

Public sports policy: a formative experience for sports administrators based on the logical framework approach

ANDREA DE OLIVEIRA BARRA¹, SHEILA APARECIDA PEREIRA DOS SANTOS SILVA², MARIA RACHEL VITORINO³

¹ Federal Center for Technological Education of Minas Gerais (Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Minas Gerais - CEFET/MG), Nepomuceno, BRAZIL

² Saint Judas Thadeus University (Universidade São Judas Tadeu - USJT), São Paulo, BRAZIL

³ Federal University for Lavras (Universidade Federal de Lavras - UFLA), Lavras, BRAZIL

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Abstract:

The sports governance literature exhibits a gap regarding the training and preparation of sports governance managers in Brazilian municipalities. The present article describes qualitative, case-study-type, action research that aims to analyze the possibilities and limitations of employing the Logical Framework Approach in the training of managers to plan, monitor and evaluate public sports policies and programs in a Brazilian municipality. Assessment of the reality was conducted through documentary analyses and semi-structured interviews, followed by application of the Logical Framework Approach to research subjects, aiming to overcome the current situation, which showed a lack of structured public-policy management action and unfamiliarity of physical education professionals with the mechanisms for its implementation. Consequently, it was observed that the initial interest and understanding of the model were positive but not enough to enact the procedures under study. The barriers encountered in the use of the methodology and the consequent change in the way managers work are linked to culturally ingrained practices that are resistant to changes in the behavioral and organizational culture.

Key words: Professional Development; Sports Administration; Planning; Monitoring; Evaluation.

Introduction

According to Amabile (2012, p. 390), public policies “are decisions that involve broad public issues and aim to satisfy the collective’s interest.” Public policies can thus be considered actions, goals, and plans that federal, state, and municipal governments undertake to ensure societal well-being and promote the public interest. Public policies have two functions: to establish social rights and to externalize the planning function of the state (Marrara, 2011).

Mihailescu (2008, p. 24) presents that “the managerial management is a complex process which is realized by many activities, attributions and tasks, determined in a managerial way, which are realized by the people with competences for these actions”, wich in this essay is regard to the government as described above, and will be deeply discussed as it follows.

Brazil began to consider sports as deserving of government and public policy attention in 1937, with the establishment of the Physical Education Division of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which is today the Ministry of Sports. This agency became even more relevant when Brazil was chosen to host the World Cup in 2014 and the city of Rio de Janeiro was selected to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016, making Brazil only the fourth country ever to consecutively host two major sports events. Based on research on public policy for sports and recreation in Brazil, Bonalume (2010) asserts that studies are scarce and that the field needs more attention from the academic community.

At the international level, academic research has been more consistent and focused on sports systems and policies in different countries, as in studies by Buggel (1986), Coakley (2010), Green and Collins (2008), Houlihan (2002), Riordan (1991), and Sedlacek, Matousek, Holcek and Moravec (1994). Their studies focus on how sports policies are implemented, how responsibility for sports administration is divided among levels of government, why countries succeed or fail in international sports competitions; how sports policies are organized in different countries, and how high-level sports policies are altered in different countries, such as Canada, the United States, and Australia.

The results of this research show that the state of sports administration is precarious, and despite having existed for quite some time as a professional field, sports administration has only recently begun to develop in a scientific manner (Bastos & Mazzei, 2012).

Sports administration consists of the application of concepts and theories of administration and the principles of planning, direction, and control to different aspects of sports (Mazzei, Amaya & da Cunha Bastos, 2013; Rocha & Bastos, 2011). Starting from the application of these principles to the field of sports administration research in Brazil, these studies generally involve creating study groups, improving professional development, and understanding the profiles of professionals in this field, as exemplified by the work of Amaral and Bastos (2015), Filhos et al. (2013), and Azevêdo and Spessoto (2009). These types of studies are extremely important in the area of sports administration and seek to fill gaps in our knowledge of the field; however, they do not seem to be of interest to or be read by professional sports administrators who are active in the public management of sports and recreation. These studies could be read over the course of an administrator's education or as part of ongoing professional development; however, "current practices do not yet seem to reflect a desire on the part of administrators to stay up-to-date or improve their job-related qualifications" (Rocco, Amaral, Bastos & Mazzei, 2015, p. 32).

According to Barbu & Barbu (2011, p. 455), "Management also involves the control of organization activities, members and its staff members so that individuals act according to the interests of the organization and work according to an agreed strategic direction". That proposition ensure the thinking of a necessity of a sport administration based on clear principles.

One of the problems noted in the literature is a lack of consensus about how professional sports administrators should be trained. Bastos and Mazzei (2012) assert there is no consensus on the subject matter that should be taught in sports administration degree programs in Brazil. Specialists in the field disagree about fundamental questions: Which curriculum model should be used in sports administration degree programs? What courses should be taught and how should the curriculum be structured in college degree programs in physical education, sports and administration? Mocsányi and da Cunha Bastos (2005, p. 55) underscore a "lack of training among managers."

