



**UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE
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**SPORTS AS A TOOL FOR INTERVENTION
IN THE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

**EL DEPORTE COMO UNA HERRAMIENTA
DE INTERVENCIÓN PARA LA PRÁCTICA
DEL TRABAJO SOCIAL**

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“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language that they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination”.

Nelson Mandela

SPORTS AS A TOOL FOR INTERVENTION IN THE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

ABSTRACT:

Sports have been always connected to human existence and used with different social purposes throughout history. Consequently, through the analysis of their historical course, it can be understood how they have become nowadays into a sociocultural phenomenon. Through all the social values that they bring, sports provide individuals with several benefits that improve their life quality and wellbeing. Indeed, through the orientations, social functions and social theories they have proven to be a phenomenon in connection to social work. In this direction, using the basic method, social work discipline can make use of sports helping individuals, groups and communities to overcome life difficulties, to transform their realities, or to become a better version of themselves. Thus, demonstrating that they are a tool for social work, they can be implemented in every model of intervention.

KEY WORDS: intervention, social values, social work, sports, wellbeing

EL DEPORTE COMO UNA HERRAMIENTA DE INTERVENCIÓN PARA LA PRÁCTICA DEL TRABAJO SOCIAL

RESUMEN:

El deporte siempre ha estado conectado a la existencia del ser humano y ha sido usado con diferentes propósitos sociales a lo largo de la historia. Por esta razón, a través del análisis de su trayectoria histórica, se puede entender cómo se ha convertido actualmente en un fenómeno sociocultural. A través de los valores que promueve, el deporte aporta a los individuos numerosos beneficios que mejoran su calidad de vida y su bienestar. Además, a través de sus orientaciones, funciones y teorías sociales, se ha demostrado que es un fenómeno en conexión con el trabajo social. En este sentido, usando el método básico, la disciplina del trabajo social puede utilizar el deporte para ayudar a individuos, grupos y comunidades a superar dificultades vitales, a transformar sus realidades o a convertirse una mejor versión de sí mismos. De este modo, demostrando que es una herramienta para el trabajo social, se puede implementar en todos sus modelos de intervención.

PALABRAS CLAVE: bienestar, deporte, intervención, trabajo social, valores

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1. Introduction

Sports are a growing phenomenon. If we look back, we all have been involved in sports at some point of our lives and probably have experienced some of their practical benefits.

Although there is a clear academic evidence about the importance of this phenomenon to the improvement of the wellbeing, there is insufficient literature work about its relation to disciplines that have that point in common, such as social work. Consequently, one of the main reasons for choosing this topic is to contribute to the still not deeply explored connection to the social work practice and to broaden the perspective of social workers. Indeed, as a high performance swimmer and future social worker I pretend to associate both of my passions in order to use my experience to become a better professional. Each social worker should use his or her strengths with the aim of developing tools that help others discovering their potentials.

Considering this, the main objective of this paper is to demonstrate using all the social values that sports promote, their connection with the social work discipline and their utility as a tool for social intervention. In order to further achieve this objective, this academic work also presents the following secondary objectives: the analysis and study of the historical trajectory of sports until becoming a sociocultural and educational phenomenon that promotes the wellbeing, the review of all the shared social benefits between sports and social work, the evaluation of the role of sports in the three levels of intervention in social work and the implementation of sports in each of the eight social work models of intervention.

To fulfil all these objectives, this paper uses a structure that goes from the general to the specific. Starting with global aspects of the sports phenomenon, it progresses to its direct application in the social work practice.

2. Methods

This academic work is the result of a bibliographic review of several scientific databases such as ProQuest, Psycinfo, Ebsco, Scielo, PsycINFO, Dialnet, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, RECERCART, WorldCat, E-Prints Complutense and Catálogo Cisne of Complutense University of Madrid. Using a qualitative method for the compilation of information, books, scientific publications and electronic documents have been analysed.

The use of the terms “social work” and “sports” in such databases generated limited results. Therefore, the range of concepts, including English and Spanish language, was broadened. The key words used were “social work intervention”, “sociology of sports”, “history of sports”, “social values of sports”, “benefits of sports”, “social work values”, “sports as a tool for intervention”.

The reason for such an in-depth bibliographical research is because this is an underexplored topic, fact that has been very constraining.

