

THE POSITION OF SPORTS WITHIN THE PUBLIC POLICY OF THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN LARGE CITIES - PREPARATION PHASE OF A CASE STUDY OF THE CAPITAL CITY OF PRAGUE

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The significant enforcing of the position of towns and municipalities and public policies realized in its territory by the local municipal authorities were a result of the integration of the Czech Republic into the European structures and the related reformation of the public administration. The approach of the local municipal authorities to the individual fields of public policy, thus sports as well, then significantly affects the environment and quality of life in the pertinent area.

This paper presents the preparation and introductory results of a research project focused on the approach of the local municipal authorities to sports in the territory of the capital city of Prague. The research is based on the content analysis of specialized documents, and the in depth interviews with the responsible employees of the authorities.

The preliminary findings outline the position of sports in public policies and its organizational, financial and personnel background within the organizational structures of the authorities. The results point out the different approaches of the local authorities to sports and the influence of financial limitations, stated priorities, and also personal preferences of the individual representatives.

Keywords: City, local authority, sport policy, public policy.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to the generally accepted opinion that sports is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, its role and contribution to the development of personality and the social consciousness of an individual is also being stressed more and more during the present period. An active lifestyle becomes, especially for the young generation, the most effective tool for the prevention of negative social phenomena, for example criminality, alcoholism or drug abuse. Sports is generally accepted not only as a factor influencing physical health, but also as a phenomenon which cultivates an individual on the spiritual, social and moral side (ÚV ČR, 2003).

Even though it is mainly an individual activity, it definitely takes place in a social context. Therefore, it must not lie outside the field of view of society and its specialized institutions, state administration and municipal organs, which should create conditions nurturing its development, encouraging it and making it easily accessible (Slepička, 2000). In the legal environment of the Czech Republic, this is confirmed by Act no. 115/2001 Coll. on Support for Sports, which sets the position of sports in the society as a community benefiting activity and orders the institutions of the state and local administration to support it. The competent organization of sports in the environment of large cities, in

particular, becomes important – settlements with more than 100,000 inhabitants, where children and youth are subjected to high risks which are brought about by the currently growing problems related to criminality, drug abuse and other negative social phenomena or to civilization illnesses such as child obesity (Collins, 2005; Schmeidler, 2000; Buriánek, 2001). All this is for its specifics, which are caused by the effects of urbanity factors such as density of population, type of housing construction, polarization of residential and working zones, but also by demographic factors including the number and composition of inhabitants, etc. (Horská et al., 2002). These specifics significantly influence social relationships inside the community, related to the elevated level of the mentioned risks on one side and urban limited possibilities of sporting activities on the other side. Another strong factor in the realm of large cities is also the constantly deeper and deeper diversification of the individual town parts concerning the social-economic composition of the inhabitants (Horská et al., 2002), which forces each local municipal administration to react to the specific local conditions and requirements, even in the field of sports, and find their own solutions maximizing the positive impact of sports on the community. The specific way of providing such support depends very much on the above mentioned institutions and their approach to public politics.

OBJECTIVES

Only recently, the Czech Republic went through a wave of important changes, such as entering the European Union and reforms of the public administration. These brought along, besides other factors, a significant reinforcement of the role of the municipal administration (Act no. 128/2000 Coll. on Municipalities, Act no. 129/2000 Coll. on Regions and consequential laws) on the regional and, mainly, municipal level. However, distribution of competencies in the sports field was not clearly specified legislatively, and neither did the long expected Act no. 115/2001 Coll. on Support for Sports clarify anything. Therefore, it depends on the individual regional and town or municipal authorities what approach they take regarding the concept of the support and development of sports. One must realize that the municipal authorities have become, even in the field of sports, one of the main elements of its support.

The object of our research is to find out whether the organs of the local administration are ready, with respect to their organization, finances and personnel, to undertake this responsibility and, after evaluating a specific situation in the area administrated by them, conceptually design and implement a specific policy in the field of sports and continuously adjust it according to the continuous results of the permanent evaluation of its impact on the quality of the life of the community being administered. This is not only an immediate measure of the municipality administration itself, but also its cooperation with the non profit sector, formed by civil associations, or with the commercial sector, formed by entrepreneurial units, offering services in the sports field.

Key objectives of this phase of research were to learn the approach of the individual town parts to the sports issue, identify the spectrum of the work agenda of the responsible employees and subsequently create a questionnaire for the next phase of research.

METHODS

After the introductory study of domestic and foreign specialized literature, available official records and documents, we proceeded to conduct semi structured interviews with selected employees of the municipal authorities of five randomly (by lot) selected parts of the capital city of Prague. The interviews were carried out with the employees who are, with their position, the closest to the sports field. Due to the different approach of the individual town parts to the support of sports, the respondents were both the employees who only handle sports as well as multi tasked employees. Most often they were heads of the education and cultural section, in which sports concerns are often included. These interviews took place during arranged meetings, in person,

at the workplace of the contacted persons. The goal of these interviews was to learn the approach of the individual town parts to the sports issue and to identify the spectrum of the work agenda of the responsible employees. The content of the interviews was up to the paradigm of the qualitative research gradually adjusted according to the previous interviews, which expanded the interviewer's knowledge of the relevant matter. The scope was from 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and, afterwards, in the form of a verbatim transcription and summarizing protocol, transferred into written electronic form.

