The role of sports activity for the formative development of disabled people

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Abstract. Motor activity has become one of the most significant social phenomena, allowing making abandon the idea of agonistic sports practice in favor of a concept of physical, educational and psychic well-being. The educational value that motor and sports activity has assumed inevitably involves the respect of the different life phases of the human being, and of the diversity of the subjects who practice it. Therefore, motor and sports activity plays a fundamental role in the life of all people, becoming an opportunity for growth regardless of personal and social conditions. In this regard, the main objective of this research work is to analyze the benefits that sport is able to generate, especially for educational growth and the constant formation of disabled people.

Key words: motor and sports activities, educational dimension, disability, formative development.

Introduction
Practice of the motor and sports activity has now become a constant for many individuals, although unfortunately sedentary people still exist. However, surely the motor and sports sciences, even if not directly, have entered different contexts of people's daily lives. Consequently, recognizing the educational importance that sport has assumed over time has become necessary, thus turning it into a component of fundamental importance (and no longer marginalized) in multiple social interaction contexts. So, it is important to encourage everyone to approach any form of sports training in a playful or competitive way (1-4).

In fact, the objective of the paper is to highlight the importance of sport for the disabled people, especially in school age. The process of inclusion of people with disabilities in Italy and the acknowledgment of its “diverse” potentialities, resources and skills has required a very long path of socio-cultural transformations. Although the succession of laws has determined the transition from institutionalization of people with disabilities to their inclusion at school, for a long time in Italy, it has legally supported the existence of differential classes, neglecting the right to integration in school and society, and the real needs of integration of people with disabilities.

This has led to an analysis of how the management of disability may need sport as an instrument suitable to the pursuit of a social benefit sustainable over time. Sports for the disabled, in addition to contributing to a better employment and a possible improvement in motor skills, contributes to the development of all dimensions of personality by promoting active and alternative learning processes.

Agonistic and amateur sports and motor activity facilitates the integration and acquisition of personal autonomy in the disabled through the enrichment of physical, intellectual, and sensory perceptive experiences. Sport, in fact, is inclusive as it is not only a purely therapeutic factor, but whenever it becomes an opportunity for recognition of one's own identity potentialities within a group or community. It, in time, has become an increasingly important element in order to pursue the objective of social and school equality. At the same time, this activity can generate a series of both physical that psychological benefits for all disabled people.

Through this research work aims to highlight the importance that motor and sports activity has assumed over time in all contexts of everyday life and the benefits that can potentially be generated thanks to sports education for everyone.
Benefits of the motor and sport activity for all

Two thousand years ago, Hippocrates claimed the importance of motor activity and proper nutrition, a concept that has spread among young people only in the last 30 years, and which is still spreading today. It is essential that young people know the benefits that arise from practicing any sports activity, and that they consequently understand the importance of taking care of their own well-being (1, 2, 5-12):

- **Physical benefits**: A regular motor activity involves improved balance, agility, coordination, strengthened bone structures and increased muscle mass;
- **Social and psychic benefits**: The practice of any sport involves being in a group, and therefore becomes, consequently, an opportunity for peer comparison allowing gaining greater self-awareness, awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses, evaluating the ability to face successes and failures, collaborate with others and face possible obstacles.

What we have affirmed is of fundamental importance precisely because we are analyzing a particular phase of the human being's life that is adolescence. It can be defined as a period of growth, between the childhood and adulthood years, in which psychic and biological changes occur, also influenced by historical and socio-cultural factors, making clear the link and the importance that motor activity can cover while also considering the fact that the contexts in which these changes are even more evident are family, school and peers.

During the adolescent phase the young person is constantly caring about his own identity and his own body, from which the image that everyone has of himself arises, and it is precisely for the reasons listed above that motor activity can facilitate the search of oneself (7, 8, 13-18).

Therefore, motor activity assumes a real social value for young adolescents, both from the point of view of the identity creation and its social importance, and from that of the physical and intellectual skills development; for this reason, it needs to make the educational systems more attractive by exploiting sport as an educational tool to involve more young adolescents, in the formal education phase and during informal development; for this reason, it needs to make the educational systems more attractive by exploiting sport as an educational tool to involve more young adolescents, in the formal education phase and during informal learning (10-16).

Motor activity practice favors the birth of values such as self-discipline, self-esteem and working to achieve the pre-set objective. In a such a delicate period as the one faced by young adolescents, the identification of one's own abilities and limits easily happens thanks to sports practice, which helps overcome the difficulties that can be compared to other events occurring in different daily life contexts, thus favoring the acquisition of one's own autonomy. Furthermore, we must not forget the intrinsic values of motor activity such as the respect for others, fair play, solidarity, tolerance, acceptance and respect for diversity; aspects which, during adolescence, seem to almost completely disappear in the young subject, and that is why sports practice helps keep well in mind and apply these fundamental values during social life.

