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Original article

## Group sports practices as a facilitating instrument for psychosocial transformation in the *Cuba Libre* Popular Council

Las prácticas deportivas grupales como instrumento facilitador de transformación psicosocial en el Consejo Popular Cuba Libre

Práticas desportivas de grupo como instrumento facilitador da transformação psicossocial no Conselho Popular Cuba Libre

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### ABSTRACT

Group sports practices favor socialization processes through collective games that can be, due to their characteristics, from sports to traditional games. In this group space, through the dissimilar games, teamwork and group cohesion can be developed, among other aspects of a psychosocial nature. Therefore, this proposal was conceived in the planning and execution of group sports practices as a means of psychosocial transformation. The general objective of this work is to propitiate favorable behavioral changes through the development of group sports practices that influence in the improvement of life quality of children and adolescents between 7 and 13 years old of the Popular Council Cuba Libre of Pinar del Rio municipality. The methods used are interview, observation, survey, workshops, group dynamics. Five strategies were developed, each one with its actions, objectives, techniques, procedures and means. These are being built as they are executed and adapted to the community. The results that have been thrown are: authenticity and spontaneity of the childhood, some tried to call the attention, wanting to have individual protagonism, social motivations oriented to the interpersonal relations between coetaneous are expressed, contents of rejection to manifestations of violence, harmful habits are noticed; increase of pleasant experiences associated to the positive interpersonal relations. The adults manifested behaviors that affected the development of the activity. The evaluation of the strategies will be systematic, continuous by means of evaluation indicators, they will be measured in the meeting of the managing group and before the municipal Direction of Sport.

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**Keywords:** Quality of life; Community; Strategies; Group sports practices; Psychosocial transformation.

## RESUMEN

Las prácticas deportivas grupales favorecen procesos de socialización a través de juegos colectivos que pueden ser, por sus características, desde deportivos propiamente hasta tradicionales. En este espacio grupal, a través de los disímiles juegos, se puede desarrollar el trabajo en equipo, la cohesión grupal, entre otros aspectos de carácter psicosocial. Por lo que esta propuesta se concibió en la planificación y ejecución de prácticas deportivas grupales como medio de transformación psicosocial. El objetivo general de este trabajo es propiciar cambios comportamentales favorables mediante el desarrollo de prácticas deportivas grupales que incidan en el mejoramiento de la calidad de vida de niños y adolescentes entre 7 y 13 años del Consejo Popular Cuba Libre del municipio de Pinar del Río. Los métodos utilizados son la entrevista, observación, encuesta, talleres, dinámicas grupales. Se desarrollaron cinco estrategias, cada una con sus acciones, objetivos, técnicas, procedimientos y medios. Estas se van construyendo en la medida en que se van ejecutando y adecuándose a la comunidad. Los resultados que se han ido arrojando son: autenticidad y espontaneidad de la infancia, algunos intentaron llamar la atención, queriendo tener protagonismo individual, se expresan motivaciones sociales orientadas a las relaciones interpersonales entre coetáneos, se advierten contenidos de rechazo a manifestaciones de violencia, hábitos nocivos; incremento de experiencias placenteras asociadas a las relaciones interpersonales positivas. Los adultos manifestaron comportamientos que afectaron el desenvolvimiento de la actividad. La evaluación de las estrategias será sistemática, continua mediante indicadores de evaluación, se medirán en la reunión del grupo gestor y ante la Dirección municipal de Deporte.

**Palabras clave:** Calidad de vida; Comunidad; Estrategias; Prácticas deportivas grupales; Transformación psicosocial.

## RESUMO

As práticas desportivas de grupo favorecem processos de socialização através de jogos coletivos que podem ser, devido às suas características, do próprio desporto aos jogos tradicionais. Neste espaço de grupo, através de jogos díspares, é possível desenvolver trabalho de equipa e coesão de grupo, entre outros aspectos de natureza psicossocial. Por conseguinte, esta proposta foi concebida no planeamento e execução de práticas desportivas de grupo como um meio de transformação psicossocial. O objetivo geral deste trabalho é propiciar mudanças comportamentais favoráveis através do desenvolvimento de práticas desportivas de grupo que tenham impacto na melhoria da qualidade de vida de crianças e adolescentes entre os 7 e 13 anos de idade do Conselho Popular Cuba Libre, no município de Pinar del Río. Os métodos utilizados são entrevista, observação, inquérito, seminários, dinâmicas de grupo. Foram desenvolvidas cinco estratégias, cada uma com as suas ações, objetivos, técnicas, procedimentos e meios. Estes estão a ser construídos à medida que são implementados e adaptados à comunidade. Os resultados são: autenticidade e espontaneidade da infância, alguns tentaram chamar a atenção, querendo ter

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protagonismo individual, as motivações sociais são expressas orientadas para as relações interpessoais entre coetâneos, conteúdos de rejeição a manifestações de violência, hábitos nocivos; aumento de experiências agradáveis associadas às relações interpessoais positivas. Os adultos mostraram comportamentos que afetaram o desenvolvimento da atividade. A avaliação das estratégias será sistemática, contínua através de indicadores de avaliação, serão medidas na reunião do grupo gestor e antes da Direção Municipal do Desporto.