Based on the evaluation of the data collected in the first phase of the research, i.e. data from the specialized literature, official records and documents as well as from the carried out interviews, we created a questionnaire which would serve to collect data from all the town parts of the capital city of Prague. The questions were chosen to completely cover the sports issues from the point of view of the municipal authorities and work agenda of its employees or elected representatives. The questionnaire was, with respect to the different approaches of the individual town parts, designed as semi structured, to cover the causes and nuances of the chosen approach to the sports field. The data collected in this way will clarify the position of sports within the public policies of the local municipal authority.

In order to verify the structure of this questionnaire, the chosen questions were discussed with a sample of relevant respondents. The five previously contacted employees as well as five employees from other town parts were contacted. All those experts were asked to respond to and provide comments as to the content and comprehensibility of the questions. Subsequent adjustments covered not only the formulation and content of some questions, but also their number, where some questions were completely removed and some new were added. The pertinence of these adjustments was then again verified with all previously interviewed employees. The evaluation of the adjusted questionnaire brought significantly more specific and complete information than its previous version. Also, the comments of the interviewed employees were positive. All those interviewed agreed on the comprehensibility and justness of the content of the questions. The respondents also expressed their feeling of gratification about the fact that the pertinent matter is being examined in this way.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Even the preliminary results of the pilot study imply that the individual municipal authorities in the pertinent town parts attach a different importance to sports and sporting activities. A difference is already visible in the managing of the sports and sporting activities

within the organizational structures of the municipal authority. Sports is either incorporated as a part of the education or cultural sections, where it often gets much lower attention compared to the main specialization of the section. It also happens that more separate sections are assigned to take care of sports, when it apparently causes insufficient mutual communication about the steps taken by the individual sections and consequent disinformation. The position of sports is much stronger in the town parts when the sports care is a part of the work agenda of the mayoral office and his/her assistants. During the pilot verification of the questionnaire, no separate department or section for sports was found.

There is almost no town part where a document outlining a concept or goals in the sports field exists. In several town parts, they take the statement of policy of the council of the town part as a directive document; however, it tends to be very general in the sports field. This consequently results in the approach to the individual fields of organization and support of sports.

Many town parts rely, probably too much, on the grant proceedings within which they support the activities of the sports organizations with activities within their territory. However, these grant proceedings are based on non uniform, and sometimes very controversial, selection criteria and, also, the following checks and evaluation of the spent means appears insufficient from either the theory of the public politics or from the management theory viewpoint. Also, in the field of organizing sporting events or the realization of social programs directly by the municipal authorities, we can see different approaches which are, along with the priorities of the local municipal authorities, also influenced by human factors.

In all of the contacted town parts, the major emphasis of importance is on the renovation of school facilities. However, the announced opening to the public in the afternoon or evening hours, to extend the possibilities of sports for the general public, often collides with the clearly commercial use of the facilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the fact that the approach of the individual town parts to the sports field is very different and there are often very original public policies in this field, it has not been definitely decided yet whether the created questionnaire will be distributed solely in a written form with an attached cover letter and instructions or whether the questionnaire will be to be filled in directly in the presence of an interviewer. In this case, the selected persons will first be sent the questionnaire and responses would be conveyed during the meeting directly to the interviewer who could immediately ask complementary questions if necessary.

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POZICE SPORTU V RÁMCI VEŘEJNÉ POLITIKY MÍSTNÍ SAMOSPRÁVY VE VELKÝCH MĚSTECH – PŘÍPRAVNÁ FÁZE PŘÍPADOVÉ STUDIE HLAVNÍHO MĚSTA PRAHY (Souhrn anglického textu)

Důsledkem integrace České republiky do evropských struktur a s ní spojené reformy veřejné správy bylo výrazné posílení pozice měst a obcí a veřejné politiky realizované na jejich územích místní samosprávou. Její přístup k jednotlivým oblastem veřejné politiky, tedy i sportu, pak následně výrazně ovlivňuje prostředí a kvalitu života v jimi spravované oblasti.

Příspěvek prezentuje přípravu a úvodní výsledky výzkumu zaměřeného na přístup místní samosprávy k oblasti sportu na území hlavního města Prahy. Výzkum je založen na obsahové analýze odborných dokumentů a hloubkových rozhovorech s odpovědnými pracovníky samosprávy.

Úvodní zjištění nastiňují pozici sportu v oblasti veřejné politiky a jeho organizačního, finančního a personálního zabezpečení v rámci organizačních struktur samosprávy. Výsledky poukazují na rozdílný přístup místní samosprávy k oblasti sportu a míru vlivu finančních omezení, sledovaných priorit, ale i osobních preferencí jednotlivých zastupitelů.

Klíčová slova: město, sportovní politika, samospráva, veřejná politika.

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