

Examining Portuguese national sport organizations' managerial strategies towards human development: what counts as effective practice in youth sport?

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ABSTRACT

In Portugal, national sports organisations receive funding from the government to achieve three key objectives: organise competitions; train key stakeholders; and foster human development. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine Portuguese sports organisations' strategic decisions towards fostering human development. A document analysis of sports organisations' annual reports and activity plans was conducted. Such analysis helped to understand how sport policy and funding influence sports organisations' practices, especially concerning youth sports. A total of 35 national sports organisations that deliver programming for youth were included in the present study. Findings indicate that the human development of youth does not appear to be at the forefront of priorities for Portuguese national sports organisations. Few managerial strategies were implemented by sports organisations to target human development deliberately. Moving forward, there is a need to devise concrete strategies to better situate psychosocial development within the Portuguese youth sports context by considering the developmental needs of youth in the 21st century. To help sports organisations foster psychosocial development, several recommendations concerning policy documents, guidelines for sports stakeholders and funding are provided.

KEYWORDS: youth development; policy; coaching; sport; pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

In Portugal, national sports organisations receive funding from the government to achieve three objectives that apply to all competitive levels and age groups (Diário da República, 2008). First, national sports organisations are funded to organise local, national, and international competitions and other sporting events, such as events in the community to promote sports practice. Second, national sports organisations have the responsibility to train coaches, referees, athletes, and sports administrators. Finally, Portuguese sports organisations are funded to foster human development. Within the Portuguese sports system, human development is positioned as the process that leads to positive outcomes across cognitive, motor, and psychosocial domains throughout the lifespan, for which coaches and administrators are

responsible for fostering (Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth, 2015). Despite the fact that human development is positioned within Portuguese sports policy as one of three objectives (National Plan for Ethics in Sport, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c), currently, the government mainly assesses national sports organisations' effectiveness using quantitative metrics that include tracking competitive results, the number of registered athletes and coaches, the number of competitions hosted per year, and the financial stability of the organisation (Diário da República, 2008). Generally speaking, if national sports organisations meet the required thresholds of these quantitative metrics, they are eligible to maintain their funding from the government. Thus, funding is primarily tied to the first two objectives outlined above (i.e., organise competitions and train stakeholders) as they are easier

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to quantitatively assess than the more subjective and multifaceted construct of human development. Governing bodies mainly assess the objective of human development through the number of events (e.g., promoting sport participation at a local school), coach education courses (e.g., courses centred on youth development offered to coaches) and campaigns (e.g., the campaign to share the need to eliminate racism in sport) fostered by sports organisations.

The Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (2015) is the governing body that assists national sports organisations in organising competitions, training stakeholders, and fostering human development towards the general population, specifically towards youth (individuals below 18 years old). In recent years, the institute has placed a growing focus on integrating ethics and values within the Portuguese sport system, which led to the creation of the National Plan for Ethics in Sport (2015a), which was established to educate coaches, athletes, administrators, and parents on how to follow ethical principles in sport more effectively. Although the creation of the National Plan for Ethics in Sport (2015a) has been a promising step for youth sports in Portugal, there is still room to implement additional strategies moving forward. Within the Portuguese sports context, there are still coaches who struggle to foster positive sports experiences for youth participants, and action-oriented sports policies centered around this topic are still scarce (Camiré & Santos, 2019).

With approximately 500,000 youth participating in organised sports across dozens of national sports organisations (PORDATA, 2020), Portugal offers youth multiple opportunities to experience positive developmental outcomes through organised sports activities (Camiré & Santos, 2019). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that sports participation can also result in adverse developmental outcomes such as reduced self-confidence and self-esteem (Bean & Forneris, 2016; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Nery, Neto, Rosado, & Smith, 2019). In essence, sports participation does not inherently lead to positive development; instead, an environment overseen by competent and caring adult leaders must be created for development to be fostered (Coakley, 2011). Moreover, adult leaders must bring to the sports environment a certain level of intentionality in their approaches to programming that encompasses raising awareness and putting in place strategies that help youth learn skills that are useful in and beyond sport (Bean & Forneris, 2016; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016).