The fundamental conditions of the sport-disability report

The right to equal opportunities and equality of people with disabilities is always among the main issues dealt with by the United Nations and other international bodies. In 1981, the celebration of the "International year of disabled persons", promoted by the General Assembly, contributed to the spread of the "World Programmed action concerning disabled persons", is one of the first laws in the field of social inclusion. This document represents the first step in a regulatory path increasingly structured and oriented to the promotion of standards, the establishment of permanent working teams on disability and the design of specific plans of action aimed not only to raise awareness, inform and educate the international community on critical issues related to disabilities, but also to identify management tools and educational and training contexts useful for the acquisition and maintenance of physical and mental capabilities (19).

A further critical step in the desire to awareness raising and social inclusion of disability was the "United Nations Decade of Disabled Person" (1983-1992) that, through the experience gained during this period, resulted in the spread of the 1993 resolution called: "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities". This act, in fact, stressed that the states should have taken measures to raise awareness, in the whole social context, of people with disabilities, their rights, needs, potential and contribution. Moreover, every state should have had to ensure that the programs for public education and sport reflected, in every aspect, the principle of full participation and equality (19, 20).

In addition to the promotion of political initiatives, useful to the increase in the level of awareness on the rights of subjects with disabilities, there was a moral duty of the social community to enhance and support in every person, regardless of the different abilities, the confidence in their abilities.
This was done through the development of management and operational policies designed to ensure equal opportunities for everyone, especially in recreational and sports activities. In this regard, for any social context, it becomes fundamental to develop management decisions and operational actions that make places and infrastructure for sports activities accessible to disabled subjects. These decisions and actions should include an important support to the personnel in programs for sports activities, including education projects related to the development of inclusive didactics skills and methods to develop a level of knowledge and professionalism (20-23). In addition, sports organizations should be encouraged to develop opportunities for participation in sport also for the disabled. This sensitivity to motor activity included a new role of the sport, and sports practice represented an important stage of a slow path of psycho-pedagogical, philosophical and managerial revaluation of the possible corporeal and kinesthetic potentialities of the disabled (8).

The adaptation and communication-relationship function of the body in its different dynamic and static forms had already been highlighted within the international classifications of the World Health Organization, which had stressed its importance in the process of psycho-social growth and development process of the disabled, and its role in the processes of interaction with the social context (21). As a consequence, this social context should be able to allow for the expression and promotion of different abilities and the full integration by developing "environmental contexts" like those motor-corporeal ones by ensuring, on a preliminary basis, the elimination of structural barriers that can prevent both adapted educational paths and the practice of sport and physical activities. So sports may represent a valuable tool for social inclusion to the world of disability, by allowing for the effective participation of subjects with disabilities in training and integration paths characterized by specific procedures, tools and contexts (20, 21).

The relationship between disability and motor and sport sciences

Over time, motor activity has gained an educational value for any person, whether affected by disability or not, valid for any age and condition. The relationship between sport and the person cannot be taken for granted as it is easy to have any prejudices in "seeing and interpreting" the reality that surrounds us, which inevitably affects the way we act and behave.

What we have said is supported by some factors, such as (1-5, 24-29):

- giving importance only to sports activities carried out in a competitive way, which consequently keeps all other people away from the practice of a certain sports activity and inevitably generates repercussions both on the people themselves and also on the sport itself, excluding the disabled from the sports activity and associating them only to the idea of rehabilitation;
- the second factor, as already mentioned above, is the disability-pathology relationship, that is the idea of observing the disabled person exclusively from the point of view of his deficit, thus having an exclusively "charitable" idea of the pathology that alienates him from everyday reality, and associating disability to rehabilitation (and not to sport).

Over time, being motor activity also accessible to weaker social classes, it has shown all its potential, understood no longer exclusively from the physical point of view, but also and especially from the psychical, educational and social one.

It aims at offering a conception about itself as something that starts acting from what a person is able to do, stimulating the consideration that someone has about oneself and one's own existence to reach the satisfaction of one's own abilities, highlighting the educational factor (assumed over time) of the sports activity sport and including people with disabilities, thus showing the plurality of its forms.

Accepting the motor activity-disability relationship means no longer allowing only for a vision of sport that is purely competitive and based on economic interests, but it also means observing people affected by disabilities in a different way: it means seeing them no longer from the point of view of their weaknesses or deficits, but from that of their strengths (30-32).