3. Brief history of sports. The legacy of the ancient Greek values in today's world

The first step to connect sports and social work is to make a brief historical review because physical activities are linked to human beings since the beginning of our existence. They have been historically associated with, among others, subsistence, religious, political, hygiene, ludic or war purposes. But it was not until the ancient Greece era when sports started to be a means of instruction and education (Hernández & Recoder, 2015), following the educational principle of *areté* (Chaverra-Fernández, 2013) which still persists nowadays since education cannot be separated from sports (Calderón, 1999).

The emergence of sports, as we understand them today, cannot be separated from the ancient Greek culture for one main reason: the origin of the Olympic Games. This event was determining in building a culture in which physical and mental wellbeing were promoted (Hernández & Recoder, 2015).

By that time, there were sports competitions among the aristocracy in which the main purpose was to be the best and stand out from the crowd (García Romero,

2019). In comparison to the contemporary period, this agonistic function also persists (Chaverra-Fernández, 2013). But in other social classes sports were also a means of entertainment. This reality could be the beginning of the current massification and popularization of sports that aims to be affordable for all. Furthermore, an essential feature of this culture that remains existing in modern sports is that those were considered as fundamental for the community and the State was in charge of promoting them among the citizenship. Additionally, for the first time, the physical practice was also important for women's health. Although the purposes were to stay healthy to give birth and to perform their roles as mothers, this could be the start of the importance that is given today to achieve the gender equality in the sports practice (García Romero, 2019; Hernández & Recoder, 2015).

Nevertheless, one of the most important characteristics is that Greeks considered that soul, body and spirit had to be educated and trained at the same level in order to accomplish the integral development of the individual and to achieve the *paideia*. (Chaverra-Fernández, 2013).

What today's sports have also learned from the Greek's sporting values is that these activities were important for the improvement of health. They were also a means of communication, socialization and building relationships (Chaverra-Fernández, 2013).

In general, sports are today understood as a lifestyle (Vilanou, 2001) that can provide individuals social and physical benefits. Indeed, they improve the wellbeing and the quality of life of individuals, groups and communities (Rodríguez Abreu, 2010).

4. State of the art: sports as a sociocultural phenomenon

As sports evolve at the same time as the different societies, this dynamic character makes difficult to define it globally. What makes this process even more complex is that they are interrelated to mostly all areas of human life, such as the social, the familiar, the educative or the political (Robles Rodríguez, Abad Robles,

& Gimenez Fuentes-Guerra, 2009; Sekot, 2017). But in general, the academic literature evidence that sports are a sociocultural and educational phenomenon that connect people (Sutula, 2018). To complete this description, experts in this field state different characteristics that should be considered.

As mentioned by Robles Rodríguez et al (2009), José María Cagigal (1985) asserts that sports are each type of physical activities performed with the desire to compare or overcome others or themselves. Furthermore, they are also an essential part of the culture, a means for constructing interpersonal connections and they allow individuals to strengthen their personal identities (Sekot, 2017). Through sports, individuals can take advantage of their personal characteristics, cooperate with others and exceed goals (Castejón, 2001, cited in Robles Rodríguez et al, 2009).

4.1. Sports orientations

It is true that not all the orientations of this phenomenon are useful in the social work field. Nevertheless, following the categorization of Robles Rodríguez et al (2009), recreational sports can be beneficial to disconnect from daily problems or to achieve a personal balance. Moreover, educational sports promote the development of some cognitive, social, or affective skills in the practitioners. Another orientation known as adapted sports, help people with disabilities to establish social contacts and to improve psychological health (Yazicioglu, Yavuz, Goktepe & Tan, 2012). Likewise, under the motto “every individual shall have the right to participate in sport” (Resolution 76 (41), 1976, p. 1), sports for all highlights that these activities are an important factor in human and sociocultural development. Indeed, the Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA, 2011) supports that the access to these phenomenon is a human right and confirms that sports promote diversity and inclusiveness.

4.2. Social functions of sports

According to Serra (2015) there are five major social functions:

Firstly, the socio-emotional function is related to the social and psychological stability of the person in society. For instance, sports help in the management of tension and conflict through the release of frustrations and aggressions and the practice also enables the individuals to develop or express emotions in a way that they are not harmful to others or to themselves. In addition, feelings of community and belonging are promoted so social distance between different cultures and backgrounds is reduced.

