watching of sports events affects the satisfaction of specific social needs.

Therefore, it can be concluded that sports events favour social inclusion and a sense of community and belonging (Schulenkorf, 2010). Moreover, sports events have social implications in the form of psychological benefits resulting from volunteering in the organisation of the event. Therefore, it is a proof that these events influence the positive attitudes of their participants (Irwin *et al.*, 2010). It should be emphasised that even local events on a smaller scale can also bring many benefits. Interestingly, their positive social effects and opportunities (power relations, urban regeneration, socialisation and human capital) for local residents may be higher as compared to mega sports events (Hover *et al.*, 2016). Grassroots initiatives of small organisations instil a sense of responsibility in the local community and generate additional positive effects.

Sport supporting initiatives in London - case study

Physical activity has a significant impact on health. In the UK, it is estimated that the lack of exercising or playing sports costs £7.4 billion a year, of which £0.9 billion for National Health Service (London Sport, 2020a). For this reason, the London authorities implement many projects aimed both at improving infrastructure and at increasing the possibilities of physical activity and volunteering for residents and creating cooperation between sports institutions. For example, in 2015-2016, the contribution to this type of activity was rated at £5.92 billion (London Sport, 2020b). This amount is the sum of the contributions of the following organisations:

- Public/Government sector: £713.2 million,
- Charities/Third sector: £8.91 million,
- Consumer sector: £2.1 billion,
- The Value of Sports Volunteers: £3.042 billion.

Based on the established levels of participation in sports, researchers at Sheffield Hallam University estimated a number of benefits for London, which were divided into several areas:

- 1) physical well-being allowed to avoid, for example, 36,160 cases of coronary heart disease and stroke; 16,696 cases of Type 2 diabetes; 413 cases of breast cancer;
- 2) mental well-being: the value participants gain from higher subjective well-being is estimated to be £3.42 billion; For sports volunteering, the gains from higher subjective well-being are estimated to be £2.4 billion;
- 3) individual development: Sports participation leads to a 1% increase in educational attainment; Graduates who participate in sport at university have on average, a £6,115 higher starting salary than those that do not participate.

For London, it is estimated that these two outcomes combined create a social impact value of £160.86 million.

- 4) social and community development: reductions in crime: engagement in physical activity and sport was estimated to prevent 3,164 criminal instances among London males aged 10-24 years. The unit cost saving for each crime averted is estimated at £3,168; Moreover, volunteers provide a service that is a form of social capital for organizations (e.g., sports clubs). It has been estimated that each volunteer contributes to their organization an average of £4,555 per annum (all active London sports volunteers contribute £3.04 billion in total).

The actions of the London authorities are multidirectional; however, they result from coherent and planned strategies. The current strategic document is the Mayor's Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity adopted in 2018. In this strategy, the Mayor of London identified three basic challenges for the city (Mayor of London, 2018):

- low physical activity among adults (this concerns approximately 38% of Londoners);
- a small number of leisure and recreational facilities: London has half the number of recreational facilities per 100,000 inhabitants than the rest of the country;
- low city budget spending on sports and physical activity.

In order to counteract the above challenges, activities have been planned in two areas:

- 1) London: the sports capital of the world - continued support for major sports events. So far, London has organised major events, such as 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Rugby Union World Cup in 2015, the World Athletics and Para Athletics in 2017, Cricket World Cup in 2019. In turn, in 2021, London will co-host the UEFA European Football Championship (seven matches, including the semi-finals and final at Wembley). In addition, London hosts cyclical sports events such as NBA Global Games, London Marathon, The Championships, Wimbledon, NFL International Series Games, and Major League Baseball.

The authorities declare that they will try to get more big events. The experience gained so far shows that financial support from the authorities was related to a high return on investment. Therefore, they expect a positive impact of sports events not only on the city's economy but also on social development. It is about the benefits of promoting the city's tourism, community sports programs and a wide range of volunteer programs for Londoners during events.

- 2) Community sport - the second area covers not only the increase in public participation in actively doing sports but also using the power of sport to improve social conditions and integration. The key program in this respect is 'sport unites'. The funding for this program is set at approximately £12 million. It covers the following three topics:

- a) Sport for Social Integration - financing partnerships between non-sport and sports organisations, sports associations, and clubs to improve social integration. Primary audiences are people from low-income families as well as single and isolated residents.
- b) Active Londoners - programs aimed at physically inactive, disabled, and people with mental health problems.
- c) Workforce, Tech & Capacity Building - financing the work of sports coaches and animators, volunteers, competitions and sports competitions, supporting the development of technology in sports (data use, innovation, evaluation), as well as initiatives undertaken by the London Sport organisation.

