

EVALUATING SPORT PROJECTS WHICH PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: A CASE STUDY

Caterina Gozzoli, Chiara D'Angelo y Emanuela Confalonieri
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, Italy

ABSTRACT: This work presents the findings of a participatory research program evaluating the outcomes of an Italian sports program for minors at risk. Using a participatory evaluation approach enabled an evaluation-research close to the real objectives and useful for monitoring and re-planning actions, starting from an initial exploration of the different stakeholders' views of the project itself. The research design is presented in the form of a case study, emphasizing the continuous involvement of the project's stakeholders in the evaluation process. The outcomes here presented make evident how the participatory evaluation project allowed a targeted and ongoing monitoring at group level as well as at individual level with the minors involved in the project.

KEYWORDS: sport programs; young people; participatory evaluation; case study

Dirección de contacto: Caterina Gozzoli. Psychology Department, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. Largo Gemelli n. 1. 20123 Milano, Italy.
Correo-e.: caterina.gozzoli@unicatt.it

LA EVALUACIÓN DE PROYECTOS DEPORTIVOS QUE PROMUEVAN LA INCLUSIÓN SOCIAL DE LOS JÓVENES: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO

RESUMEN: Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un programa de investigación participativa para la evaluación de un programa deportivo italiano para niños en situación de riesgo. Utilizando un enfoque de evaluación participativa hemos desarrollado una investigación cerca de los objetivos reales y útiles para el monitoreo y las acciones de replanificación, a partir de una exploración inicial de las opiniones de los diferentes grupos de interés del proyecto en sí mismo. El diseño de la investigación se presenta en la forma de un estudio de caso, haciendo hincapié en la participación continua de las partes interesadas del proyecto en el proceso de evaluación. Los resultados aquí presentados ponen en evidencia cómo el proyecto de evaluación participativa permite un seguimiento específico y permanente a nivel de grupo como a nivel individual con los menores involucrados en el programa deportivo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: programas deportivos, jóvenes, evaluación participativa, estudio de caso

A AVALIAÇÃO DOS PROJETOS ESPORTIVOS QUE PROMOVAM A INCLUSÃO SOCIAL DOS JOVENS: UM ESTUDO DE CASO

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta os resultados dum programa de pesquisa participativa. O objetivo é avaliar um programa italiano do desporto para crianças em risco. Este programa usa uma abordagem participativa para a pesquisa da avaliação sobre o desenvolvimento dum indicador útil para monitorar o programa para desenvolver novas acções. Começa a partir duma exploração inicial dos pontos de vista dos diferentes actores envolvidos no projeto. O projeto de pesquisa é apresentada na forma dum estudo de caso, com o envolvimento contínuo das partes interessadas no projeto. Os resultados aqui apresentados ilustram como a avaliação do projeto participativo permite o monitoramento específico e permanente a nível de grupo e individual com as crianças envolvidas no programa do desporto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: programas desportivos, juventude estudo de caso da avaliação participativa

As highlighted in the proposal of this monograph, the value of sport as a tool for social revitalization and community network development has become more recognized on an international level. Numerous projects and initiatives use sport to intervene in risky and fraught social situations. The declared goals of these programs include promoting wellness, improving quality of life, and providing social integration and inclusion for participants (minors, individuals with disabilities, and disadvantaged populations). Additionally, in the literature, some authors (Danish, 2002; Hellison, 2003; Hellison & Martinek, 2006; Ruiz, Rodríguez, Martinek, Schilling, Durán & Jiménez, 2006) propose and analyze intervention sports programs for at-risk youth. Given the scope of these ambitious undertakings, we note a remarkable lack of attention to evaluating such projects. As some authors have highlighted (Collins & Kay, 2003; Moreno, Vera & Cervelló, 2006; Gómez, Puig & Maza, 2009), a lack of attention to outcomes and efficacy evaluation could lead to the failure of various sport projects, risking the huge investments and the efforts put into developing these programs.

For this reason, we aim to contribute to this field with the evaluation of a participatory research program through the analysis of the outcomes of an Italian sports program for at-risk minors. Detailed evaluations of these sport projects are necessary in order to redesign the programs according to a more efficient structure.

