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Decentralization and opportunities for sports development: a systematic review

[Descentralización y oportunidades de desarrollo deportivo: una revisión sistemática]

[Descentralização e oportunidades de desenvolvimento desportivo: uma revisão sistemática]

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Abstract

Introduction: decentralization has emerged as a key strategy to drive global sports development, influencing public policies and generating opportunities in areas such as social inclusion, access to facilities and community strengthening.

Objective: analyze research related to decentralization and its impacts on sports development.

Materials and methods: the PRISMA method was used, 1,150 articles from databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc and ScienceDirect were reviewed. Inclusion criteria limited the selection to scientific and review articles published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in a detailed analysis of 17 relevant studies.

Results: The results revealed that decentralization has a positive impact on access to sports infrastructure, promoting a better distribution of resources and greater accessibility in rural areas and marginalized communities. However, significant limitations were also identified, such as a lack of political will and the absence of effective social development plans, which make compliance with these provisions difficult.

Conclusions: decentralization encourages more inclusive and equitable sports development by facilitating participation at different levels. However, the need for effective coordination between the State and local governments is highlighted to guarantee adequate administration of the budget and achieve the stated objectives. This approach can be fundamental to overcome inequalities and strengthen the social impact of sport in various regions.

Keywords: sports decentralization, equal opportunities, public policies, sports development, sports infrastructure

Resumen

Introducción: la descentralización ha surgido como una estrategia clave para impulsar el desarrollo deportivo global, influyendo en las políticas públicas y generando oportunidades en áreas como inclusión social, acceso a instalaciones y fortalecimiento comunitario.

Objetivo: analizar investigaciones relacionadas con la descentralización y sus impactos en el desarrollo deportivo.

Materiales y métodos: se utilizó el método PRISMA, se revisaron 1,150 artículos provenientes de bases de datos como Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc y ScienceDirect. Los criterios de inclusión limitaron la selección a artículos científicos y de revisión

publicados entre 2019 y 2024, lo que resultó en un análisis detallado de 17 estudios relevantes.

Resultados: los resultados revelaron que la descentralización tiene un impacto positivo en el acceso a la infraestructura deportiva, promoviendo una mejor distribución de recursos y una mayor accesibilidad en áreas rurales y comunidades marginadas. Sin embargo, también se identificaron limitaciones significativas, como la falta de voluntad política y la ausencia de planes de desarrollo social efectivos, que dificultan el cumplimiento de estas disposiciones.

Conclusiones: la descentralización fomenta un desarrollo deportivo más inclusivo y equitativo al facilitar la participación en diferentes niveles. No obstante, se destaca la necesidad de una coordinación efectiva entre el Estado y los gobiernos locales para garantizar una administración adecuada del presupuesto y alcanzar los objetivos planteados. Este enfoque puede ser fundamental para superar desigualdades y fortalecer el impacto social del deporte en diversas regiones.

Palabras clave: emprendimiento escolar; motivación escolar; empoderamiento estudiantil; estrategias pedagógicas.

Resumo

Introdução: A descentralização emergiu como uma estratégia chave para impulsionar o desenvolvimento desportivo global, influenciando políticas públicas e gerando oportunidades em áreas como inclusão social, acesso a instalações e fortalecimento comunitário.

Objetivo: analisar pesquisas relacionadas à descentralização e seus impactos no desenvolvimento esportivo.

Materiais e métodos: utilizou-se o método PRISMA, foram revisados 1.150 artigos de bases de dados como Scopus, Web of Science, Redalyc e ScienceDirect. Os critérios de inclusão limitaram a seleção a artigos científicos e de revisão publicados entre 2019 e 2024, resultando em uma análise detalhada de 17 estudos relevantes.

Resultados: Os resultados revelaram que a descentralização tem um impacto positivo no acesso às infraestruturas desportivas, promovendo uma melhor distribuição de recursos e maior acessibilidade nas zonas rurais e comunidades marginalizadas. No entanto, também foram identificadas limitações significativas, como a falta de vontade política e a ausência de planos de desenvolvimento social eficazes, que dificultam o cumprimento destas disposições.