Recent work by Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2016) suggests that youth participants can increase their self-esteem, experience happiness, reduce stress, and learn leadership skills through sport. Holt et al. (2017) outlined that coaches, peers, and parents are

important agents that influence the youth sports experience. When their influence is experienced positively by youth participants and is combined with an *intentional* focus on development on the part of adult leaders, there are enhanced opportunities for desirable outcomes to occur (Camiré, Kendellen, Rathwell, & Turgeon, 2020). Alongside physical development, psychosocial development is considered an important outcome of youth sports participation that may help youth succeed across life domains and develop holistically (Coakley, 2011; 2016; Gould, 2019). Psychosocial development can be defined as an on-going process that leads to the development of attitudes, behaviours, and psychosocial skills, enabling youth to interact with their environment and overcome social challenges. Psychosocial development has been associated with character development, values, ethical behaviour among youth, and skills such as leadership, respect, emotional control, and teamwork (Harwood, Barker, & Anderson, 2015).

To date, most research on the psychosocial development of youth sports participants has primarily occurred in Anglo-Saxon and Western countries (Holt et al., 2017; Schut & Collinet, 2016). Further, multiple coach education initiatives aimed at helping coaches foster psychosocial outcomes have been developed in Canada (Strachan, MacDonald, & Côté, 2016), the United Kingdom (Harwood et al., 2015) and the United States (Ferris, Ettekal, Agans, & Burkhard, 2016). As research in this area expands, we must consider how local culture influences the conceptualisation and operationalisation of psychosocial development by sports organisations, coaches, and other stakeholders. Kochanek and Erickson (2020) recently suggested that development sometimes "... takes up a predetermined understanding of coach effectiveness that forecloses what these terms [e.g., life skills] might actually constitute in context and culture" (Kochanek & Erickson, 2020, p. 233). It is therefore suggested that in the study of youth psychosocial development through sport, it is imperative to situate research within particular contexts (i.e., in the present study of the Portuguese sports system) while working to better understand the policy and managerial approaches used in these contexts that drive decision-making in the sport system. Such an approach may help understand policy effectiveness and conceptualise human development in and through sport.

Situating youth psychosocial development within the Portuguese sport system

Recent research has demonstrated how Portuguese youth sports coaches generally do not prioritise psychosocial development in their coaching (Santos et al., 2019b). The Portuguese

sports system remains somewhat rooted in a performance mindset, where coaches prioritise physical and tactical skills (Camiré & Santos, 2019). Santos et al. (2017) discussed that the lack of attention to psychosocial development is attributable to many interrelated factors. One prominent factor is the absence of pedagogical material on psychosocial development in Portuguese coach education courses. In a study involving 12 Portuguese field hockey coaches, Santos et al. (2017) examined coaches' awareness of coaching principles related to psychosocial development. They concluded that coaches appear to value the ideals of including psychosocial development in their coaching philosophies but often lack confidence, motivation, knowledge, and strategies to implement content on the ground. In another study, MacDonald, Camiré, Erickson, and Santos (2020) observed coaches before, during, and after their participation in a 10-week coach education course focused on psychosocial development. They found that although coach behaviours relating to psychosocial development increased during the intervention, coaches returned to pre-intervention levels at follow-up. This suggests that the material presented during the intervention failed to produce long-term behaviour change as coaches quickly returned to their previous methods of coaching post-intervention.

Several factors of influence operating at a micro (e.g., coaching philosophy, club culture) and macro (e.g., national policies, funding mandates) levels must be considered in order to explain the findings of the studies reviewed above. Within the coaching science literature, more research has focused on micro-level factors, while less is known concerning how macro-level factors shape the focus (or lack thereof) on psychosocial development in sports systems. The factor of interest we wish to examine more closely lies at the macro level concerning how the objective of fostering human development is integrated in the Portuguese sports system, particularly as it relates to the psychosocial development of youth.

The purpose of the present study was to examine national sports organisations' strategic decisions towards fostering human development through document analysis of their annual reports and activity plans. We are unaware of any similar studies that have attempted to elucidate how national sports organisations' stated practices target or not the psychosocial development of youth. To achieve this purpose, the analysis focused on the extent to which national sports organisations detailed the strategies they use to foster human development in their annual reports and activity plans. Investigation of the activities will help us understand how a governing body situates human development and ultimately influences how coaches implement it in practice.