Participatory evaluation: a definition

We define evaluation as an activity of critical thought during any phase of a project that identifies indicators and tools that show the effects and methods of the project. This definition of evaluation is not the only one in the literature, nor it is the predominant one. Guba and Lincoln (1989) illustrate how the definition of evaluation has gone through three major iterations, and a fourth one is evolving which revises the basic values of evaluation and hypothesizes a changing role for the evaluator. The first iteration developed in the 1920s and saw evaluation only as the technical review of measurements. The second iteration, which originated during the American New Deal of 1930s, was characterized by highlighting the discrepancy levels between the ideal program and the actual one, emphasizing its strengths and weaknesses. The third iteration maintained the technical and descriptive functions of the previous descriptions and added the dimension of the evaluator's discretion.

The fourth-generation iteration is emerging from the development of the responsive evaluation model, in which declarations, worries, and stakeholders' issues work as organizational points in the co-construction of the evaluative process. This definition of evaluation is characterized by some guiding principles:

- a) *Value pluralism among the parts:* The goals of an evaluation should be formulated after an agreement among the parts.

- b) *Building stakeholders:* Because reality is a social construction (Berger and Luckman, 1966), fourth-generation evaluation involves the participants and recognizes that the evaluator is an actor in a reality-building project.
- c) *A negotiation and collaborative process:* Judgments can be obtained only through negotiation, which is based on collaboration and results from stakeholders' inclusion in the evaluation process itself. This inclusion is a continuous and profitable cooperation between evaluators and stakeholders.
- d) *An emerging project with unexpected outcomes:* Evaluation is viewed as an evolutionary process. An evaluation can be defined in advance but changes as it is actually conducted.

Moving toward a fourth-generation definition of evaluation, some authors (De Ambrogio, 2000; Bezzi, 2001) describe how evaluation acquires the functions of a learning process to increase the performance and quality of service of the program being studied. In this view, evaluation often serves to improve the professional practice of working groups, a sort of learning process which involves both service suppliers and stakeholders. Thus, evaluation becomes a research activity with the main goal of activating knowledge and thought on a project's processes and outcomes in order to improve its functioning (Coalter, 2002).

Recent literature (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Cousins, 2003; Cousins & Chouinard, 2012) defines this approach as participatory evaluation. More an approach than a method or a tool, this style of evaluation aims to involve the project's actors in building meaning and redefining the project itself in light of the work by evaluators or their staff. Such an approach draws upon Freire's (1982) conception of participatory research as a learning process based on the three-stage listening-dialogue-action approach (McTaggart, 1991). Similar to the definition of participatory action research (PAR) given by McTaggart (1997), participatory evaluation can be defined as the "educational process through which social groups produce action-oriented knowledge about their reality, clarify and articulate their norms and values, and reach a consensus about further action" (Brunner & Guzman, 1989, p.11).

The principle which guided us in the design and development of this evaluation research project was to maximize the actors' proximity to and involvement in the project from the start. We projected an evaluation design close to the real project objectives and useful for monitoring and re-planning action, starting from an initial exploration of the different stakeholders' views of the project itself. In this view, the participation of the stakeholders was a process activated in the data collecting phase and, above all, in analysis and interpretation, following the assumption that an evaluation makes a difference most effectively when it is close to working processes and influences changes, giving rise to more efficient professional practices. In the

following paragraph, the case study considered within the article is presented. A specific focus is made on the modalities through which the donor was fully involved in the evaluating process from the beginning.

The case study: evaluation of a sport program for at-risk children

The evaluation project presented here was developed by an international foundation which operates in Italy and promotes the social value of sport. Specifically, the object of the project is organized free sports activities, primarily soccer, volleyball, and basketball, for children between 6 and 18 years old aimed at promoting wellness and preventing at-risk behaviors. Participating minors are youth living in suburbs or poor districts of large Italian cities who have troubled family situations (poverty, single-parent units, or immigrant families). The majority of the youth are already involved in projects of secondary prevention promoted by the third-sector parties (afternoon activities or daylong assistance) which promote wellness and participation in positive social networks. This program is designed around the belief that sport can offer children a richer network and more positive growth experiences and models than those easily accessible in urban settings such as the suburbs of large cities.

This sports program project was established in 2007 and underwent a two-year phase of development which saw the construction of a team of specialized staff (coaches, educators, and psychologists) and the creation of a network of schools and third-sector bodies which already take care of at-risk children and cooperate with sport clubs. After this first experimental phase, the organizers requested that external consultants evaluate the resistance and efficacy of the project model as developed.