Conclusões: a descentralização incentiva um desenvolvimento desportivo mais inclusivo e equitativo, facilitando a participação a diferentes níveis. No entanto, é destacada a necessidade de uma coordenação eficaz entre o Estado e os governos locais para garantir uma administração adequada do orçamento e alcançar os objectivos declarados. Esta abordagem pode ser fundamental para superar as desigualdades e reforçar o impacto social do desporto em diversas regiões.

Palavras-chave: empreendedorismo escolar; motivação escolar; empoderamento, estudantil; estratégias pedagógicas

Introduction

Decentralization in sport presents the problem of low efficiency of state management of sport development in Ukraine needs further elaboration, as it is characterized by extremely weak implementation of Ukrainian laws, current regulations and departmental acts. (Dorofieieva and Prikhodko, 2020). The decentralization of sports policies is a global phenomenon that has gained relevance in recent decades, driven by the need to adapt sports management models to local and regional realities. Globally, this trend seeks to improve the efficiency of resource distribution, strengthen sports infrastructure and promote social inclusion, especially in marginalized or rural communities. However, decentralization has also generated a number of challenges, from a lack of coordination between different levels of government to ineffective management of available resources.

In the international context, various studies have addressed how this process impacts different regions. In Asia, Anderson (2021) points to the challenges and opportunities of decentralized policies, highlighting how they influence sports development and accessibility in countries with large regional disparities.

In Latin America, Bertoni (2019) and Green (2020) analyze the impact of decentralization on youth sport, identifying both benefits and limitations in the implementation of sports programs aimed at young people. Meanwhile, in Africa, Browne (2021) highlights how decentralization can be an engine for community development, although lack of resources and insufficient infrastructure remain significant barriers. Specific cases such as Bogotá (Castro García, 2021) and Sopó (Carrillo Vargas, 2022) show how decentralization directly affects the provision of facilities and the management of sports centers. These local studies provide a better understanding of the specific challenges that cities and communities face when trying to implement decentralized sports policies, which often lack the necessary structure to ensure their long-term sustainability. Overall, they reveal that decentralization offers several opportunities, such as greater accessibility and the customization of sports programs. However, it also faces significant challenges related to governance, efficient resource allocation, and administrative improvement of governments within each institution. The key to success lies in finding a balance between local autonomy and institutional support to ensure that decentralized policies are effective, sustainable, and inclusive. The questions of interest and objectives were developed. (Table 1)

Table 1.- Research questions and objectives

RSL Research Questions	RSL Research Objectives
General Question: How did decentralization and opportunities affect sports development?	General objective:
Specific questions:	Explain how decentralization and opportunities affected sports development?
Where have interventions been made and which population is affected by problems due to decentralization and opportunities in sports development?	Specific objectives:
What types of decentralized sports policy implementation have been reviewed?	Mention where interventions have been made, as the population is affected by the problems caused by decentralization and opportunities in sports development.
What results have been achieved in decentralization and opportunities for sports development?	Indicate what types of implementations of decentralized sports policies have been reviewed
	Compare results obtained in decentralization and opportunities for sports development

The justification for analyzing the selected articles lies in the growing importance of decentralization in sports management worldwide and its effects on access, development, and participation in sports activities in various regions. The decentralization of sports policies has become a relevant topic due to its ability to adapt sports policies to local needs and realities, generating both opportunities and challenges in different geographic, social, and economic contexts.

Materials and methods

TITLE-ABS-KEY (" Decentralization " OR " Equal Opportunities " OR " Policies Public " OR " politics sports "OR" management sports "OR" development sports "OR" Infrastructure sports ") AND PUBYEAR 2018 AND PUBYEAR 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI")) AND (LIMITTO (DOCTYPE , " ar ")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Spanish")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Public Policies"))

AND (LIMIT TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Spain") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Brazil") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Colombia") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Argentina") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Chile")) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA , "all") OR LIMIT-TO (OA , " publisherfullgold ")

For the storage of information from the studies carried out, screening was performed to obtain important information in the literature search (Table 2)

Table 2.- Criteria applied to the literature search

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Articles within the years range 2019 to 2024 Studies where the subject matter corresponds to opportunities for sports development Documents in scientific article format Studies available in Spanish, English and Portuguese. Documents that have the search keywords Open access articles	Items that are not within the year range 2019 to 2024 Studies that do not correspond to the subject matter correspond to sports development opportunities Documents that are not in scientific article format Studies that are not available in Spanish, English, and Portuguese. Documents that do not have the search keywords Closed access articles

After identifying the 97 open access articles, 80 documents were excluded, considering 17 files that are related to the research objective (Figure 1).