METHODS

Sample

The Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (2015) lists all existing national sports organisations within the Portuguese sport system ($n=59$). Of these 59 organisations, 17 were omitted as they do not provide programming to athletes under 18 years of age. Thus, 42 national sports organisations met our selection criterion (i.e., deliver programming to youth) and were included in our sample. These sports organisations were responsible for managing a range of sports: volleyball; basketball; padel; athletics; handball; judo; karate; Kickboxing and Muaythai; horse riding; football and futsal; gymnastics; hockey; rowing; swimming; orienteering; tennis; golf; badminton; skating; cycling; korfbal; dance; minigolf; parachute; winter sports; fencing; pool; Chinese martial arts; rugby; underwater sport activities; tennis; table tennis; chess; triathlon; sailing; aikido; surf; amateur fights; skating. According to a national survey (PORDATA, 2020), the most representative sports organisations with the highest number of athletes were football (190,865 athletes), volleyball (53,316 athletes), handball (45,394 athletes) and basketball (26,608 athletes). Sports organisations are managed by a president and other sports administrators responsible for achieving the objectives set by the state and providing evidence of these efforts. Some organisations are responsible for managing a sport (e.g., Portuguese Football Federation, $n=38$) or may be responsible for a range of sports and have a broader scope (e.g., Portuguese Olympic Committee, $n=4$). Considering that seven sports organisations did not have their activity plans and annual reports available on their websites, our final sample consisted of 35 national sports organisations.

Data collection

Data for the present study included national sports organisations' activity plans for 2020 as well as their annual reports for 2019. Annual activity plans include objectives, managerial strategies, and activities across a wide range of domains connected to the funding criteria. Annual reports include a summary of how these aspects were implemented in the past year. Considering the relevance of this information in our study aims, these documents were identified as the preferred sources of information for our analysis.

A total of 84 documents comprised of approximately 25 pages each were analysed. These documents are, for the most part, readily available online to the public from national sports organisations' websites and as such, no ethical clearance was needed to conduct the study. The data collection process involved two steps. First, we visited the websites of

the 42 national sports organisations to gather their annual activity plans and annual reports. Second, eight national sports organisations did not have the documents available online on their websites; therefore, we proceeded to contact them via email and phone. Only one national sports organisation provided the necessary documentation, while the remaining seven did not respond to our request. Thus, our final sample consisted of 35 national sports organisations.

Data analysis

Based on the purpose of the present study, a content analysis (Patton, 2002) was conducted using the following steps: decontextualisation, recontextualisation, categorisation, and compilation. First, all documents (i.e., annual reports, activity plans) were carefully reviewed by the second author (i.e., who led the analysis) with the three key objectives in mind (i.e., organise competitions, train stakeholders, foster human development). During the review, meaning units (i.e., paragraphs of texts in the documents) were labelled as initial codes as part of the decontextualisation process. Second, these initial codes were refined through a process of recontextualisation to make sure they represented the dataset. The documents were then re-read by the second author, allowing him to reflect on how the codes aligned with the purpose of the study. Third, considering the study purpose, categorisation occurred by aligning our three main categories (organise competitions, train stakeholders, and foster human development) deductively through a theory-driven approach with the three organisational objectives set by sports organisations in the Portuguese sports system, which drove the focus of the analysis. All three categories were revised to ensure they reflected commonalities and patterns within the dataset in addition to communicating a central meaningful concept. Fourth, a comprehensive report was compiled to represent the categories developed once the categorisation process was finalised. Representative quotes alongside descriptions and interpretations for each category were included. To present representative quotes while maintaining confidentiality, each national sports organisation was given a code (e.g., NSO1). To help increase the quality of the present study, the other members of the research team played key roles as critical friends who challenged the second author's interpretations throughout the analysis and writing process (Burke, 2016).

RESULTS

Findings were organised according to our three main categories: organise competitions, train stakeholders, and foster human development. The first category included the

following subcategories: competitive events; sports participants; and challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The second category involved the following subcategories: the delivery of training programs; and performance-focused training. The third category included the following subcategories: youth psychosocial development as a priority; few strategies towards youth psychosocial development; and the emergence of an assets-based approach to development (Table 1).

Considering that the purpose of the present study is to examine national sports organisations' managerial strategies towards human development, these three categories enable an understanding of how human development is positioned within the Portuguese sports system compared to other key objectives.

Organise competitions

Competitive events

A large proportion of the documents analysed were devoted to statistics and projections for organising competitions, as characterised by the following quotes:

- The objective of the male national team for 2020 is first to stay in group I and in case we win, try once again to reach the qualifying of the world group. The results of the best Portuguese players in 2019 enable us to continue in this competition with high ambitions (NSO10);
- The main objective of the high-performance program for 2020 is to qualify for the men's [competition] with the aim of participation in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games (NSO2).