The first, crucial step of our work was to gather different views of what sports are, what the purpose of the project is, and how well it performs from the actors in play: 2 project managers, 6 coaches, 4 psychologists, and 4 educators. The research staff conducted 5 interviews (2 with the project managers, 1 with each coach, 1 with each psychologist, and 1 with each educator) and 3 focus groups with professionals involved in the project. During this process, key issues for the research project arose:

- a) The managers' conception of sport as a good activity in and of itself, which strongly agrees with the general purpose of the foundation to promote "wellness and social inclusion among the youth thorough sport practice."
- b) The conditions that allow sports practice to be a positive experience for youth is a matter of question for staff who work directly with the youth but not for managers.
- c) The evaluation by an external subject adopts management's assumption that a measuring process will determine if the project works correctly, with the goal of collecting more sponsorships.
- d) The evaluation by an external subject inherently injects the evaluators' views of control and evaluation of their work, which can result in a professional crisis.

This first phase of collecting views of the program, the evaluation and the object of work (sports) led to a planning phase to clarify the macro-goal of the project and to break it down into specific operational aims. Starting a participatory evaluation process first entailed opening the declared macro-goal –sports to encourage the social inclusion of at-risk youth– for the different stakeholders to collectively build the meaning of social inclusion, starting with their thoughts on their actual work practices with the children. Between July and December 2009, the evaluation staff conducted a series of 3 meetings with two project managers and 14 staff members. After the meetings, the foundation's project team and the evaluation staff wrote a detailed document reflecting on how to hone specific goals for different age of children involved. An excerpt of this report follows in Table 1.

As evidenced by the examples quoted in Table 1, the indicators highlighted by project staff operate on an individual level (construction of a positive self-image, development of self-esteem, and learning basic physical skills) and on a group level (establishment of cohesive team groups). This phase of the project gave us better understanding of how the meaning that the staff assigned to the project's declared goal of social inclusion would function within the ideas of simultaneous individual wellness support and socialization in the peer groups. Staff members' idea of this inclusive process missed the dimension of opening and involving a larger social network (families, schools, and referral bodies), which was also not addressed by their professional practices.

This finding led us to move the evaluation project in two directions:

- a) Creating an evaluation research framework in response to project goals highlighted by the operators who work in the field with minors. The framework also keeps both the individual and group levels in consideration and, at least, initially avoids the social network dimension.
- b) Leading the foundation management to realize that, in addition to the declared goal of social inclusion through sports practice, the project was missing a basic piece: the involvement of the children's existing social network.

Moreover, this initial work debunked misconceptions about the threatening evaluator and creating the understanding that an evaluation close to the actual work processes from the start could both review the progress made the children and offer an opportunity to examine actual practices and think about possible interventions.

Table 1

Co-construction of program's specific goals for different ages

Splitting the four groups into four reference groups, we can hypothesize the following working goals:

6-8 years old:

- ✓ Development of basic physical skills, particularly coordination
- ✓ Development of a positive self-image, expressed in fluid bodily movement and good composure
- ✓ Development of control of space and time

9-10 years old:

- ✓ Further development of the 6-8-year-old goals
- ✓ Acquisition of technical sports abilities
- ✓ Development of team-playing and cooperative skills

11-14 years old:

- ✓ Increase self-esteem through achieving more mastery of sports skills,
- ✓ Assume individual responsibilities above and beyond group responsibilities
- ✓ Creation of teams capable of participating in matches

15-18 years old:

- ✓ Consolidation of the earlier goals
- ✓ Work on managing anxiety and aggressiveness from a performance viewpoint
- ✓ Work on decision-making abilities and support teens' choices in team-group dynamics

METHOD

Given the redefined goals for the different ages and in agreement with the foundation, we planned an 18-month-long longitudinal research project involving 62 at-risk minors (January 2010- June 2011). Four practice teams of heterogeneous ages and sports were identified as representative of the 200 children involved in the program: a soccer team of 17 males, a mini-volleyball team of 16 females, an under-14 volley team of 15 females, and a junior basketball team of 14 males.

The participants to the research project are divided according to their teams, ages and gender as indicated within the Graph 1, Tables 2 and 3 presented below.

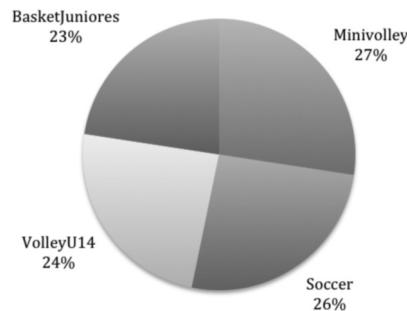


Figure 1. Teams-based classification

Table 2
Gender-based classification

		TEAM				Tot. %
		MiniVolley	Soccer	VolleyU14	Basket Juniores	
SEX	male		15	3	14	51.6
	female	17	1	12		48.4
	Tot.	17	16	15	14	

Table 3
Age-based classification

		TEAM			
		MiniVolley	Soccer	VolleyU14	Basket Juniores
AGE	mean	9.2	10.1	12.4	15.7
	SD	0.6	0.5	0.9	1.12

A majority of the 62 children involved in the research had Italian nationality (36, or 59%), while the rest had foreign nationality, with a prevalence of Asian (18%) and Maghrebi (13%) descent. Of the children of non-Italian descent, 69% were second-generation immigrants (born in Italy), while 31% (19) were first generation immigrants.