Based on this overview of recent research, there is a need for studies that contribute to our knowledge of how planning, monitoring and evaluation methods can be applied to public sports policies. This concern led us to our research project, which seeks empirically based answers to the following questions: Do planning, monitoring, and evaluation take place in public sports policies at the municipal level? What theoretical bases underlie these activities? Who are the administrators who implement sports policies?

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) is one of the most widely used evaluation methodologies for public sector programs around the world, and its use in Brazil has been growing since the 1980s (Zingoni, 2007). The LFA was developed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Pfeiffer, 2000) as an instrument for planning and systematizing social interventions, and it offers the advantage of making the evaluation and monitoring of these interventions possible. In summary, applying the LFA facilitates the planning process (Neto, 2010).

The LFA has been adopted by international financing and cooperation organizations, state institutions and private companies, such as USAID, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Inter-American Development Bank (Pfeiffer, 2000). In the public sector, the approach has also been adopted to support the Brazilian Federal Government Multi-Year Plan.

State institutions and several private companies also use the LFA as a reference to guide their support for social projects. Pereira, Conceição and Nunez (2009, p. 69) indicate that this methodology has been used consistently by "the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, the Brazilian Federal Court of Auditors, the United Nations, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank."

Given these considerations, the objective of the present study was to describe and evaluate the management process of a municipal sports department from the perspective of sports administrators, aiming to implement the LFA as a tool for planning, monitoring, and evaluating the actions of this department.

Materials and methods

The action research method was used in this qualitative case study. Thiollent (2011) describes action research as a method or research strategy that combines several social research techniques to establish a structure that is collective, participative, and active at the level of the information gathering process. Action research allows for the use of different, specific techniques at each stage or phase of the research process.

This research was conducted in three stages, the exploratory phase, the seminar presentation phase, and the action plan phase. Different techniques were used in each stage, which will be described in detail in the corresponding sections below.

Research site

The municipality of Lavras is located in the southern region of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, it has an area of 564.5 square kilometers and has an estimated population of 99,229 in 2014 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2015). Good roads connect Lavras to major cities such as Belo Horizonte (230 km), São Paulo (370 km), and Rio de Janeiro (420 km).

The action research was conducted from February to July 2015 in the Municipal Department of Sports, Recreation, and Tourism (Secretaria de Esportes, Lazer e Turismo, SELT), the public agency responsible for the development of sports policies in the municipality.

The SELT was created in 1991 to develop sports, recreation, and tourism in the city. It sponsors projects that cater to the elderly, children, and people with disabilities to ensure social inclusion and improve the quality of life of the city's citizens. Public facilities are also used by private institutions that operate training programs for indoor soccer, volleyball, and basketball. The city offers sports activities for beginners, for people seeking physical exercise as a form of recreation, and for sports teams training to compete in local, regional, and state championships.

The SELT has twelve employees (including both permanent staff and temporary contractors) and a Municipal Secretary of Sports. Seven permanent staff members and the Secretary—seven males and one female—all of whom had more than 11 years of experience in physical education and were at least 37 years old participated in the project. Participants were from the following management positions in the SELT: the Municipal Secretary of Sports, two department heads, a sports coordinator and three physical education teachers. By decision of the Secretary, temporary contractors did not participate.

All participants gave informed consent in writing, and the project's procedures were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the São Judas Tadeu University under protocol number 963,381/2015.

Research phases

Exploratory phase

The basic element to be considered in this research is the diagnosis, which consists of attempting to understand the signs and symptoms by identifying the actors involved and their roles in relation to best practices. This phase “consists of getting to know the research site, the stakeholders and their expectations and reaching a preliminary assessment or ‘diagnosis’ of the situation, the most pressing problems, and what can be done” (Thiollent, 2011, p. 56).

The study began with the diagnosis of the current department situation with regard to organizational aspects described by the Municipal Secretary of Sports and by the teachers. An initial assessment was also conducted at the first meeting through an informal, recorded conversation guided by a series of questions regarding planning, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies to identify expectations, current problems, and the population being served, among other aspects. A document and historical review of the SELT and its activities was also conducted.

This diagnostic phase focused on the following points: the local context and its different dimensions (social, economic, political, cultural and behavioral); the problem situation or situations; identification of individuals whose activities are related to the issue to be addressed; available resources; and obstacles. The activities conducted by the Municipal Sports Department were also observed first-hand and recorded in writing to better understand the research universe.

Seminar presentation phase

According to Thiollent (2011, p. 67), “the role of the seminar is to examine, discuss and make decisions about the research process.” The decision to hold seminars is made when the researcher and the people interested in the research agree on the objectives and the problems to be analyzed. To ensure that the seminars ran uniformly and smoothly, the researcher organized them in the following way: (a) theoretical and practical knowledge was made available to participants to facilitate discussion of the problems; (b) audio recordings of the seminars were produced; and (c) seminars focused on collaborative participation between participants and the researcher, making it possible to arrive at an overview of possible generalizations and discussion of the situations involved. The first seminar lasted two months; the second, six weeks; and the third, two weeks.