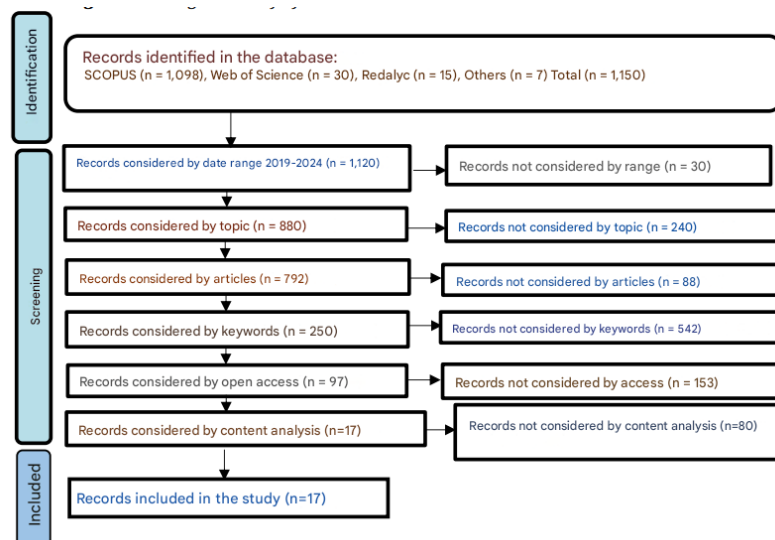


Fig. 1.- Flowchart of article selection using the PRISMA method

To analyze the information from each selected article, a matrix was structured in MS Excel with the relevant points, such as: objectives, proposed policies, and country.

Results and discussion

Clustering was performed by keyword co-occurrence. The largest nodes correspond to the words “decentralization”, “sports development”, “sports policy”, “community development”, “youth”, and “governance”, indicating that these are recurring concepts in the articles. Links between nodes, such as between “decentralization” and “governance”, indicate that these concepts tend to appear together in many documents, indicating that they are closely related in the literature. The colors of the nodes indicate which thematic group each term belongs to. Thick lines between nodes indicate a strong relationship between these concepts in the literature, while thin lines, although related, do not appear together as frequently (Figure 2).



Fig. 2.- Flowchart of article selection using the PRISMA method

After reviewing, reading and extracting the findings from the articles, for a better understanding and to achieve the objective, the study sample was grouped by objectives and proposed policies (Table 3)

Table 3.- Background Grouped by objectives and proposed policies

Authors	Year	Country	Goals	Proposed Policies
Anderson, M.	2021	Asia	Examine the challenges and opportunities of decentralizing sports policies in Asia.	Promote the decentralization of sports management at the local level, improve infrastructure, and facilitate access in rural communities.
Bertoni, L.	2019	South America (Latin America)	To evaluate the effect of decentralization on youth sports activities in South America.	Strengthen decentralization to promote youth participation and the creation of more sports infrastructure.
Bielsa, M. & García, D.	2020	International	Analyze how decentralized sports structures affect public access to sports facilities.	Decentralize resources to improve access to sports facilities, especially in urban and rural areas.
Browne, R.	2021	Africa	Analyze the effects of decentralized sports policies on community development in Africa.	Promote the creation of decentralized sports infrastructure that contributes to the social and economic development of local communities.
Carrillo Vargas, THE	2022	Colombia	Propose a management methodology for sports development centers in Sopó.	Optimize resource management in sports centers through a decentralized methodological approach.