For each group, we identified specific indicators, including the goals formulated in the previous stage. Each indicator was monitored with both quantitative and qualitative tools. We detail the evaluation scheme in Table 4.

Table 4

Evaluation program: goals and specific tools

TEAMS	SPECIFIC GOALS	INDICATORS AND RESEARCH TOOLS
Soccer and Mini-volleyball	1. Monitoring the evolution of self-perception	<p><i>1. SELF-ESTEEM</i> Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Italian trans. Prezza, Trombaccia, Armento, 1997)</p> <p>This questionnaire is composed of 10 items in which the subjects are asked to indicate their agreement on a 4-step Likert scale. From the answers to the 10 items, we can measure self-esteem broadly as the degree to which people like and accept themselves, including their flaws. In addition to the broad definition of self-esteem, we can measure two other dimensions: self-criticism (items 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), or the ability to criticize oneself and defend oneself from others' criticisms, and self-recognition (items 1, 2, 4), or the ability to show off.</p> <p><i>2. PERCEPRION OF ONE'S BODY</i> Drawing me (Witkin, 1962; Italian version in Confalonieri, 2011)</p> <p>This tool was created by Witkin and later modified for use with younger age groups. It can be used with pre-adolescents and teenagers, and its code-grade has been validated for this age. The tool asks participants to provide a graphic self-representation:</p> <p>"I ask you to draw yourself as you would introduce yourself to a person who does not know you but is interested in you. You are free to represent yourself in the most appropriate way, concentrating on communicating your dominant characteristics to another person."</p> <p>The code-grade is composed of three scales, each with three sub-scales. The Formal Level scale measures the accuracy and similarity of the drawing to the actual human figure. This scale's three dimensions are: shape (how much the shape in the drawing resembles the actual human figure); integration (how much the body parts are integrated among themselves); and proportions (how proportionate the figure is).</p> <p>The second scale, Details, measures the number of details in the drawn figure. The three dimensions of this scale are body details (how many body elements are present); facial details (how many facial details are present); and clothing details (how detailed the representation of clothing is).</p> <p>The Sexual Characterization Level scale measures the presence or absence of bodily secondary sex characteristics and gendered clothing. This scale's three dimensions are bodily sexual characteristics (details of sexually identifying, secondary physical characteristics); facial sexual characteristics (details of facial characteristics specific to a single sex); clothing sexual characteristics (details of clothing specific to a single sex).</p>

TEAMS	SPECIFIC GOALS	INDICATORS AND RESEARCH TOOLS
Soccer and Mini-volleyball	2. Monitoring the change of group team perception as an indicator of socialization	<p>3. TEAM CLIMATE The team climate (by Gruère e Stern, 1982 and adapted to a sport team) tool is composed of 16 items related to team behavior toward individual players. Athletes are asked to evaluate the frequency of behaviors directed toward them on a scale from 1 to 6. We obtained measures of four dimensions of a team climate: authenticity, comprehension, esteem, and acceptance.</p> <p>4. PERCEPTION OF ONE'S TEAM Drawing "my team" Built ad-hoc, this tool investigates individuals' representations of their team group. For qualitative analysis, we identified 8 indicators: present people, present adults, individual-level representation of depicted subjects, depicted objects, context, presence of symbolic elements, and depictions of subjects engaged in an activity.</p>
Under-14 volleyball and junior basketball	1. Monitoring the evolution of self-perception focusing on bodily physical dimension (as seen in the pubertal development stage)	<p>1. SELF-ESTEEM Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965; Italian trans.: Prezza, Trombaccia, Armento, 1997)</p> <p>2. PERCEPRION OF ONE'S BODY Drawing me (Witkin, 1962; Italian version Confalonieri, 2011)</p> <p>3. BODY IMAGE Body esteem scale (BES) (Mendelson, Mendelson, White, 2001; Italian trans.: Confalonieri et al., 2008) This scale measures levels of body image perception. It has been validated in the Italian language on a sample of adolescents and is tuned for this age. The scale is composed of 14 items, and the subjects are asked to indicate their level of agreement on a scale of 5 points (0=never; 1=seldom; 2=sometimes; 3=often; 4=always). The results are measured for 3 factors: Appearance (evaluates general perceptions of one's physical qualities); Attribution (measures beliefs about others' evaluation of one's physical qualities); Weight (measures people's satisfaction with their weight). High scores in any dimension indicate a high level of satisfaction of one's body or weight or positive perceptions of other people's view of one's physical qualities.</p>
	2. Monitoring the evolution of affiliation to the team group	<p>4. TEAM COHESION Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) (adapted by Widmeyer, Brawley & Carron, 1993) This questionnaire investigates group cohesion. It is composed of 18 items to which group members assign agreement on a scale from 1 to 9. It is based on individuals' perceptions of 4 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individual attraction to the social group — members' individual perceptions of their involvement in the team and social interaction within it ✓ Individual attraction to group tasks — members' individual perceptions of their involvement in performing their responsibilities to the group ✓ Group social integration — members' individual perceptions of the level to which the whole team is united and treats members similarly ✓ Group task integration — members' individual perceptions of the level to which the whole team is united in picking and achieving common tasks and goals <p>5. TEAM PERCEPTION Drawing "my team"</p>