**Palavras-chave:** Qualidade de vida; Comunidade; Estratégias; Práticas desportivas de grupo; Transformação psicossocial.

## INTRODUCTION

Group sport practices are a tool to encourage the sharing of a time and space for human development with people who may or may not know each other before, who may or may not meet again in the future, but who at the moment share through a sport game, transmit something particular that facilitates the learning of a new lesson for the life of the other.

In previous experiences of social transformation, these practices have been used with the aim of identifying psychosocial problems in advance in order to shape and address the content that will be taken into account in their design.

From the significant results that were obtained during several years of the implementation of the Program of Psychosocial Transformation developed by the Group of Psychosocial Studies of the Health of the Center of Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) in collaboration with the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Switzerland Zunzún, the desire to share this methodology was born, with the intention of motivating the multiplication of similar experiences, in different communities of the country.

The basic theoretical and categorical foundations of the program of psychosocial transformation centered on the practice of collective sports with boys and girls, start from the historical-cultural approach that is the theoretical conception of child psychological development that served as a support for the educational actions that have been carried out, have an objective that implies the integral "education for development", (UNICEF, 2006), category that is linked to the conception of sport for development (Sport and Development International Conference, 2003), since sport is the tool chosen to promote the proposed psychosocial changes. This concept of "sport for human development" is expressed concretely in our purpose, in the use of sport as a means to facilitate social transformation processes.

To address these particularities it is necessary to make some initial clarifications as to what is meant by processes of psychosocial transformation.

When referring to "psycho" and "social", we are before a reference where it is a matter of "understanding people (and obviously the problems that present themselves as producers of discomfort...), in an intersection of the spaces or more



personal dimensions of their lives (hence the psycho), and those in which the registry of the real dictates from (with) the demands (conditions) of their real situations of existence (hence the social). We are talking about the subject (individual, group, institutional) and its real circumstances of existence" [Calviño, 2010, p. 179](#)).

The processes of psychosocial transformation must be subject to professional psychosocial actions (PPA), which are defined, according to [Calviño \(2010\)](#), as:

"...a process of intervention at a personal, group or community level that seeks to favor in the participants the reestablishment, reinforcement or development of their optimal level of professional performance. It is about the training and optimization of capacities (competences, skills, dispositions, etc.) to achieve well-being and personal growth in the real conditions of their lives (...) (p. 178)"

The processes of psychosocial transformation can and should also generate and socialize a production of knowledge. In this sense, to facilitate this production, it may be useful to follow a logical sequence that includes three fundamental steps: action, observation and reflective discussion ([Montero, 2010, p. 32](#)).

As [Hernández \(2011\)](#) points out, a transformation implies essential changes, with a scope and degree of stability that leads to its irreversibility. Knowing and evaluating the extent of the changes that are achieved through our actions is essential to realize under what conditions and on what processes or systems can be achieved transformation. This is important because if the changes achieved are not essential or do not last over time can be very easily reversed by the multiple influences of the environment.

The practice of sport offers multiple benefits not only for health but also for psychosocial issues, including: social integration, the creation and strengthening of social relationships, and the improvement of communication between individuals and groups. It enhances human capabilities by providing knowledge about one's body, human relationships, and the environment. Promotes the learning of basic values and life skills, such as cooperation, communication, respect for rules, problem solving, understanding, leadership, effort, honesty, tolerance, discipline, teamwork ([Zas, 2014, p. 12](#)).

However, it is precisely how sport is used that can make it a promoter of certain ethical social values, just as improper implementation can promote undesirable values such as aggressiveness, deceit, and overzealousness. From this perspective, school sport should give priority to playful, recreational and non-competitive aspects, seeking not to form champions but to provide children with sport training for life and personal growth ([Zas, 2014, p. 12](#)).

The main potentialities of sport, as a means of promoting human development, lie in the contribution of psychosocial benefits, the construction and empowerment of human capacities, the teaching of basic values and skills for social life ([Zas, 2014, p. 13](#)).