Then, the socialisation function refers to the process of “learning and development in and through sport” (p. 71). Macionis & Plummer (2008) describe socialisation as a lifelong process through which individuals build their personal biography, create interactional rules and adapt to the patterns of the culture they belong to. Coakley (1993) describes this phenomenon as a dual process of social development and social interaction in which individuals learn about themselves, the environment and learn orientations and patterns for behaviour and social organization. Furthermore, through socialisation, individuals create their own personal and social identity: personality characteristics, social values and beliefs. Important principles that are promoted in the social work practice are also encouraged through sports, such as building healthy relationships, developing communication skills, cooperation or respect (Serra, 2015). What is clear is that sports have an inexorable connection with culture since they are an expression of the sociocultural reality in which they happen (Lüschen, 1967).

Next, the integrative function suggests that sports stimulate the social interaction. Connecting people, they foster a shared sense of belonging and participation that allows individuals from different environments feel identified, united and integrated.

Even more, the political function is connected with the integrative function since sports can be used to unite a nation or different countries.

Eventually, the social mobility function involves shifting from one class to another, including intergenerational or intragenerational movements. In this sense, sports generally foster the upward mobility because some skills can be discovered by individuals through the practice such as leadership competences.

4.3. Social theories of sports

Connected to the social functions, there are some social theories that help studying sports in society and its connection with social work values and objectives. Following the ideas of Serra (2015) and Moscoso Sánchez (2006) these are the social theories of sports:

First, the functional theory is focused on how can sports contribute to the stability and social progress in communities and societies. This theory holds that participation in sports can fight deviance, build values and inspire individuals exposing them to role models. In addition, its vision shows an organic character of sports since they are a phenomenon that reproduces and reinforces the social model of a culture and they have a strong integrative and socialization function that helps achieving the social order.

Similarly, the conflict theory has its main focus on economic factors and class inequality, and it holds the idea that the social order exists because there is an unequal access to resources. Sometimes through sports, capitalism, manipulation and oppression are promoted. Nevertheless, this theory does not consider how sports can empower individuals, groups and communities.

Meanwhile, the critical theory highlights that sports are more than a reflection of society since they are a social construct and a phenomenon for cultural transformation. It also focuses on understand, confront and transform systems of exploitation and oppression in social life using sports. In addition, it intends to increase diversity in sports, to challenge debates and ideologies and to give power to marginalized voices.

Then, following the idea that society is created through social interactions, the interactional theory analyses sports through the meanings and symbols that people create through them. It underlines the process of how individuals experience sports and how they create identities through them because our personality influences our decisions, actions and interactions.

Likewise, the feminist theory has its main focus on gender relations. It understands that social life is patriarchal and man-dominated and consequently sports as well.

In this context sports also reproduce sexuality of the body and perpetuate the patriarchy through a misrepresentation of the women in the media aiming to be feminine or showing mainly caring and supportive roles. However, sports can also be an opportunity for empowering women demonstrating that those do not belong just to masculine world.

Finally, the figurational theory understands sports as a social phenomenon and emphasizes social networking and interdependent relationships and how they change over time as key in social life. This theory highlights the civilising process of sports and focuses on the importance of acquiring more and more knowledge of social life because this will facilitate individuals strategies for controlling violence, exploitation or abuse of power, and will increase the access and participation in sports of people historically oppressed and powerless.

5. General social benefits of sports. A link toward social work and its values

Social work is broadly a discipline which advocates human rights and values such as individuality, liberty, equity, autonomy, solidarity, respect for the diversity and responsibility, aiming to increase the wellbeing of individuals (Consejo General del Trabajo Social, 2012). Even more, social work is concerned with helping people to develop capacities and skills to help themselves (Chukwu, Chukwu & Nwadike, 2017). Similarly, different sports instruct individuals in essential competences, rules and principles (Serra, 2015) that help them to cope with problems, overcome obstacles or simply be a better version of themselves.

As a result and making a link between sports and social work, it is important to outline that the six social work values and ethical principles mentioned by NASW (2017) -service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence- can be provided and enhanced by the professionals through the use of sports as a tool for intervention (Newman et al., 2019).

According to Frost and Sims (1974, p. 16, cited in Ruiz Llamas & Cabrera Suárez, 2004), from a general dimension, the sports practice encourages honesty, loyalty, humility, an ethical behaviour, fair play, the removal of prejudices, cultural exchange, self-control, self-realization and sacrifice. Still more, from a psychosocial dimension, sports promote self-respect, self-esteem, sportiness, responsibility, leadership, emotional control, determination, tolerance, patience, empathy and cooperation.