For each group, the research tools were administered 3 times (February 2010, December 2010; May 2011). After each administration, the research staff collected data and summarized it in a report on the overall progress of the teams. These tools and reports were presented to and discussed with the foundation management. In addition, we wrote specific reports for each team group dealing with their overall progress and their singular situations. These reports were presented to and discussed with the representatives of any involved team (trainers, educators, psychologists). These meetings also covered the results for individual children from the questionnaires, including showing staff members the drawings the children made. Such meetings provided important opportunities to build meaning from data that emerged from the research tools and to translate that meaning into focused actions by staff members. Some staff, inspired by these intermediate meetings, drew up individual dossiers documenting the actions taken for each child during the study, further integrating the evaluation.

RESULTS

For explanatory purposes, we selected a case which shows how the research design resulted in detailed monitoring of the children's evolution during the project. This monitoring allowed the staff both to take actions designed to improve the efficacy of their intervention and to question and consider the logic and purpose of their professional practices (What do I do? How do I do it? Why do I do it?).

Outcomes of the evaluation research: the case of Sonia

Sonia (fictitious name) is a 12-year-old Italian girl and the youngest of three siblings. Sonia lives with her parents, but her family situation is critical because of hard economic and social conditions. Social services has kept track of her family for several years and are helping the whole family unit. Sonia has been part of the under-14 volleyball team since October 2010, and we followed her development during the 2010-11 season when she participated in training twice a week. During the season, the team was composed of girls, most in their first year of participation, so it did not take part in any competitions.

On the measurements of self-esteem gathered in December 2010 and May 2011, Sonia, along with the whole team, obtained values equal to or higher than the average for school-aged Italian subjects (29.49 value –the red line in the Figure 2). As clearly shown in the figure 2, while the average score of the volleyball group decreased slightly during this time period, Sonia's self-esteem was noticeably improved.

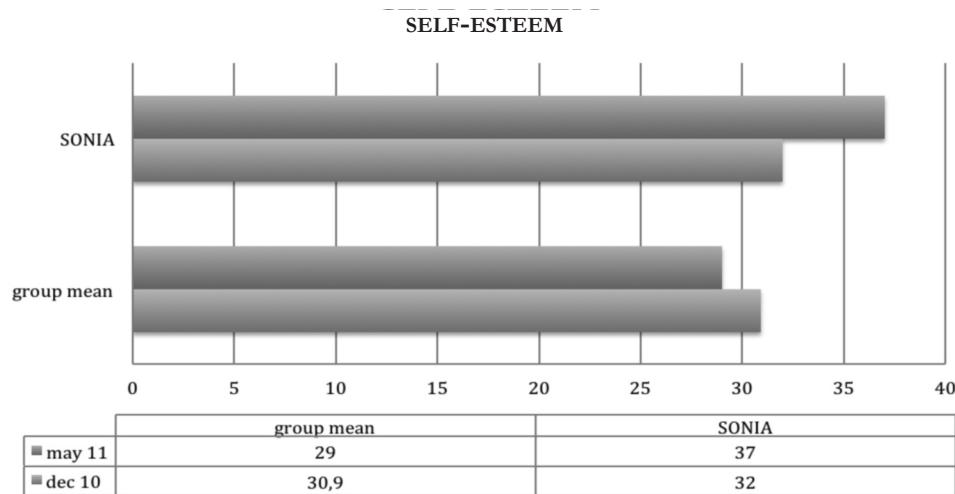


Figure 2. Comparison between Sonia and the volleyball team's Self Esteem Score

In regards to the three dimensions of self-body perception (appearance, attribution, and weight), Sonia had scores equal to the average of the normative scores and, in some cases, higher than her group's scores (see the dimension of appearance in Figure 3), with some very significant improvements (see the dimension of attribution in Figure 4).