Sport participants

Sports organisations also commended their efforts to attract a substantial number of athletes and engage them

Table 1. Overview of the categories and subcategories.

Categories	Subcategories
Organise Competitions	Competitive events
	Sport participants
	Challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic
Train Stakeholders	The delivery of training programs
	Performance-focused training
Foster Human Development	Youth psychosocial development as a priority
	Few strategies towards youth psychosocial development
	The emergence of an assets-based approach to development

in competition. Such quantitative metrics were recognised as the main quality indicators. There seemed to be a great concern towards assessing a successful sports experience through the number of athletes participating in competitive events, with little reflection on how the competitions may have helped athletes develop holistically. NSO20 provided a list of competitions attended by Portuguese athletes in 2019: “World Championships in Shanghai (5 athletes), European Championships in Moscow (27 athletes), World Championship in Melbourne (2 athletes) ...” and “We have increased for the fourth consecutive year the number of athletes, coaches, teams and competitive games due to the good work developed by sports associations and clubs” (NSO15). It was quite clear sports organisations mainly aimed to “... promote and disseminate the sport, increase [the sport’s] visibility, keep the current athletes, coaches and recruit more athletes” (NSO17). These metrics were deemed sufficient and the most relevant to assess effectiveness.

Challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, many sports organisations were apprehensive about not meeting their main objectives of organising national and international competitive events. Such climate was clearly demonstrated by an implicit fear of not pleasing the government and potentially losing funding in the following year:

“[Sport] felt the consequences of the current economic and health crisis as there was a reduction in sports activities. The calendar for national competitions was significantly affected as most events for the current season were either cancelled and/or postponed. On an international level, the situation was the same... we hope that we can manage resources more effectively” (NSO14).

Train stakeholders

The delivery of training programs

National sports organisations acknowledged the importance of training coaches and referees. The simple act of delivering some training programs appeared to be considered sufficient to promote learning and attain desired outcomes, without much textual display devoted in the documents explaining the rationale and goals behind the training programs offered: “Training is key for developing our sport. Our federation has reinforced the investment made in training programs and will do the same in 2020. There are already partnerships with several institutions in place [to achieve this objective] ...” (NSO25) and “In 2020, educating coaches, referees and

athletes will be a priority” (NSO6). The data suggest a concern towards promoting various training opportunities to a vast array of stakeholders such as “coaches, referees, sports administrators and even physical education teachers (in school sport)” (NSO23).

Performance-focused training

When the coach education content was mentioned in the documents, the priorities set by national sports organisations were focused on developing modules centred on physical, technical, and tactical skill development. Such priorities reflect the need to help coaches achieve performance outcomes, which are often prioritised within the Portuguese sport system: “An area to improve in Portuguese [sport] is the physical/athletic domain that will demand new strategies. Therefore, we aim to promote a course for physical conditioning instructors...” (NSO15).

Foster human development

Youth psychosocial development as a priority

All sports organisations had clearly stated strategies to organise competitions, train stakeholders, and foster technical, tactical, and physical aspects of youth development through talent development programs and other initiatives. However, little attention was given to the concept of youth psychosocial development, which did not appear to be of high priority for national sports organisations, as few outlined how human development objectives were addressed in past or future plans. In most cases, human development represented one or two paragraphs in national sports organisations’ documents, with the promotion of ethics and the development of values positioned as automatic outcomes of sport participation. Nevertheless, statements in the guiding documents revealed that national sports organisations used governmental slogans about sport’s developmental potential. The sport was described as an optimal platform to teach values and foster ethics, irrespective of the objectives and strategies used: “With the aim of continuing to use the potential and intrinsic value of sport, the main purpose of this project is to reinforce the development of ethical values and fair play...” (NSO8) and “sport has values... that are always transmitted by coaches and athletes” (NSO26).