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Group sports practices, by becoming a tool that facilitates the learning of a *new lesson for life*, are based on a series of rules derived from pedagogical principles (Colectivo de autores, 2014, p. 11).

- To educate in such a way that knowledge, habits, skills and adequate social behavior are developed, thus helping personal and social development.
- To diagnose the psychosocial problems on which one tries to influence; and to orient the practices towards the modification of behaviors related to these problems (principle of the scientific character).
- To adapt the practices to the needs, ages and characteristics of the stage of life (childhood, adolescence, youth and adulthood), level of development (of knowledge, skills and abilities), individual peculiarities and experience of the participants; characteristics of the groups, organizations or communities; as well as conditions in which they are carried out.
- Organize learning activities from different logical sequences, by phases or stages, from the simplest to the most complex.
- Encourage participants to play an active role under the guidance of the process leader, who will be referred to as the promoter, through reflective, questioning and self-critical learning.

"Group sports practices can generally improve the quality of life and the processes of psychosocial transformation (Colectivo de autores, 2014, p.9).

The practices of psychosocial transformation should not be subjected to the chaos of improvisation. The social sciences have developed sufficient theoretical and methodological frameworks that must be constantly reviewed, analyzed, taken up, reconstructed, and made available to all those who undertake projects and programs of transformation (Colectivo de autores, 2014, p.10).

To address the psychosocial issue in the field of sport, the author of this research needed to consult several sources to provide methodological tools and theoretical and practical concepts in terms of a proposed solution. Among these sources, the work of Sánchez Vidal, A., (2015); Buelga, S., et al., (2015); Gaete, V., (2015); Del Castillo, J. A. G., (2015); García del Castillo Rodríguez, J. A., et al., (2016); Vidal, A. S., (2016); Flórez, E. D., et al., (2016); Apio, J. J. R., & Rodríguez, J. M. A., (2017); Bezanilla, J. M., et al., (2018); Paiva, V., et al., (2018) and Rivas Santos, E., et al., (2018). Through the interpretation of these scientific articles, the results achieved through the methods used were analyzed and this served as reference points to transfer and apply advanced methodologies. In these works it was possible to determine the psychosocial dimension and the level of incidence of the contextualized psychosocial treatment in the health, the community work, the educational institutions, in the enterprise field; as well as the presentation of a psychosocial profile and the analysis in different stages of the life as it is the adolescence to influence in the moral values of the society.

Given the lack in our country of systematized programs and studies that use collective sport as an instrument to facilitate psychosocial changes, as instruments of conscious and oriented transformation, the favorable results that have been obtained can serve as reference to promote new projects of this type in different communities of Cuba.

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The case that corresponds, specifically, is in the People's Council Cuba Libre. Although with the revolutionary triumph it has been favored by the government policies based on the principle of equity in Education, Health and Sports, there are still weaknesses that affect the proper development of its inhabitants because it continues to be a community in social disadvantage marked by antisocial behavior of its citizens with housing problems, overcrowding, alteration of public order, prohibited games, illegal sales; conditions that have caused, in children and adolescents, deterioration of their values, characterized by unfavorable modes of action, high degree of alcoholism, smoking, domestic and social violence.

Taking into account the situation previously exposed; the insufficient educational influences and community projects that guarantee behavioral changes in children and adolescents that affect their quality of life, the need to create new purposes that contribute to the psychosocial transformation of children and adolescents that favors the improvement of their quality of life and the idea of a multidisciplinary group of committed professionals. That is why on this occasion it is up to the Province of Pinar del Río, approved by the Provincial Government in Pinar del Río with the participation of the Direction of the National Institute of Sport and Recreation (Inder in Spanish), that since January 2019 a set of training activities have been carried out to carry out this experience to the different selected communities through the training of multipliers. When reflecting on all these limitations, the author of this work proposes as a general objective: to develop a program of psychosocial transformation through group sports practices as an instrument to facilitate changes in the behavior and quality of life of children and adolescents between 7 and 13 years of age of the Popular Council *Cuba Libre* of the municipality of Pinar del Río.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For the development of the project, the dialectic-materialist method was assumed as a general method, allowing the study of the different social problems that affected the quality of life of children and adolescents between 7 and 13 years old of the Popular Council of Free Cuba, by means of the foundation and dialectic integration between the methods of the theoretical and empirical level, where participatory action research was assumed as an approach having as purpose not only the understanding, interpretation and reflection but also the transformation of reality, as a dialectic process of interaction theory-practice and practice-theory, between knowledge and action, between the process and the product, between the subject and the object.