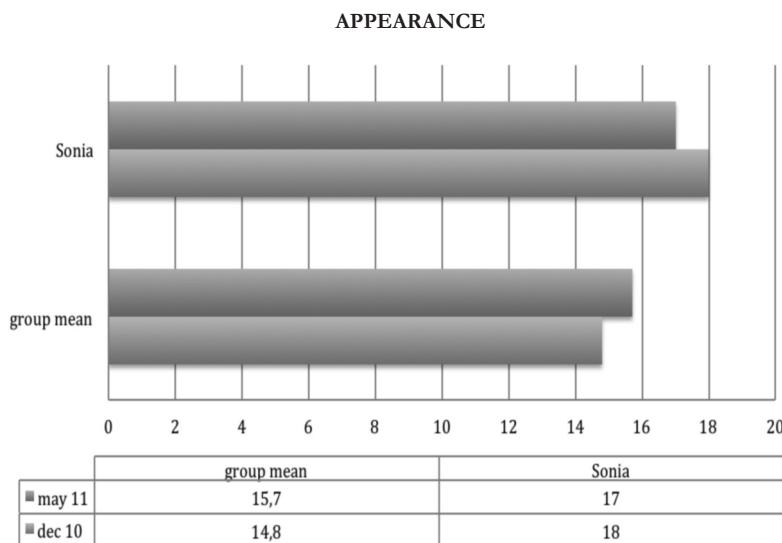


Figure 3. Comparison between Sonia and the volleyball team's Appearance Scores

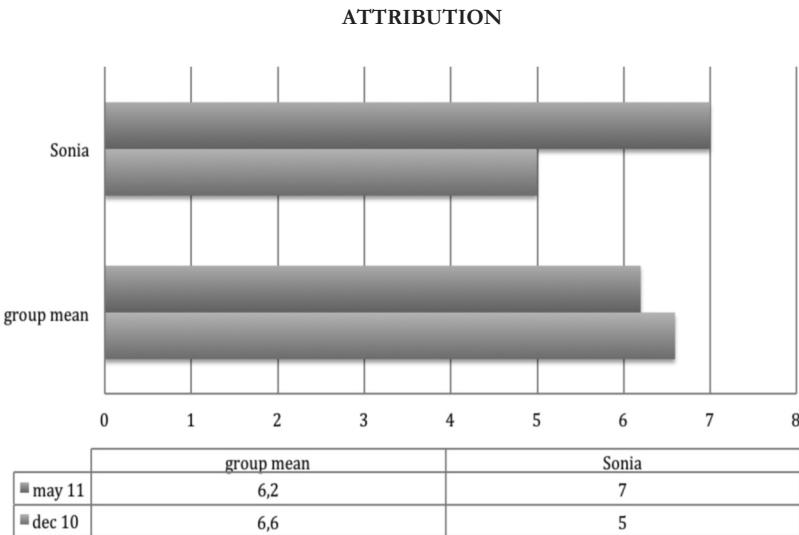


Figure 4. Comparison between Sonia and the volleyball team's Attribution Scores

In addition to the data collected through self-reported scales, also the drawings evaluated Sonia development regarding self-perception.

Figure 5A. Sonia's "Drawing me",
December 2010

Mi Disegno
(Witkin, 1962; tr. it. Confalonieri et al., in press)

Ti chiedo di disegnarti come se ti dovesti presentare ad una persona che non ti conosce, ma che è interessata a te. Sei libero di rappresentare te stesso nel modo che ritiene più opportuno, facendo attenzione a comunicare ad un'altra persona quali sono le tue caratteristiche.



Figure 5B. Sonia's "Drawing me",
May 2011

Mi Disegno
(Witkin, 1962; tr. it. Confalonieri et al., in press)

Ti chiedo di disegnarti come se ti dovesti presentare ad una persona che non ti conosce, ma che è interessata a te. Sei libero di rappresentare te stesso nel modo che ritiene più opportuno, facendo attenzione a comunicare ad un'altra persona quali sono le tue caratteristiche.