But individuals can also confront the acceptance of rules, face new experiences and challenges, develop initiative and originality, promote their physical and psychological wellbeing or enhance their understanding of themselves and others. Moreover, Gómez Rijo (2001), highlights other qualities that can be achieved through the sports practice such as autonomy, solidarity and equity. But partnership and expression of feelings, opinions and interests (Gutiérrez Sanmartín 1998), social participation (Cayuela Maldonado, 1997), effort, learning from victory and defeat, concentration, professionalism, sense of belonging, transparency or authority (Valenciano Oller, 2012) are also important. The formation of critical thinking (Rodríguez, 2015), control and management skills, decision making and problem solving abilities (Opstoel et al., 2019) can also be achieved through the practice and individuals can create mutual support networks based on trust that generate psychosocial benefits (Pérez Flores & Muñoz Sánchez, 2018).

Added to all previously mentioned values and giving a global perspective of sports also connected to the social work practice, this phenomenon can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) because sports can “cut across barriers that divide societies” (United Nations, 2003, p. 5), support in conflict prevention, fight for gender equality, improve health and contribute to sustainable environments.

But social workers can use sports as a tool for more purposes. Apart from all the psychosocial benefits mentioned above, social workers, through their promotion, also intend to improve the physical health of clients, especially of those who are not physically active. In such cases, professionals can encourage them to participate in the physical and sporting practice in order to meet their practical or

emotional needs and to foster their empowerment. So consequently, social workers can inform and educate people on the benefits that can be obtained (Paylor, 2010).

Additionally, several social groups can benefit from their positive effects, going from the development of physical and emotional health among young people to the healthy ageing of the elderly. But it is not just a matter of age, because sports can be beneficial for individuals who, for instance, suffer from drug abuse or have committed crime (United Nations, 2003). Moreover, other groups who suffer from social exclusion can take advantage of the benefits, just like immigrants or people from marginalised suburbs (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2004).

6. Sports as a tool for intervention in the social work practice

To explain why sports can be considered a tool for social intervention, it is important to contextualize what this concept means. A social intervention is an action, or a series of activities and tasks programmed on a collective or a group with the aim of triggering social change to improve their situation. So it begins in an scenario which is necessary to change and tries to achieve other situation stablished as desirable (Losada Menéndez, 2016). It is in this context when sports plays a role as a tool for social intervention, because through all the benefits that they provide, they support the individuals to achieve that desirable situation.

But the social intervention is part of a broader context: the social work method. One aspect that differentiates it from other methods in social sciences is that it focuses not only on the study of a reality but also aims to transform it (Malagón Bernal, Barrera Algarín & Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, 2007). Meanwhile, generally known as basic method, it is a systematic procedure based on five stages, called differently by diverse professionals but which in general can be summarised as follows (Colomer, 1974, p. 28 cited in Malagón Bernal, Barrera Algarín & Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, 2007):

First, observation and investigation of the reality target of change. Then, interpretation of all the data collected. Next, creation of a work plan of how to proceed to achieve social change. Afterwards, intervention and implementation of the plan. And finally, evaluation.

The question that arises here is where do sports place in these five previously mentioned stages. Once all the characteristics and information of a certain group have been collected with the aim of identifying their main problems, and after creating a workplan that adapts to their features and skills, sports can be used as one of the possible tools to implement with the clients through the social intervention. Since they are considered an instrument that provide a socialising environment in which several values and healthy social relationships are promoted (Pérez Flores & Muñoz Sánchez, 2018), this fact helps the individuals to achieve that desirable social change target of the intervention. As a consequence, sports can be considered a means and not an end in itself (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2004). Finally, after the implementation of the plan, it is necessary to evaluate if all the objectives have been accomplished and if not, create other alternatives, such as using other tools for the intervention.

But it is necessary to bear in mind that to succeed in the social intervention the implementation of the plan must consider the personal values of the clients and their backgrounds. To exemplify this, it is useful to research what do the clients going through different situations and the people in their environments believe and value about the sporting activities (Ruiz Llamas & Cabrera Suárez, 2004). If the target group do not believe in their change through the sporting activities, the social intervention may fail.