Few strategies towards youth psychosocial development

In their attempts to address human development, national sports organisations often referred to a deficit-reduction

approach that considers the importance of helping stakeholders understand the need to eliminate violence and doping: "... our audience has shown more and more interest in these sessions [courses centred on values through sport] and there is more and more outrage towards acts of violenceand stakeholders' behaviours that compromise important values such as ethics..." (NSO18). Such statements tended to equate ethics to the absence of negative experiences and narrowly viewed sport as helpful in reducing negative developmental outcomes. It was rare to see expressions such as "development" or "psychosocial development" in national sports organisations' guiding documents that are more indicative of an assets-building approach.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that some national sports organisations described how they used specific strategies for promoting ethical behaviour and/or positive attitudes during competitions. For example, organisations used white cards in their system for referees. White cards were created by the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth as a strategy to promote values and fair play in sports. They may be used by referees in competitive games to praise athletes, coaches, parents, or any other sports stakeholders for positive conduct (e.g., helping a player who got injured). Thus, White cards empower referees to advocate for the importance of values and fair play in sports. However, in the documents, no concrete objectives were discussed by national sports organisations that explicitly focused on what the white cards should achieve regarding key developmental outcomes for stakeholders. The lack of concrete strategies left a void between narratives on the power of sport and its actual impact on development.

The emergence of an assets-based approach to development

Of the 35 national sports organisations reviewed, two stood out regarding how much they acknowledged the importance of an assets-based approach to development and conceptualised life skills and values as actionable items. These organisations were involved in research-to-practice partnerships with local institutions and recognised the importance of "sharing experiences and perspectives with experts" (NSO9). They also conducted multiple workshops on positive youth development through sport. In addition, both organisations mentioned in their guiding documents the use of the white card and the importance of ethics in sports. In other words, these organisations used the same strategies outlined previously. Still, they went a step further and attempted to use positive youth development and partnerships with researchers to develop a more evidence-based and systematic approach to youth development. These partnerships included polytechnic

institutes and researchers who investigated youth development and coach development programs, assisted these sports organisations in creating and delivering coach training programs, and helped to develop evidence-based policies and practices.

These national sports organisations reported how they made concrete efforts to help coaches, parents, and sports administrators develop strategies targeting the psychosocial development of youth. These organisations were the only ones that mentioned the concept of "life skills" and how such skills can contribute to youth's psychosocial development. For example, NSO9 discussed how it attempted to connect its training programs with the needs of its stakeholders by operationalising ethics in the training programs: "It is necessary to provide an operational definition of ethics and create opportunities for experiential learning [in coach training]" (NSO9). Similarly, NSO28 attempted to collaborate with some of its clubs to help them foster life skills and values:

Coaches, as well as sports administrators will be the target of our interventions so we can include key stakeholders responsible for creating an inclusive environment for teaching values and life skills. We will collaborate with sports clubs to (a) create coach education courses that consider their actual needs and (b) research the impact of these coach education courses.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine Portuguese sports organisations' strategic decisions towards fostering human development. Most sports programs across the country have a competitive focus. It should be noted that having the majority of content in annual reports and activity plans around performance and competition is to be expected, as most funds are provided for national sports organisations to create opportunities for structuring competitive events, recruiting athletes and fostering sports participation. Nevertheless, in consideration of the objective of fostering human development, further textual display should be provided in annual reports and activity plans to discuss the strategies used by sports organisations to promote the psychosocial development of youth if we consider that more than 500.000 youth participate in sport in Portugal. As many researchers have noted, a focus on competition does not need to come at the expense of the psychosocial development of youth (Camiré, 2015; Harwood et al., 2015). The technical and tactical aspects of sports can be taught alongside psychosocial skills and across a range of sports program types. However, most sports organisations did not report psychosocial development as a target during the planning of competitions or make a

substantial investment in using competitions as a developmental platform.

As positioned by Hartmann and Kwauk (2011, p. 15) “sport programming must be combined with other, non-sport programming and investment if broader developmental goals (whatever the specifics) are to be achieved”. In other words, the lack of investment and managerial strategies directed towards psychosocial development during the organisation of competitions may compromise sport’s potential as a vehicle for holistic youth development and social change (Coakley, 2011; 2016). It may be necessary to carefully reflect on sport’s reach and actual impact on youth development. Evangelical discourses claiming that sports automatically lead to psychosocial development are misleading and unrealistic and may be replaced by action-oriented policies with concrete implications for stakeholders (Coakley, 2011).