A new bio-psycho-social vision of disability established by the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health), which introduced the concept of Special Normality and the idea of inclusion of people with disabilities (and no longer of their integration). This new way of living the world of disability is associated, in the sports context, with the concept of APA (Adapted Physical Activity); it includes all those sports activities designed for people with special needs, with the goal to enhance the subject's motor skills, and at the same time to improve his physical and mental health by exploiting all the positive aspects of motor activity (socialization, relationship, emotion, identity, autonomy), and it is precisely for this reason that it can also be practiced only for fun during free time (1, 6-12).
Despite the too many perplexities, the lack of facilities and the presence of architectural barriers limiting sports practice for people with disabilities, as previously mentioned, explains why disabled people want to be part of the sports world: they want to be like other people, they want to show they possess particular skills able to simplify even more the relationships with people defined as "normal".

### The positive educational effects of sport for the disabled

The importance of sports activity for people with disabilities is also noticeable in the ability to generate a series of physical, mental and social benefits. In fact, sports practice helps people with disabilities develop greater balance, useful when walking and to strengthen the muscle tissue by enabling them to handle tools more easily. Moreover, through the movement, disabled individuals improve their endurance, speed and strength, facilitate the decrease in heart rate and optimize respiratory rate. A disabled athlete will be able to move properly in space by acquiring and enhancing the spatial-temporal organization skills, and will reach a high level of voluntary motor autonomy (33).

In addition, on a psychological level, motor activity allows the disabled athlete to become more confident towards the things he does and towards himself, helping him restore confidence in his potentialities. The athlete is able to test his abilities and skills, his possibilities and limitations, thus acquiring greater self-knowledge (5, 34).

Through a running or a match the disabled learn to react to strain by going beyond and challenging his limits, trying not to surrender to the first difficulties he finds and emerge stronger than before. He experiences the value of a defeat, whether it concerns the outcome of the competition or it's as a bad individual performance, and learns to accept and overcome this difficult moment, reflecting it also in everyday life situations. Just like how fundamental it is to realize a defeat, it is essential, especially for athletes with mental disabilities, to enjoy the meaning of victory. These people, throughout their lives, have suffered continuing and heavy defeats; just think of the problems they have had at school, in friendship relationships, and in those sexual and affective ones. Sport can represent for them the main context in which to feel fulfilled and satisfied in order to achieve a goal and/or for having been part of a team (12, 13).

When we speak of the benefits of sports on the psychological conditions, we cannot ignore its effect on the state of inner tension. Sport is an occasion for relieving tension and aggressiveness which, if not relieved, may lead the subject to sudden and violent reactions against people or things. So, especially for people with mental disabilities, sport represents a new experience to address by themselves without the help of parents on whom they usually depend.

Through this experience they learn, little by little, to take care of themselves by developing a series of autonomies and independences that will be useful in everyday life, such as taking a shower, getting dressed, tying on shoes, remembering the days and hours of training (33, 34).

Finally, sports practiced is very important for subjects with disabilities as it allows them to integrate or reintegrate in a social context. By getting in touch with the outside world, a disabled athlete discovers a healthy collaboration, one that goes beyond personal gain, and enjoys human relationships. Within the sporting world, in fact, the established interactions are manifold and of different type; for example, the athlete comes into contact with his coach, his teammates, in the case of team sports, and with his opponents. This complex panorama of connections allows the subject to experience a wide range of feelings and emotions, to handle possible relational conflicts and learn to adapt the relationship to the persons with which he interacts. In the interpersonal relationships, the subjects are recognized goals and a specific role, thus enhancing the process personal identity building.

Special attention should be paid to the practice of team sports and the fruits that this activity could provide. To speak of team sports, it is critical to refer to the concept of group. The group can be defined as a non-random ensemble of people with shared values, needs and motivations, who are in a relationship of positive interdependence with each other in order to achieve a common purpose. Being in a positive interdependence means that each member of the group depends on one of his companions and, at the same time, constitutes a resource for him. For a person with disabilities, being part of a team is a huge satisfaction as it plays on his need to feel accepted and integrated in a social reality.

### Conclusions

Physical and sporting activity is often associated with the concept of improving the state of health, but in this work we focused attention on the importance of sport formation can also have in the social and educational dimension.
Furthermore, another aim of this work was to study the multiple benefit of the training also in relation to disabled subjects. The need to manage effectively and efficiently the critical issue of disability has always been one of the main social objectives on which the main educative organizations have focused more attention. In this scenario, a global awareness of how sports can be a valuable resource in order to achieve an improvement of the welfare of disabled persons was highlighted. In fact, there are many benefits that sports can bring to such persons from a social, physical and psychic viewpoint, like an optimal instrument able to promote simultaneously a social inclusion process, sustainable over time, and increased autonomy and self-esteem for people with disabilities.

References
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