6.1. Levels of intervention in the social work practice: how can sports help individuals, groups and communities?

According to Ebue, Uche & Agha (2017), social workers can be considered as change agents “who work with a wide variety of clients, in a vast array of settings” (p. 84), but human wellbeing is the central objective of their intervention in all cases. To achieve it, social intervention is carried out through a series of actions

that can be developed at different levels (Losada Menéndez, 2016): micro, mezzo or macro levels. In the micro level, social workers focus on the direct intervention with individuals and their families, the mezzo level is referred to social work with groups, and the macro level emphasises the social intervention with communities.

Furthermore, although the social work with individuals was the first and the most commonly practiced (Ebue, Uche and Agha, 2017), considering that individuals are naturally immersed in wider social contexts, sports can also be implemented in social work with groups and social work with communities. In accordance, bearing in mind the premise that humans are inherently social beings and the interdependence (Viscarret Garro, 2018) between individuals, it is not possible to explain all benefits that sports can promote in each level of intervention separately.

In general, one way to connect social work and sports in the social intervention is through the analysis of human needs. One exemplification of this is Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs due to the importance given for the social work discipline. It is considered as a baseline for social work in the three levels of intervention since it is based on advocating basic human needs and rights. But it is also considered a source of self-awareness that enables social workers to carry out the professional practice with more empathy and understanding (Vitzthum & Frankfurth, 2017).

According to the theory of Abraham Maslow (1970, p. 3. cited in Sack, Singh & DiPaolo, 2009), "most human behaviour is motivated by physiological, safety, affiliation, esteem, and self-actualisation needs." Maslow posits that these five levels of needs are organized in a pyramid structure in which the most basic needs are placed below, and higher or rational needs are on the top. In addition, this pyramid follows a hierarchical structure so that higher needs can only be achieved when the most basic needs have been previously met (Herrera Delgado, 2015).

According to Aruma & Enwuesi Hanachor (2017), starting from physiological needs, Maslow refers to the ones needed for survival such as water, shelter, clothing, resting and comfort and reproduction.

Once physiological needs are met, safety or security needs are related to protection from danger caused by, for instance, social or physical emergencies or problems, chaotic situations, disorders or disturbances.

In the next level, regarding affiliation or social needs, also called love and belonging needs, Maslow refers to the sense of identification and belonging to social organizations or groups such as the family, but also workplace or friendship groups, communities or even a society or a nation. Feeling part of a group and surrounded by others is essential for human life.

One stage higher, esteem, prestige or ego needs involve feeling secure being loved by different groups. At the same time that individuals belong to social organizations, people search for respect, reputation, status, positive feedback, reaffirming the self-worth (Sack, Singh & DiPaolo, 2009) and recognition from others.

Finally, self-actualisation needs deal with “the desire of people to develop their talents and potential that are hidden in them in the society” (Aruma & Enwuvesi Hanachor, 2017, p. 22) so they become the best version of themselves. They are also related with personal development.

But now the following questions arise: where are sports included in this hierarchy? Which of the mentioned needs can be fulfilled through the sports practice? The truth is that sports are a cross-cutting phenomenon since they are related with several of these needs (Moreno Cuesta, 2012).

According to Moreno Cuesta (2012), starting from below, if sports are considered a means of improving physical health and an important factor to live longer or even for survival, physiological needs can be met through them.

Even more, sports can be also a source of security since they can be useful to disconnect from daily problems or even people who suffer from different conditions or problems can take advantage of their positive effects. It is important to contemplate that emotional and social stability, health and wellbeing (Pola, 2020) are also included in the kind of needs, and sports can be a source of achieving them.

In addition, the socialisation and integrative power of sports has been previously highlighted, and this is connected to the meet of affiliation or social needs. It also has to be, talking about team sports, to the feeling of belonging that helps the members to trust in others and to achieve a common goal.

One stage forward, to meet esteem, prestige or ego needs, individuals through the sports practice can achieve the recognition of themselves or others. Also, going back to the general benefits of sports, the value of respect is encouraged through the practice and this is also important to achieve this kind of needs.

Finally, regarding self-actualisation needs, through the sports practice some people may find a hidden talent or potential that can help them to develop personal skills that might be useful for multiple spheres of life.

It should not be passed away that needs are perceived, understood and expressed differently according to the diverse cultures (Illich, 2021). Considering this, if Maslow's Hierarchy is a great summary of all existing types of needs, it does not matter what the need is and how it is culturally understood, that sports can be a means for achieving them.