As depicted in Figure 5A and 5B, in both drawings Sonia depicts her entire body. In Figure 5, the girl she draws wears jeans and a white T-shirt, her hips are not depicted, and her breasts are not outlined. Six months later, in Figure 6, Sonia represents herself differently: her hips and breasts are more pronounced, and her eyes likely have make-up on them, all denoting a more female characterization. The clothing, too, is changed. Sonia draws herself with a red top and shorts, similar to the clothing used during sports.

Sonia's case study is a good example of the positive evolution of the entire "Volley Group under 14" with regard to self-perception. The results of our meeting with the staff members working with the volleyball team for the entire season demonstrate that the actions implemented by the trainer (and educator) were particularly directed to the group dimension variable. This just-mentioned variable has emerged as the most inadequate one. Sonia, and so many other minors, are incapable of taking advantage of horizontal networks to support their growth process, so during the sports season, the coaches and educators focused mainly on promoting group skills.

The data collected by the researchers also revealed a lack of group skills. As the Figure 6 shows, the comparison of team scores for the four dimensions of team cohesion¹ reveals large differences among the scores for integration, which is subjects' view of their team, and for attraction, which is subjects' view of their involvement in the group.

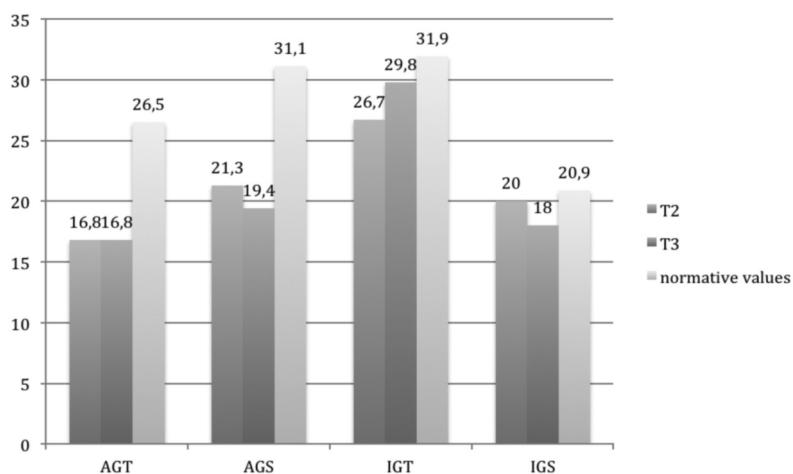


Figure 6. Under 14 Volleyball Team Cohesion – group mean scores

¹ Individual attraction to group-task – AGT; Individual attractions to group-social – AGS; Group integration-task – IGT; Group integration-social - IGS.

At the team level, we identify a positive development of group perception, appropriate for the achievement of sport performances (IGT) and tending to uniform and average scores. The girls perceive a much lower level of involvement in their group and social relations within it (AGS), particularly concerning task development (AGT). Sonia's scores are congruent to the group's mean scores (Figure 7).