An initiative worth emphasising from the point of view of its impact on social development is also the Young Londoners Fund. This fund aims to support activities aimed at involving young Londoners in sports events and physical activity in the long term. It is particularly important because its recipients are young people exposed to violence and crimes. Extracting these people from high-crime environments is a priority.

The whole strategy is to combine major sports events with the development of community sport. Each organisation preparing a sports event, if it is applying for financial support from the London authorities, should present a community project strategy. It should describe how the event will affect the opportunities to participate, volunteer, and spectate. This way, the authorities of London force the organisers to become more involved in the social development of the local community. The target groups of the strategy cover broad social strata, including excluded groups such as Black, Asian, ethnic minorities, people with low income, disabled, elderly, LGBT +, refugees, homeless, and disadvantaged young people.

The activities planned in the strategy are to contribute to social development by:

- improving the health of residents through community sport (the goal of the authorities is that by 2041 every Londoner should walk or cycle for at least 20 minutes a day);
- social inclusion, which increases opportunities for people with low income;
- helping young people to prepare for employment through community sports initiatives and the work of youth organisations;
- promoting a healthy lifestyle in schools, active travel, games, physical activity, especially among overweight children;
- improvement of the mental health of the inhabitants by expanding parks, green, sports and leisure zones;
- building social relations, ties and cooperation networks also for rejected and lonely people.

One of the key organisations for the implementation of this strategy is London Sport. It is an independent charity funded mainly by Sport England (executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport). The Mayor of London appoints the chairman and, like Sport England and London Councils, two board members. The other board members are appointed by London Sport. London Sport is an amalgamation of five County Sport Partnerships in London that are funded by Sport England to implement sporting programs through a network of local organisations committed to increasing participation in sport. Partners include National Governing Bodies of Sport and their clubs, school sport partnerships, local authorities, sport and leisure facilities, primary care trusts and other sports and non-sports organisations.

London Sport operates in several areas. One of them is supporting the workforce for sport. It is about people who are volunteers in sports clubs, doctors, and coaches. For example, in cooperation with the University of Kent, training workshops were created for social prescribers and link workers so that they can advocate physical activity more effectively with their clients. The free course is aimed at increasing the skills and equipping with the necessary competences for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

Another activity of London Sport is supporting the employment of coaches and sports animators in London municipalities. They can apply for support of up to £10,000 in which they will present their plans, strategies, and employment plans for the coming years. Financial support is also distributed through grants. NGOs and clubs may apply for funding for sailing schools, talented youth, disabled athletes, athletics competitions, training courses for sports teams, purchase of equipment, *etc.*

London Sport also has a fund of £200,000 for organisations helping the following groups:

- Lower Socio-Economic Groups;
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities;
- Disabled People and People with Long-Term Health Conditions.

Individual grants for organisations of up to £10,000 are intended for the integration of children and adolescents and the promotion of the physical activity. Apart from financial support, London Sport also offers advisory and organisational assistance throughout the duration of the grant.

Another specific type of support is the creation of rules and guidelines for schools to make their sports facilities available. It is about expanding the range of extracurricular sports and physical activities available to students and the wider community. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many barriers and restrictions to accessing this infrastructure. London Sport is producing a guide for schools that provides a set of solutions for safe use after school classes, at weekends, and during public holidays.

London Sport also distributes money donated by Sport England to establish satellite clubs. Their task is to provide young people aged 14-19 with the possibility of active recreation close to their place of residence. They should meet the recommendations of Chief Medical Officers and encourage and promote physical activity. Subsidies to satellite clubs may cover the costs of:

- coaching (maximum of £30 per hour);
- administration – all successful projects receive a set fee of £75 to cover admin costs;
- volunteers (maximum of £10 per hour);
- hire of facilities;
- transport of participants or coaches;

- training/Coach Education Courses (to run or sustain the project) up to one/project;
- equipment.

The program is a continuation of activities undertaken several years earlier. In the period from 2015 to 2017, 1,130 Satellite Clubs were established in London, in which 18,217 people actively participate (London Sport, 2017). The vast majority of these clubs, about 76%, were established at secondary schools. Almost 23% of all satellite clubs are targeted at young females, 6.7% for young people with disabilities, 3.1 for young people from ethnic minorities. The dominating clubs are basketball (14.25%), cricket (10.53%), and athletics (9.73%). However, in 2017-2020, football and basketball clubs, as well as dance schools, were in the lead. To sum up, in the years 2017-2020, the London Sport organisation allocated approximately £914,000 to satellite clubs projects.