Castro García, OD	2021	Colombia (Bogotá)	Analysis of the use of compact sports equipment in the Fontibón area of Bogotá.	Implement compact sports equipment for optimize space and facilitate access to sport in dense urban areas.
Dorofiieieva , T. and Prikhodko , V.	2020	Ukraine	To assess the importance of decentralization for the future development of sport in Ukraine.	Promote decentralized policies that redistribute resources and encourage the creation of sports infrastructure at the regional level.
Green, M.	2020	International	Explore the opportunities of decentralization for youth development in sport.	Implement decentralized programs to encourage youth participation and improve access to sports programs.
Harris, L.	2019	Europe (various countries)	Examining the decentralization of public sports funding in Europe.	Strengthen the decentralization of sports financing at the regional level to improve equity and access to resources.
Liu, Y.	2020	China	Analyze how decentralization influences accessibility to sports facilities in rural areas.	Implement decentralized policies to improve construction and access to different sporting environments in remote areas of China.
Johnson, R.	2019	International	Analyze decentralization in sports governance and its impact on local development opportunities.	Decentralize sports governance, enabling local communities to manage their own sporting resources and opportunities.
Lozano, M.	2020	Caribbean (Small Islands)	Analyze the impact of decentralization on sport in small island states in the Caribbean.	Promote decentralized sports policies that benefit small island nations through greater autonomy in sports management.

Martin, L.	2021	International	Explore the global impact of decentralization on sports development.	Create policy frameworks that promote decentralization to support local and inclusive development in all regions of the world.
McDonald, P. & Griffiths, M.	2020	International	Analyze the effects of decentralized sports policies on national sporting opportunities.	Develop strategies to enhance national sporting opportunities through decentralization of resources and decision-making.
Morrow, R.	2019	Europe	Study the decentralization of sports financing in the context of European football.	Create a decentralized financing model that promotes the equitable development of football across Europe's regions.
Nguyen, C.	2019	Asia	Examine how the decentralization of sports administration affects regional youth engagement.	Promote decentralization to engage youth in and participate in various sports program offerings.

Answering the questions:

How does decentralization affect opportunities in sports development? Authors Dorofiiieva and Prikhodko (2020) highlighted the inefficiency and lack of capacity of state management in the achievements of sport in Ukraine, citing the poor implementation of current laws and regulations as a key factor in this problem. On the other hand, Anderson (2021) and Johnson (2019) point out that decentralization has allowed sports policies to be better adapted to local needs and characteristics, which can lead to greater effectiveness in program implementation. This is especially relevant in contexts such as Asia, where disparities in access to sports resources between urban and rural areas are significant. Instead of a centralized and homogeneous, local government can design strategies, improving participation and access to sports facilities. Lozano (2020) points out that, in the case of small Caribbean islands, decentralization allows local governments to better manage limited resources and create sports development opportunities tailored to their specific realities. However, he also argues that, due to their

size and limited resources, small nations must overcome barriers such as lack of infrastructure and geographic isolation.

Where have interventions been made and which populations have been harmed by the problems of decentralization and opportunities in sports development?

For Castro (2021), the city of Bogotá does not have what is necessary for sports equipment, much less public places for the adequate practice of high-performance sports. It is considered one of the most affected places and with few adequate spaces for sports practice, considering its population.

Disadvantaged populations include young people in rural areas with less access to sports resources and programs due to deficiencies in the coordination and distribution of funds (Bertoni, 2019). In Africa, marginalized communities, especially in rural regions, where sports resources are limited and decentralization has widened regional gaps (Browne, 2021), are particularly vulnerable to these challenges. In Europe, however, low-income urban groups have, in some cases, not been prioritized in local policies, limiting their access to sports programs (Harris, 2019; Morrow, 2019). Similarly, in the Caribbean, smaller communities lack the resources to maintain consistent and sustainable programs (Lozano, 2020). In Ukraine, conflict-affected regions have hindered the effective implementation of sports policies (Dorofiieva and Prikhodko, 2020). In Latin America, the affected populations are urban areas with high population density and rural communities with less sports infrastructure (Carrillo Vargas, 2022; Castro García, 2021).

What types of decentralized sports policy implementation have been reviewed?