From another point of view, sports can be useful in the social work intervention with individuals, groups and communities because one of the main objectives that this discipline pursues is the establishment and maintenance of social networks (Campos Vidal, 1996), goal that shares with the sports practice through its socialising and integrative function (Serra, 2015).

What social work searches through the intervention is that individuals expand and strengthen their supportive networks. Even more, it is important that these networks foment the growth and positive integral development (Chaverra-Fernández, 2013) of the individuals, not coercing them (Campos Vidal, 1996), and the sports practice is a great opportunity to achieve these objectives.

6.2. Sports implementation in the eight models of intervention in social work

In this section, the explanation of how can sports be applied to each of the eight existing models of intervention will be included. All these models are useful for social workers in a way that they provide orientation while facing different kind of situations and problems. As the current society in which we are immersed is characterised by increasingly complex problems, there are several models that professionals can follow. Just as there is no single intervention tool since sports are just one of many, there is no single solution to all the problems the professionals have to face, and hence the different theoretical models emerge (Viscarret Garro, 2009).

To decide which model is more suitable for each situation, García & Melián (1993, p. 35, cited in Malagón Bernal, Barrera Algarín & Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, 2007) expose that the following questions have to be answered: to whom the professional intervention is dedicated? Which intervention techniques, tools and resources are going to be used and which plan is going to be followed? When is the plan going to start and end? Who is going to be the responsible of the implementation, control and evaluation of the plan?

In addition, to determine which intervention techniques and tools are more suitable, Trigueros Guardiola (1991, p. 36, cited in Malagón Bernal, Barrera Algarín & Sarasola Sánchez-Serrano, 2007) asserts that, among other aspects, the nature and purpose of the activity and the level of intervention must be taken into consideration.

There is a huge variety of classifications regarding models of intervention in the social work practice. However, in this section the classification of Viscarret Garro (2009) expanded in 2018, is going to be followed. The next step is to see the role of sports in each of these models.

6.2.1. Psychodynamic model

This model focuses on improving and facilitating the development of the individual's personality, which might have been hindered by different psychic or

traumatic conflicts. In this context, as sports foment the creation of the identity and personality, it might be an useful tool in the professional practice.

The psychodynamic model is also compounded by three different approaches:

First, the functional casework (Robinson, 1930, p.305, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) highlights that the personality is created through the relationship with others. Since those psychic disorders are caused by client's destructive relationships, social workers try to foment the creation of new constructive relations with themselves and others, and sports could be one of the tools used by the professionals due to their socialisation role and capacity of expanding and strengthening their supportive networks.

Then, the psychosocial approach (Woods & Hollis, 1964, p.306, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) can also take advantage of these two recently mentioned social benefits of sports since it is focused on the improvement of the individual's interpersonal relationships. In addition, Hamilton's theory of the importance of the interrelation between the individual and its situation (1968, p. 306, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) is confirmed through the sports practice because it helps social workers to find which elements of the person's environment are being harmful.

Third, the problem solving model (Harris, 1957, p. 306, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) is based on the idea that social workers support individuals in their current problems and try to facilitate some learnings in order to face future difficulties. As seen, sports help to this purpose since they provide individuals with abilities to cope with problems or overcome obstacles.

6.2.2. Behaviour modification model

This model advocates the idea that every behaviour is learned, and if the stimuli associated with a situation change, the behaviour can be modified. Because of this, if an individual starts practising sports in a new healthy environment, he or she can suppress or reduce negative behaviours and reinforce constructive actions that can be useful for other life spheres. For instance, potential for conflict

can be reduced in contrast with the improvement of teamwork. In this model the active participation of the client is crucial in order to discover new personal skills.

6.2.3. Crisis intervention model

According to this model, the intervention by the social worker focuses on supporting every individual, group or community who is going through a personal or life crisis, so they have the necessary abilities to face the situation. Indeed, through this support, the negative effects and damages are reduced and the possibility of growth and acquiring new skills and perspectives are increased. In this scenario, the promotion of sports is important in a way that they can help individuals to discover personal potentials such as, among others, leadership, which may be useful for future situations as well.

6.2.4. Task-centred model

This model is characterised because several tasks are used to face a problem under the motto of learning-by-doing. It also believes in the capacities and potentials of the individuals to solve their situations since the clients identify their target problem. Indeed, this implication fosters sacrifice and determination, skills encouraged as well by sports and their practical sense. Moreover, the effectiveness of this model has been demonstrated in, for example, decision making problems and sporting activities improve this ability in their practitioners.