Findings showed how coach training was considered important by national sports organisations in equipping coaches and other sports stakeholders with the necessary knowledge to intervene in youth sports. The relevance of coach training in helping coaches create meaningful athlete experiences in youth sports has been highlighted by several researchers (MacDonald et al., 2020; Strachan et al., 2016). However, coach education may need to be more strategically positioned by national sports organisations in terms of how exactly coaches can develop meaningful knowledge that helps them consider youth’s developmental needs. Without a careful design and rationale communicated to the intended audience, coach education alone may not automatically lead to better athlete experiences in youth sports.

Based on these findings, it is important to consider that how coach training is delivered may be influenced by national sports organisations’ philosophies and practices (Coalter, 2010). In other words, if national sports organisations simply focus on physical, technical, and tactical skill development and do not recognise the need for programming centred on psychosocial development, coaches may not feel any urgency to learn how to foster in their athletes a variety of personal and social skills such as respect, goal setting, and teamwork. Further, suppose the sports system mainly targets and values performance outcomes. In that case, sports organisations may pressure coaches to exclusively develop knowledge that enables them to achieve this objective, which, in most cases, remains the reality on the ground. Although higher education institutions are also responsible for training coaches, sport organisations play a pivotal role in this process. We must consider physical, technical, tactical, and psychosocial development as equally relevant pursuits within youth sports. Moving forward, national sports organisations must

help coaches develop their athletes in all these developmental domains and search for novel approaches and frameworks (Bean, Kramers, Forneris, & Camiré, 2018; Holt et al., 2017). The government and sports organisations could work jointly with experts in the field of youth development to develop a national coach training plan that targets aspects of human development (both individual and collective) that are most relevant in contemporary society, such as psychosocial development, mental health, and social justice.

Some organisations have positioned the concept of ethics as a framework to promote psychosocial development. This undoubtedly stems from the fact that the Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (2015) endorses a national policy for ethics in sport, which has resulted in some organisations mentioning ethics in their documents. However, previous research conducted in Portugal has shown how coaches often situate the promotion of ethics as a secondary objective, with some coaches even positioning ethics as irrelevant to the youth sports system (Santos et al., 2017; 2019a). Considering youth’s developmental needs, national sports organisations must further examine how they address ‘youth development’ and the extent to which they provide concrete guidelines for promoting ethics and teaching values in their sport environment.

Current approaches to development used by “... sports officials, policymakers, and advocates often have relatively unsophisticated understandings of development and the role of sport therein” (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011, p. 1). Moving forward, sports organisations that aim to comprehensively conceptualise youth development in their activity plan and wish to do so must consider some pressing contemporary issues surrounding mental health and social justice (Camiré, Newman, Bean, & Strachan, 2021; Gonzalez, Kokozos, Byrd, & McKee, 2020). Nowadays, psychosocial development must be operationalised by sports organisations in their policy documents according to the degree to which youth develop the necessary skills to become activists for social change in a society where racism, sexism, and discrimination are very evident challenges in the sports domain (Love, Deeb, & Waller, 2019). Therefore, sports organisations may adopt a two-pronged approach to development whereby, in an integrated manner, they foster human development at both an individual (e.g., mental health) and collective (e.g., social justice) level.

If sport is to be used as a platform to achieve a variety of outcomes inclusive of mental health, social justice, and character development (Coalter, 2010; Lerner, 2021; Newman, 2020), then sports organisations have a mandate to raise awareness about the importance of helping youth critically

reflect on the state of affairs in today's society. Sports organisations should thus view: "youth as participants in systems of oppression who can, with the right environmental support, challenge and transform those systems ..." (Gonzalez et al., 2020, p. 36-37). Additionally, sports organisations should clearly outline their targeted psychosocial outcomes in their activity and annual plans, thereby guiding stakeholders' implementation efforts (Darnell et al., 2019). For example, sports organisations may define a series of psychosocial skills such as goal setting, decision making and leadership and strategies for coaches to foster these skills (e.g., create opportunities for athletes to lead in practice, become responsible for a cause and motivate others to contribute). Another example is how sports organisations can become advocates for mental health and social justice and define strategies for coaches to deal with trauma derived from the COVID-19 pandemic (Whitley, Smith, Dorsch, Bowers, & Centeio, 2021).

