



ANALYSIS OF INNOVATIVE POLICIES PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES

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ABSTRACT

Social policy in individual countries of the European Union is primarily governed by the national governments of each member state. Throughout the process of integration, the social dimension of the EU has gradually developed through social instruments. These include legislative acts, subsidies, and mechanisms for coordinating and monitoring innovative national policies. The European Union promotes the exchange of experiences among member states concerning their social policies.

The present study aims to analyze innovations in the implementation of national and European strategies and initiatives aimed at improving physical activity levels and access to sports for all citizens across these nations. Content analysis of documentary sources identifies key policies in the management of physical activity and sports for all at national and international levels. Actions and trends regarding the innovative implementation policies have been examined based on specific indicators relevant to the respective countries, utilizing a Case study approach.

The results obtained indicate that many countries implement successful strategies to promote physical activity, which include public education campaigns, funding programs for sports initiatives, and other programs for various age and social groups.

Conclusion: The integration of physical activity into national policies and strategies leads numerous benefits for a country, including improved public health, social cohesion, economic growth, and national pride.

Keywords: Management, policy, sport, European countries

INTRODUCTION

Sport is an integral part of European Union (EU) policy. The variety of approaches applied to the development and management of sport for all and physical activity in different countries reflects their specific objectives, structures, values and national identities. Social policy in individual countries is primarily managed by the national governments of each member state (1). In the process of integration, the social dimension of the EU is gradually evolving, through multiple social instruments (2). These include legislation, subsidies, and mechanisms to coordinate and monitor innovative national policies. The European Union promotes the exchange of experiences between countries, focusing on their social policies, which requires a strong commitment and investment of the member states (3).

Investing in sport for all provides the impetus for countries to strengthen their global influence and promote a positive perception of their country and national identity (4).

Developing sport for all and achieving the social benefits of physical activity are essential to building a healthy nation (5). Sport for all policies contribute to addressing important social issues for particular socio-demographic groups (6). There is a need for states to focus on the overall well-being of society (physical, mental and social). This is a priority that should be followed when designing policies, strategies, programs and projects related to physical activity (7). The effective governance of different countries is determined by the parameters of a healthy and active population (8).

Incorporating sport for all into national policies and strategies can lead to a range of benefits for a country, including improved public health,

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social cohesion, economic growth and national pride.

Some key organisations responsible for enforcing “modern” sport for all policies and creating global strategies for healthy lifestyles could be identified. These are both at the supranational level, such as international organisations (United Nations (UN), International Red Cross/ Red Crescent, World Health Organisation (WHO), International Olympic Committee (IOC), European Commission, Council of Europe, UNICEF, etc.) and at the national level, such as national governments, NGOs and other state and community institutions (9). All of them have focused their efforts on promoting healthy lifestyles for the public through physical activity. It is important to note, however, that the work in these organisations is not limited to setting recommendations and guidelines. Both globally and locally, they work purposefully to inform the public, encourage behavioural and lifestyle change, and provide easy access to sport and physical activity for all (10-12).

In Europe, a number of innovative concepts, programs, campaigns and initiatives are being promoted on that highlight the importance of systematic physical activity for the health of society and the opportunity to lead an active lifestyle. These are relevant to the physical activity of the population as well as the mental health benefits, stress reduction and improvement of the overall well-being of the individual. Examples of some of the most successful and well-established European programs include: the WHO and EC's European Framework for the Promotion of Physical Activity (2020-2030); the European Health Program (2021-2027); Erasmus+ (offers opportunities for exchange of experiences between universities, schools, sports clubs and other organisations working in the field of physical activity and sport). The World Health Organization has adopted a Work Plan for Physical Activity (2018-2030) as well as for the prevention and control of NCDs developed for member countries. Many have adopted their own national programs, including initiatives to promote physical activity in schools, workplaces and everyday life.

METHODS

This study aims to analyse innovations in the implementation of national and European strategies and initiatives aimed at improving

physical activity and access to sport by all citizens in countries.

Innovative policies implemented at the national and local level to promote physical activity in the European Union member states are explored through the analysis of literature and documentary sources, including scientific publications (including online publications), legal and regulatory documents, strategies, programs, reports and decisions of state and public structures and organisations in the field of sport. An in-depth content analysis of specific texts defining principled policies in the governance of sport for all, both at national level and internationally, is conducted.