The importance of creating regional youth sports programs (Bertoni, 2019; Serrano, 2019) and specific policies to engage youth in sports activities (Nguyen, 2019; Green, 2020). The comprehensive development of youth was promoted through access to local sports. Likewise, resources were decentralized so that marginalized youth communities had sports opportunities (Green, 2020). To this end, participation and the development of sports skills among youth in disadvantaged rural and urban areas were increased

(Nguyen, 2019). The construction of sports facilities in rural and urban communities. And the management of public access to infrastructure through local sports federations (Bielsa and García, 2020), and in this way, equitable access to sports facilities for rural areas and densely populated urban areas was improved, Therefore, inequalities in sports infrastructure between centralized and decentralized regions were reduced (Bielsa and García, 2020). For Pérez, (2020). The decentralization of community-oriented sports programs was achieved, very important to encourage participation in low-cost and accessible sports activities for communities, in this way it promoted social cohesion and health through community participation in sports. The important thing about the articles reviewed in terms of Local Sports Governance is the Creation of local bodies for the management of decentralized sports policies (Johnson, 2019). Decentralization of sports financing to subnational governments (Morrow, 2019). Improving the effectiveness of decision-making by adapting sports policies to local needs. Promote transparency and public participation

What results have been achieved in decentralization and opportunities for sports development?

Decentralization has improved accessibility to sports facilities in marginalized rural and urban communities (Bielsa & García, 2020; Simpson, 2021).

Youth Sports Development: In South America and Asia, it has promoted youth-specific sports programs, strengthening participation and development (Bertoni, 2019; Green, 2020; Nguyen, 2019). Community Engagement: It has empowered local communities by enabling them to design and manage sports initiatives tailored to their needs (Browne, 2021).

The decentralization of sports policies has had a significant impact on sports development worldwide, presenting both opportunities and challenges for different regions and populations. Through the studies reviewed, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding how decentralization

It affects access to sports resources and opportunities for development in different social groups. The objectives of this research were achieved.

In terms of intervention areas and affected populations, decentralization has primarily affected rural areas, disadvantaged communities, and vulnerable groups in various regions of the world. As mentioned in the studies by Liu (2020) and Bertoni (2019), decentralization has allowed for greater accessibility to sports facilities in areas that traditionally lacked these resources. However, disadvantaged populations are also identified, mainly in contexts where local governments' capacity to effectively manage sports resources is limited, negatively impacting smaller communities with less infrastructure, as observed in Africa (Browne, 2021) and some rural areas in Asia (Anderson, 2021).

The implementation of reviewed decentralized sports policies ranges from the local management of infrastructure and resources to the creation of youth sports development programs tailored to the specific needs of local communities. For example, according to Green's (2020) study, the decentralization of sports policy in Europe has allowed local governments to implement specific youth development programs in disadvantaged areas. In turn, in the context of Latin America, Bertoni (2019) shows how decentralization has facilitated the implementation of projects focused on youth sports, especially in countries such as Brazil and Argentina, where sporting events are promoted, and where social inequality is sought to be combated by promoting sports activities.

The results of the different studies reviewed were compared, and several common trends were observed. In Asia, Anderson (2021) and Liu (2020) agree that decentralization has improved access to sports facilities in remote areas, but it has also revealed challenges in local management and a lack of resources. In the context of Latin America, Bertoni (2019) highlights that, while decentralization has allowed for a greater focus on youth sport, problems related to a lack of local infrastructure and funding persist. On the other hand, in Europe, Harris (2019) and Morrow (2019) indicate that decentralization has allowed countries to adapt their policies to local realities, promoting sports development more effectively in regions with specific needs, although problems

of lack of coordination between governments have also been identified. Finally, in Africa, Browne (2021) highlights that decentralization has favored the creation of community programs, but the lack of funding and adequate infrastructure remains a significant challenge.

Conclusions

Decentralization encourages more inclusive and equitable sports development by facilitating participation at different levels. However, the need for effective coordination between the State and local governments is highlighted to guarantee adequate administration of the budget and achieve the stated objectives. This approach can be fundamental to overcome inequalities and strengthen the social impact of sport in various regions.

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Conflict of interest statement:

The authors declare having competing interests.

Author contribution statement:

The authors have participated in the redaction of the manuscript and the documentary review.



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