The present study identified two organisations emphasising psychosocial development through an assets-based approach. An asset-based approach to development focuses on the youth's strengths and the need to develop a range of psychosocial skills that may help them thrive in and outside the sports arena through concrete strategies used by sports stakeholders (Lerner, 2021). These sports organisations represent a minority who, through their documents, appear to prioritise psychosocial development by integrating explicit and direct strategies such as training coaches to foster life skills. Past research in the Portuguese context and elsewhere has shown how organisations involved in research-to-practice projects demonstrate increased openness and awareness about how to foster psychosocial development (Camiré et al., 2020; Kramers, Camiré, & Bean, 2020). Research-to-practice projects aim to help organisations use research evidence to improve the effectiveness of their programming and develop evidence-based practices. For instance, research-to-practice partnerships conducted in Canada (Camiré, Kendellen, Rathwell, & Charbonneau, 2018; Camiré et al., 2020) have resulted in better athlete experiences, coaches' ability to foster psychosocial development, and increased access to research evidence. Therefore, Portuguese polytechnic institutes and universities could work to develop further partnerships with national sports organisations, as well as with the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, to inform policy, funding, and sports organisations' practices. Although partnering initiatives offer promise, as Spaaij and Schailée (2021) outlined, there is still much resistance permeating the youth sports system when it comes to meaningful change through the propagation of discursive practices that systematically and blatantly ignore national level policies.

Thus, holding sports organisations accountable for fostering human development is necessary. Nonetheless, substantial changes may be needed within the Portuguese sports system before accountability toward fostering human development becomes a tangible reality on the ground (Palheta, Ciampolini, Nunes, Santos, & Milistetd, 2020). The policy creation process could be further participatory and transparent. The COVID-19 pandemic and its many disturbances to the sports system offer opportunities to reflect on the importance of sports in contemporary society and its potential as a public health initiative if carefully implemented. Thus, the government could engage in the process of devising a robust policy for human development in conjunction with national sports organisations. There also needs to be a clear operationalisation of how organisations can meet policy objectives. A high-level guiding document which provides guidelines for sports clubs could be developed with input from national sports organisations in manners that provide flexibility to contextualise strategies for fostering human development. Therefore, we encourage organisations to undertake the exercise of situating their preferred approach to fostering human development and conceive action-oriented guidelines enabling stakeholders on the ground to foster positive outcomes.

To promote a culture where sports organisations and coaches value psychosocial development as a worthwhile objective, the funding provided to sports organisations must reflect all three objectives outlined by the government. As such, if a governing body insists that human development through sport is paramount, it must attempt to do more in requiring sports organisations to demonstrate exactly how they integrate human development activities in their programming (Coalter, 2010; Dorsch et al., 2020). Therefore, sports organisations are responsible for establishing and implementing organisational values and priorities that reflect the policies (Camiré, Werthner, & Trudel, 2009; Dorsch et al., 2020). Clearly, associating human development priorities with funding (Darnell et al., 2019) can serve as a roadmap for sports organisations to follow (Grix, 2009). As stated by Ivašković and Čater (2018, p. 799), funding creates "... a relationship of dependence where the external factors form a system of indirect supervision and guidance of the organisational management...". Funding influences accountability and expectations set by the sport system. In Portugal, funding appears loosely tied to the human development objective, making it unclear how sports organisations integrate it into their activities (Diário da República, 2008). Further, national sports organisations receive little guidance and supervision while attempting to achieve human development objectives.

The recommendations offered in the present study should be considered in light of the limitations encountered. The annual reports and examined activity plans reflect a specific time period. Sports organisations may currently be in the process of updating documents and developing new programs. Although the researchers made efforts to obtain as much information as possible from organisations, some information may have been missed during the data collection process. These limitations could have impacted our analysis. Despite these limitations, we encourage stakeholders in the sport system to consider psychosocial development and identify meaningful ways of using sports programming as a tool for social change.

CONCLUSION

The present study suggests that, based on an analysis of annual reports and activity plans, the human development of youth does not appear to be at the forefront of priorities for Portuguese national sports organisations. We encourage the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, as well as other sports organisations and governing bodies, to reflect on the concept of psychosocial development and determine ways of better integrating it into the sport system, given that the fostering of human development through sport can have long-lasting individual and societal effects (Camiré et al., 2022). Future studies are needed to continue to examine the relationship between national sports policies and on-the-ground practices to help identify the variables that contribute to or hinder efforts to foster psychosocial development. Finally, there is the need to understand youth sports as an integrated system and analyse sports stakeholders' needs and challenges while attempting to foster psychosocial development across socio-cultural contexts.

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