Good practices and initiatives implemented in different European countries are explored through the Case study method. A detailed study of the actions and trends of enforced policies in sport for all has been carried out according to individual specific indicators in the respective country where they are implemented. Based on this, conclusions have been formulated which represent strategic guidelines for the integration of physical activity in the different countries.

RESULTS

The analysis of the imposed policies for the development and management of sport for all in the EU is built on the following two-pronged methodology.

The first covers the recommendations for action formulated by the European Commission for individual countries, which are used to analyse the policies imposed for the development and management of sport for all, with the aim of improving the health and physical activity of the nation in the following areas: health, sport, education, transport, monitoring, guidelines.

The second strand examines the good practices of different EU countries in the management of sport for all, based on the following main principles: policies and programs documents; cooperation; target groups; good practices.

The European Union imposes a common international framework in line with European Union (EU) policies for each Member State. International frameworks for sport and physical activity influence the design and implementation of sport for all as a public

policy in different European countries. Alongside this, however, countries can integrate EU guidelines and recommendations into their national policies, but it would be difficult to generalise which ones are leading the way in enforcing successful ones, as each country has focused its efforts on different aspects.

Governance in the Nordic countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland has been pointed to as being entirely socially oriented governance, with high social standards. Germany is also a country with a widespread social culture and significant investment in sport for all. Other countries such as the Netherlands and France, for example, have a mixed governance model in which the role of the state is partial, based on both social and market policy principles.

Such studies and the identification of key differences and similarities in governance enable countries to be informed, to know good practices, to adapt them to their strategies according to specificities and to cooperate in order to make sport for all policy effective in Europe.

As a result of the analysis, many countries are implementing successful strategies to promote physical activity, which include:

- Digital platforms for social interaction (mobile apps).
- Public education campaigns.
- Funding programs for sport initiatives.
- Programs adapted to the needs of different age and social groups.
- Urban infrastructure.
- Corporate programs.
- Sports and cultural festivals.

On the basis of these key aspects, good practices in sport governance could be derived for the EU member states.

European views on the implementation of sport for all policies aim at realising a common goal for each Member State. Countries in Europe seek to promote physical activity and participation in sport. However, there are key differences in the implementation, focus and outcomes of these initiatives across countries in the European Union (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Good practices for promoting physical activity and sport for all in European countries.

GOOD PRACTICES		
Countries	Initiatives	Description
Germany	IN FORM	Program "Germany - IN FORM" since 2008. More than 200 projects in schools, offices and communities are involved, combining sport and healthy eating (13). The program is aimed at children: exercise in between and during class. Workers: office yoga, standing desks, short breaks. Adults: walking and balance groups.
Sweden	Corporate sport events	Sweden gives an annual amount under the program that employees can use for sports, fitness, swimming, etc. Corporate sports events are organised. There are flexible breaks, and working hours are tailored to physical activity. They have their own gyms, sports clubs, health and activity mentors (14).
	EUPAP	Project European Physical Activity on Prescription is a Swedish model for physical activity on prescription (PAP-S), (15).
Austria	Austrian Day of Sports, ("Tag des Sports")	Annual Austrian Day of Sport. In 2014, a record number of 500,000 participants was registered at a central location in Vienna (Heldenplatz). Various demonstrations take place on several stages and there are autograph sessions by prominent elite athletes. More than 150 sports-related stands have been set up, showcasing sports, equipment and accessories that visitors can take advantage of. A new trend in sports is so-called "street sports" (16).
Belgium	"Sport beweegt je school"	The "Sport moves your school" program which aims at health-enhancing physical activity and the prevention of sedentary lifestyles.

		Under this initiative, streets near educational institutions are closed and inaccessible to motor vehicles at the beginning and end of the school day for a set period of time, usually half an hour. Only pedestrians, people on bicycles and e-bikes, the so-called speed pedelecs, have access (17).
Denmark	“Sammen I bevægelse”	Project “Moving Together”. Schools across the country participate in the project through various initiatives in which school classes count the kilometres they have travelled. A project in which Denmark's largest electronic media agency disseminates information on health status, health-related risk factors and prevention of unhealthy lifestyles on radio, television and the internet (18).
Luxembourg	National day GIMB	A national platform for the exchange of knowledge and good practices on healthy lifestyles is being established. This is a traditional event under the motto “Expand your thinking by networking” (19).
Portugal	Fit@work	A campaign aimed at preventing illness in the work environment through the distribution of videos, posters and leaflets containing exercise at work (20).
Slovenia	“My SLOfit app”	Lifelong fitness monitoring system. A national monitoring tool to improve the physical fitness of Slovenian students (21).
France	Pass'Sports	Is a 15-hour voucher that gives a discount on the price of a sports club membership and licence, which can be downloaded electronically from the Department of Sport website (22).