The group sports practices were planned twice a month for three years in the 168 Circumscription between San Ignacio street and street 8 of the Cuba Libre People Council in Pascual Martin Street at the end. The population of 894 teenagers (from 7 to 13 years old), directly addressed 16 children and teenagers between 7 and 13 years old, 11 males and five females; and indirectly to the whole population.

These group sports practices were implemented progressively, starting from a diagnostic exploratory strategy, composed by a set of exploratory actions of relevant available information; characterizing the peculiarities of individuals, groups or





environments with which transformation actions are carried out; evaluating activities, processes and results of such actions; planned in a systematic and dynamic way. Its purpose is to identify needs, demands, psychosocial problems and determine the fundamental psychosocial issues to be worked on.

The group sport practice was designed in such a way that it went through four fundamental moments or phases:

Preparatory-organizational phase, which includes:

- Drinking water and snacks (as far as possible).
- Delimitation of the area or land where the activity will take place.
- Preparation of everything that is necessary to use in the sport activity: balls, flags, pennants, T-shirts, etc.

Initial, introductory phase, which aims to:

- Integration of the participants. For example, through a ritual of greeting or welcome.
- Explanation of the objectives and tasks of the activity.
- Carrying out of warm-up exercises. This avoids injuries, increases attention and stimulates teamwork.
- Can be used: jumps, races, rhythmic dances, games (modern and traditional), etc.

Examples:

One person demonstrated a movement and the rest tried to imitate it, for example, by making movements with their legs and arms. All the players were placed in a circle and a rhythmic dance was started: clapping. Later, and in a progressive way, adding new elements. The rhythm should be kept simple, with many repetitions. All the players run and intermingle in a disorderly way, taking care not to disturb or damage each other. Then, they are instructed to do it in pairs or in groups of three.

Central or core phase of the session:

- The objective is to contribute to the socialization of the participants through different activities, sports, traditional, didactic games, etc.; and to stimulate the formation of values, healthy behaviors and a greater well-being.

Final phase:

- It is a time for relaxation, recovery, discussion, evaluation and closure of the activity. Performing exercises that allow you to relax and share together.



Examples of how they can be done:

- Inventing static games in pairs or in groups of three. Make a demonstration for the rest. Move the body in a certain way, and the rest will imitate it. Make one of the participants a representation using mime. The rest have to try to guess the word that corresponds to what is being represented, and then try to name the activity. Repeat a familiar exercise that the participants will like.
- Group the participants and talk, debate about what happened in the activity, as positive, constructive and stimulating feedback. Positive aspects should always outweigh negative criticism. Promote the motivation that makes the players want to participate again. To thank the participants, showing the promoter how pleased he is to have shared with them. Perform a farewell ritual that marks the end of the activity. Count and collect all the equipment used.

The methods used were observation, interview, questionnaire, workshops and scientific materials.

### **Observation of group sport practice**

It is the method par excellence for recording important events that occur throughout the process of psychosocial transformation. The possibility that it has of being carried out in the environments where the activities take place, allowed to accompany initial exploratory, evaluative and monitoring actions in the community. This was done directly (immediate contact was made with what one wanted to observe, either as a witness to what is happening or by participating); and indirectly (work was done with information provided by parents, teachers, community leaders or others who observed the group). To facilitate the recording of what was observed, auxiliary means were used, such as guides and photographic or audio and/or video recording devices. In this case, it is essential to have the consensus of individuals or groups involved.

### **Interview and questionnaire**

These are useful techniques to obtain relevant information about the characteristics and problems of the group on which the transformation actions are oriented and the areas in which this takes place. The interview is a conversation between one person and another (or others) for a specific purpose. While the questionnaire is a set of questions on one or several topics that are offered preferably in written form.

In both techniques, the questions were closed and open. However, the latter were more convenient since they offered the possibility of reflecting, deepening and expanding on the topic in question, instead of providing possible answers determined a priori, as in the case of the former.

The questionnaires used were "Questionnaire on some habits and Questionnaire on satisfaction with life".

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Timely observations and interventions were made during the implementation process. Although children welcome this type of task with enthusiasm (as evidenced in the experience) some situations occurred, such as: Incomplete or omitted answers: in this case completion was encouraged, without forcing or insisting too much and without making comments that suggested answers. There were concerns about spelling: when they asked in doubt about how to write a word, they were given help so that they would not feel insecure and could continue the task without difficulty. Some also said that they did not want to continue because they were tired, so the techniques that had not been applied were postponed for another day. Most of the children expressed their desire not to fight with their little friends and for the children to play with everyone else because they don't fight.