6.2.5. Humanist/existentialist model

Humanist and existentialist social work, similarly as sports do, respects diversity, promotes cooperation, communication and community work and advocates liberty and freedom of choice. It comprises four approaches.

First, Carl Rogers (1969, p. 323, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009), with the client-centered approach, believes that individuals have capabilities to manage their lives but sometimes this capacity might be latent, hence social workers have a role in uncovering it enabling the individual's personal growth. In this context, the promotion of sports by the professionals may serve for this purpose.

Second, gestalt approach (Perls, 1951, p. 323, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) focuses on the integral development of the individual, aspect that shares with the sports practice.

Third, transactional analysis and social work (Berne, 1961, p.323, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) provides a basic training in communication, human needs, emotions or groups dynamics but it also provides reference patterns of self-observation and group experiences that open new perspectives for the improvement of communication and problem solving. With this premise, it is clear that sports can be a tool to attain all these objectives.

Eventually, in the existentialist approach (Krill, 1978, p. 324, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009), the social worker stimulates individuals to search for new life expectations and options, and sports can be a practice that leads this way through all their benefits.

6.2.6. Critical/ radical model

In this model, social work is committed to a liberating intervention based on the premise that change is to be found in the people themselves, who have to face structural inequalities and oppressive structures. In this context, it has been stated the power of sports fighting against gender or class discrimination.

6.2.7. Case management model

As mentioned, it is difficult just to work with one individual since there is a huge interdependence between human beings. Indeed, respecting the self-

determination and the decision of the individuals, professionals seek, for example, the expansion of their social networks. In this context, sports foment an exchange space that enables this purpose. Moreover, in this model, the case manager is responsible for supporting individuals to make choices about services and resources, and among others, encouraging the participation in sporting activities is a great source of social benefits.

6.2.8. Systemic model

The key idea is that systemic social works focuses on the importance of social interactions to explain the complex conditions that individuals go through since every situation cannot be understood on an individual basis but in a multicausal manner. In this context, two of the main purposes of systemic social work intervention are improving people's communication and developing problem solving abilities, objectives that share with the sports practice. In addition, the ecological approach of this model (Germain y Gitterman, 1980, p. 339, cited in Viscarret Garro, 2009) seeks to explore and empower individual's capacities and improve the interrelation with their environments, objectives that can be achieved using sports as one of the potential tools.

7. Conclusions, discussion of findings and future work

Throughout the present paper, the connection between sports and social work has been explored and demonstrated using their commonalities. As a result, and taking into consideration the main objectives that were initially established, the following conclusions can be underlined:

Sports can be used as a tool for intervention, framed in the social work method. The implementation of sports generates important changes in a huge variety of situations trough the promotion of several social values, some of which are shared with the social work discipline such as inclusion, welfare and equity. In

addition, they both advocate the formation of positive values and pursue the harmonious development of individuals.

Moreover, sports have been historically linked to human existence, until becoming nowadays a phenomenon that improves the quality of life and the wellbeing through its physical, psychological and social benefits. Furthermore, sports are a sociocultural and educational phenomenon that evolve the same way as the society does and it is connected to mostly all spheres of social life. Having this in common with social work, it can be observed through the orientations, social functions and social theories. Besides, sports can encourage positive values in people with different circumstances, characteristics and backgrounds.

As well as social work does, sports foster the construction of relationships, strengthening identities and encouraging the development of social and personal skills in order to deal with different life situations. Additionally, those can be used in the three levels of social work intervention. Considering that humans are inherently social beings, the implementation of sports in individual, group and community social work is not possible in the practice. Because of this, the analysis of human needs and the importance of social networking is important. Finally, considering theoretical foundations of each model of intervention, sports advocate such variety of social values that the implementation of this phenomenon is possible in every model.

However, this paper also presents some limitations and sources of future academic work:

First, it does not sufficiently contemplate the negative or oppressive side of sports. Sometimes they can be used as political instruments, following competitive, economic and commercial interests.

Second, this paper always refers to the term “sports” in general. Nevertheless, not all types of sports have the same benefits or advocate the same values.

Third, sports are just one of the many possible tools that can be used in the social intervention. Not everybody likes sports and not everyone has a satisfactory experience through the practice.

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