Identifying key programs and initiatives enable countries to be informed, know best practices and adapt them to their strategies. Depending on the specificities and identities of the countries, they could collaborate in order to effectively implement sport for all policies in Europe.

Figure 1 presents aspects reflecting the model for integrating physical activity in individual countries, through improving the governance of sport for all by stable governments and their collaboration with key stakeholders.

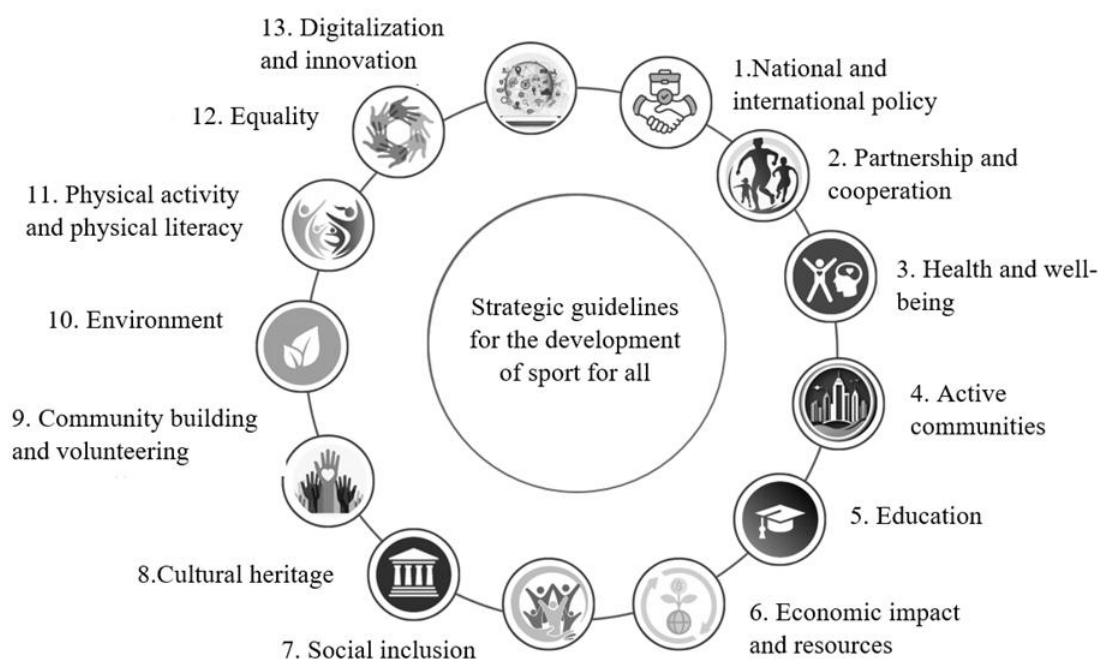


Figure 1. Strategic guidelines for the development of sport for all in EU countries.

Sport for All is a strategic tool for social, economic and cultural development aimed at enhancing public health, inclusion and sustainability. Good governance and effective national and supranational policies ensure equitable access to physical activity and sport. Partnerships between institutions, municipalities and civil society organisations are crucial for building an active and united society. Sport promotes healthy lifestyles, supports education, develops physical literacy and social skills, while creating economic benefits and volunteering opportunities. It is important to preserve cultural heritage through traditional sports and to ensure environmental protection through sustainable sporting practices. Digitalisation and innovation create new conditions for participation, making sport more accessible and engaging for all target groups. Underpinning the concept is the idea of equity, social inclusion and accessibility to physical activity as a right for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating physical activity into national policies and strategies leads to a range of benefits for a country, including improved public health, social cohesion, economic growth and national pride.

The proposed guidelines in the context of coordination of government bodies, through common work with organisations and structures, are a prerequisite for achieving the development of sport for all and physical activity, promoting widespread participation in physical activity and the associated health, social and economic benefits.

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ILIEVA D.

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