### **Exploratory-diagnostic workshops**

They are one of the main tools used. They are aimed not only at obtaining information for the diagnosis (initial and final) and identifying training needs during the training process, but also at building actions in a participatory manner, taking place at different times: An initial meeting (in which the objectives, duration and rules for group functioning were specified and agreed upon) and the participants were warmed up (to encourage, disinhibit and integrate them); a second moment in which activities were carried out, under the guidance of coordinators, aimed at fulfilling the proposed objectives; and another closing moment to recover key aspects dealt with, evaluate the fulfilment of expectations, stimulate the sense of group work and relax the participants. During the development of the workshop we worked in small subgroups and alternated with plenary returns. The workshops were conducted through participatory techniques of Popular Education- used to warm up the participants; to provoke reflection and analysis of the contents under discussion- and/or psychodramatic resources (role-playing, pedagogical psychodrama and socio-drama) used to dramatize scenes about social situations and to visualize the role that each person played in them. The most frequent responses of the children were related to attitudes of rejection towards harmful habits, expressed in terms of, for example: "Let my dad stop smoking", "Let nobody in my family drink alcoholic drinks more". Responses emerged in which the community identified with hostile, hostile and dangerous behavior.

### **Scientific materials**

Publications on the psychosocial theme that is the object of transformation, reports or systematizations of similar or previous experiences of transformation, as well as documents and records produced for a certain purpose by the participants, such as: minutes of meetings, reports of workshops and images in photos and videos; which helped to understand experiences, experiences or situations that occurred.

Whatever method, technique or resource is used, it is a requirement for the coordinator to be properly prepared to handle them, developing skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes necessary for diagnosis, evaluation, facilitation, planning, among others.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results obtained, through the applied techniques, allows to give answer to the objectives raised by the investigation, in which, once the triangulation of the information is done, the integration of the results is exposed.

The level of interpretation of the information takes place, fundamentally, at a group level, allowing to know events or experiences that are present or happen in most situations or people.

Currently, work is being done on the exploratory diagnostic strategy. The results that these actions have produced are the following.

The authenticity and spontaneity characteristic of childhood made the exploratory-diagnostic workshops a space of enjoyment par excellence. However, it is also important to pay attention to some issues. More than offering resistance to the task, some school children tried to call attention to them, for example, by constantly getting up, wanting to always have the individual protagonism, etc., in addition, they broke out in manifestations of violence in situations of dramatization in the aforementioned workshop. Also during the closing, comments arose about the lack of interest of some in participating.

In the answers given by the children, social motivations are expressed that are oriented towards themselves and others in terms of interpersonal relationships between (and with) peers, towards recreation, desires that express responsibility, duty, good behavior with friends or schoolmates. In addition, there are contents that evidence family, rejection of manifestations of violence, attitudes of rejection of harmful habits, this was evidence of favorable changes in the way that behaviors related to alcohol and snuff consumption are structured. A greater number of responses emerged in which the community is identified as a space in which socially inappropriate behaviors take place. This can be interpreted as a greater recognition of these types of behaviors, as an expression of the empowerment of favorable attitudes and perceptions towards areas of life linked to moral and social development.

There was a tendency to increase pleasant experiences associated with positive interpersonal relationships as an expression of changes in the subjective dimension of quality of life. Children expressed their satisfaction in contact through play or fun, displays of affection or attitudes of solidarity.

In the workshops that were carried out with adults, there were also behaviors that affected the development of the activity, such as late arrivals, attempts to divert attention to other topics, whispering, etc., most of them expressed the desire to have a greater bond with themselves and with the community; they expressed the aspiration that other circumscriptions would also benefit from the transformation actions.



Added to this is the perception of changes, attributed to such actions, by parents in terms of: "better communication", "greater sociability", "less aggression" and "more interest in school".

In conclusion, it is proposed that group sports practices implemented in children, as a facilitating instrument for psychosocial transformation, will be an experience that will bring about a series of favorable and fundamental changes.

These practices will favor a greater identification and rejection of inappropriate behaviors mainly of a violent nature, better communication skills, in terms of greater sociability and the development of moral values, such as honesty; collectivity and responsibility; interest towards study and teaching results; the acquisition of knowledge with a higher level of elaboration and the development of more proactive attitudes and social skills in relation to harmful habits.

Some of the most notable changes will be a greater correspondence between the preference for sports practice and its realization during the free time of the group of children, thus promoting an improvement in the quality of life of this group.

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**Conflict of interests:**

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

**Authors' contribution:**

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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