London Sport also runs a technology incubator to help start-ups thrive, using innovation to promote physical and sports activities. Digital products related to the measurement of physical activity, the number of calories burned, and individual training plans are becoming increasingly popular. The Sport Tech Hub offers a 24-week business support program as well as assistance in establishing business contacts, looking for sponsors, *etc.* It was launched in 2017. So far, the program has cooperated with 36 start-ups, whose applications and digital services were used by 70,000 Londoners. The examples of companies that have become very popular with residents are Pace to Race, Red January, Moki, and Set Play.

The London authorities, apart from activities related to the preparation and implementation of the internal strategy, also undertake international activities. London is one of the three founding cities of the Active Citizens Worldwide (ACW) project (alongside Auckland and Singapore). It was established in 2018. In the same year, Stockholm joined the organisation. It is a network of cities that provides local decision-makers around the world with knowledge, insights, and ideas about physical activity in cities. Thanks to the activity of ACW, cities share best practices, cooperate in creating new solutions and develop a global standard in the field of measuring and analysing physical activity in cities.

Benchmarking gives cities a unique opportunity to discover global trends, identify anomalies and learn from others about taking effective interventions in the domain of physical activity. Research conducted in four of ACW member cities confirmed the positive effect of physical activity on an individual (Active Citizen Worldwide, 2019). It has been confirmed that the population of physically active people compared to inactive people:

- is 6% happier;
- trusts the community 28% more;
- has a 6% higher life satisfaction;
- is 14% less mentally stressed.

Moreover, societal and economic benefits have been identified that result from a sporty and healthy lifestyle in the member cities. These include:

- 4,400 lives saved;
- \$1.6 billion healthcare savings;
- 3.2 million sick days prevented;
- \$14 billion economic contribution;
- 65,000 jobs created.

The results of joint research, as well as good practices, are made available to other interested cities. In this way, the ACW organisation promotes a healthy lifestyle and the use of sport and physical activity to raise the level of social development.

Conclusions

Sport should be considered in a very broad sense. It is not only an activity that contributes to the improvement of health and well-being but also has social implications. It allows not only the creation of individual development but also of local communities and entire societies. By influencing the physical, emotional, and psychological state, it has a real impact on the quality of people's lives. It improves integration, gives new opportunities for action, social inclusion and, consequently, prevents many negative social effects (*e.g.*, crime).

Over years, the London authorities have recognised the potential of sport as a factor of social development. The initiatives taken are focused on several areas. Firstly, these are investments in infrastructure, allowing the extension of leisure, recreation and sports opportunities. It is hard to imagine that the city that organised the Olympic Games, World Championships in various disciplines or cyclical sports events would not have a developed sports infrastructure. It is worth mentioning here, for example, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London Stadium, Copper Box Arena, London Aquatics Centre, Lee Valley Regional Park, Wembley Stadium, Wimbledon, Emirates Stadium, Tottenham Hotspur's new stadium, Stamford Bridge, or O2 Arena. However, its further expansion allows the implementation of social strategies and programs on a larger scale. Moreover, it makes it easier to apply for the next big sports events. These, in turn, in addition to economic

benefits, bring social benefits. This is particularly important as the city authorities openly declare their will to remain the sports capital of the world. Secondly, the London authorities initiate partnerships between charitable organisations, non-profit organisations, sports clubs, and organisations supporting national and sexual minorities. In this way, they try to include in the implementation of the Strategy For Sport and Physical Activity a wide group of excluded, discriminated, socially inactive, disabled, and people at risk of poverty and crime. Programs such as Satellite Clubs or volunteering during major sports events give them opportunities for physical development, acquiring new competencies, working in a group, establishing contacts and relationships. An organisation that is particularly involved in the implementation of social sports programs is London Sport. Thirdly, and finally, London is actively involved in Active Citizen Worldwide. It deals with the promotion of sport and improvement of the level of social development through physical activity. Sharing best practices and research results makes it easier for other cities to implement them.

London can be considered a model city when it comes to using sport in social development. However, the initiatives taken by the city authorities require a comprehensive understanding of various organisations and a favourable attitude of residents. Practice shows that the effectiveness of activities is also supported by regular financing and long-term planning.

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