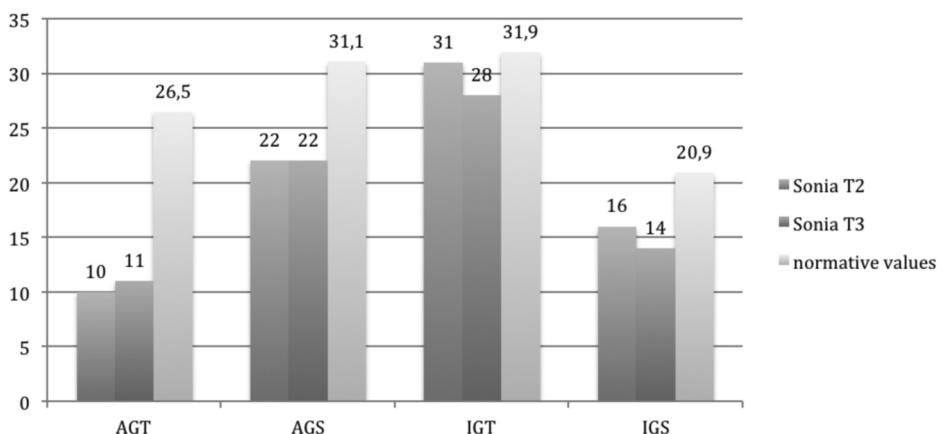


Figure 7. Sonia's scores about Team cohesion

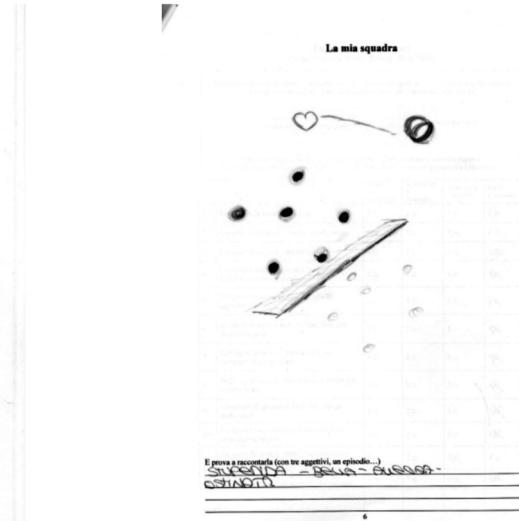
More critical findings emerge from the scales measuring Sonia's participation in the group (AGS and AGC). These data seem to confirm that the effort made during the season by staff members to improve group cohesion (such as planning activities after practices and exercises with group goals) were more effective in generating an awareness concerning the rise of the group dimension rather than generating a real involvement in it, especially concerning the IGT dimension-reaching athletic performance.

Sonia's drawings of the team group (Figure 8 and 9) indicate a strong affective investment in the team, which she describes as "very important to me, nice, fun".

Figure 8. Sonia's "Drawing my team", December 2010



Figure 9. Sonia's Drawing my team", May 2011



In the drawings, the group is depicted in emotional and positive ways through symbols, such as the elements depicting the sports activities (the net in the first drawing, the ball in the second one). In Figure 8, there are 12 players on the field, in addition to a 13th figure on the sidelines who we think is the trainer. In the second drawing, players are represented with spots, but this time, they are placed on the court according to the correct positions of players in an actual volleyball game. The six spots on one half of the court are highlighted in yellow as if they represent her team, while her opponents are likely depicted on the other half of the court.

We decided to present the case of the under-14 volleyball team and Sonia, in particular, in order to demonstrate how the longitudinal monitoring of group and individuals situations got the staff members to take concrete actions. At the end of the season, for example, the under-14 volleyball team staff requested that the foundation management consider that the team participate in a non-professional championship the next season, which would enable them to work more concretely on group skills due to the constant comparison against rivals and performance dimension. The role of the evaluators, in this case, has been to order and highlight elements that emerged from data collection, stimulating in the operators a process of reflection and continuous re-definition of their intervention's goals and the means to achieve them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This work should be conceived within the field of studies focusing the analysis on the projects, significantly growing in number, that use sport as an instrument of social inclusion (Collins & Kay, 2003; Bailey, 2005; Gómez, Puig & Maza, 2009). In particular, our attempt has been to answer to the challenges risen by some scholars highlighting how a scientific approach to the issue is often missing (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2001; Collins et al., 1999).

By presenting a participatory evaluation case applied to a sport intervention project for minors at risk, this work highlighted the various opportunities that the here-applied methodology allows (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). First, it forces the interlocutors to think about the logic of the proposal and to translate it into specific goals and coherent actions. In other words, the researchers must review their declared professional practices to make sure they are coherent. Secondly, this research method can generate a new culture of projecting as part of the evaluation process, which could be seen as representing the heritage of the working group. Finally, but not least, this type of project highlights the positive outcomes and the elements that contribute to those outcomes (efficacy issue).

As with any research method, this one does present certain difficulties and limitations. Management often resists the practices and has difficulty envisioning the evaluation as a simple action that enriches their project and makes it more accessible. Operators' commitment and participation requires work beyond their normal daily activities and more engagement and effort than other research methods, often in a professionally precarious situation. The operators have an opportunity to enhance their sense of professionalism but must also face the frustration of seeing when they fall short of their ideals. Another limitation is the high turnover among the operators, who often have weak contracts, so the researchers must identify a small group of operators which can serve as a reference point in order not to lose the accumulated data. Concerning the children, it was not possible in our experience to meet youth who quit sports practice and to learn their reasons why. Finally, time and investment constraints prevented us from involving other social actors (e.g., the children's social networks) in the project, even though this element is crucial when discussing social inclusion.

A comparison to similar projects would allow researchers to refine the evaluation process and to highlight the opportunities and risks of this method. A participatory evaluation can help clarify our understanding of what we can achieve through sports and what conditions we must create in order to fulfill sports' potentialities, without trivializing or idealizing it (Coalter, 2002; Collins, 2004).

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