The first seminar consisted of first-hand observation, document analysis and semi-structured interviews with reference to “identifying group members and their functions in the SELT, their length of experience in their positions; their academic training; length of time since they graduated from their degree programs; how the department carries out planning, monitoring, and evaluation of its activities; who participates in these processes; if the group participates or has participated in any of these processes; if the local population was consulted; if there is an inventory of the spaces and equipment used in each project; and what suggestions they might offer to improve the planning, monitoring, and evaluation process.” The head sports administrator and all of the department's permanent physical education teaching staff participated in this seminar. The semi-structured interviews were adjusted to fit the profiles of the participants (the head administrator and the teachers), recognizing that each group has distinct features. Thus, the head administrator was asked about his experience as

a sports administrator outside of the department, his work history as sports administrator in this department, professional training that prepared him to work as a sports administrator, and challenges he faced as a sports administrator.

The information collected during this stage served as the basis for the remaining seminars.

During the second seminar, the discussions during the initial contact were synthesized, focusing on the ideas presented by the research subjects and on the proposed research aims. During this seminar, the LFA was presented to the participants along with techniques for developing and planning projects. During this stage, it was suggested that participants design a project, including the steps for its implementation. This work was conducted collaboratively, using a method that links concepts to their immediate application as a tool in sports administration. The seminar covered (a) basic concepts of planning, (b) definition of the project, (c) reasons for differences among government projects, (d) specific proposed changes and the LFA method, (e) decision trees, (f) goals, (g) LFA indicators, (h) verification, and (i) assumptions.

The third seminar gave the participants an opportunity to put the LFA and the project development techniques into practice, focusing on understanding how monitoring and evaluation should be conducted. The seminar covered (a) evaluation of social projects; (b) definitions of monitoring and evaluation; and (c) developing a participative plan for monitoring and development with its respective stages: 1 - Gathering the interested parties, 2 - Assessing the starting point (diagnosis), 3 - Formulating questions, 4 - Developing and choosing indicators, 5 - Defining forms of information-gathering, 6 - Analyzing the information, and 7 - Communicating the results.

The seminars were well received by the participants and their primary focus was the presentation of the LFA methodology with the help of teaching materials that the researcher had prepared specifically for the study group, including advice and models for mastering this administrative tool.

Action plan phase

The action plan is linked to the relationship between the objective and the planned action, that is, to analyzing the relevance of the LFA model as a tool for planning, monitoring and evaluating in the context of a municipal sports department, discussing their potential limits and possible applications.

After the seminars, participants were asked to put their new knowledge into practice by conducting an exercise in planning, monitoring, and evaluating the actions of the department based on the methodology, the guidelines, and the discussions. This task was to be completed over a period of approximately six months, after which participants would present the plan to the researcher and discuss the aspects that had been easy to implement and those that were difficult to implement while completing the task. The task, however, was not completed by any of the participants, although they had expressed their commitment to do so, verbally and in writing, when they signed the informed consent form indicating their agreement to participate in all activities proposed by the researcher. According to the participants, the tasks were not completed due the numerous demands on their time.

As the research project could not continue as originally planned, a decision was made to undertake an assessment of the participants using this methodology, to understand the primary limitations and barriers that would need to be overcome in order for SELT actions to be planned based on the LFA methodology.

Procedures for gathering and analyzing the interviews

As in the exploratory phase, a second round of semi-structured interviews was designed and conducted with regard to these issues: the duties and expected results of the position the interviewee occupies in the SELT; the interviewee's opinion of the LFA methodology; the limitations and barriers to be overcome to allow the successful development of department activities and the city's principal challenges in improving planning, monitoring, and evaluating the public sports administration. In addition to these questions, the head administrator was asked to evaluate the success of the teachers in their efforts to implement SELT projects?

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and the participants were identified only by a number in the transcripts to preserve each interviewee's confidentiality. Audio recordings of the interviews were made with the intention of going beyond a report based on interviews or questionnaires, as according to Melo and Araújo (2010), this makes it easier to interpret the dynamics of a group in relation to the topic under discussion.

According to Thomas, Nelson and Silverman (2012), the general stages of analysis include classification and analysis during data collection, analysis and categorization of the data, and interpretation and development of a theory. The analysis was performed during and after the interviews, as it is considered necessary to classify and organize the data while it is being collected so that the findings can shape each successive phase of the study.

The transcribed recordings were analyzed by the content analysis method, which is used to describe, analyze, and identify trends observed in written documents, including data collected through focus groups, interviews, and field notes (Worthen, Sanders & Fitzpatrick, 2004).

The content of the interviews, as well as notes of discussions among and suggestions made by participants, were interpreted using the steps recommended by Bardin (2011): 1) pre-analysis; 2) exploration of the material and 3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation.

During the **pre-analysis stage**, the material to be analyzed is organized to make it operational, systematizing the initial ideas. It can be flexible to allow new procedures to be introduced over the course of the analysis. **Exploration of the material** consists of exploring what was collected, defining categories (coding systems), and identifying reporting units and context units in the documents. This can be considered the analytical description phase with respect to the *corpus* of work subjected to close scrutiny, guided by assumptions and theoretical frameworks. It consists essentially of coding, classification, and categorization. The next step is **treatment of results, drawing conclusions, and interpretation**. This is the step for condensing and highlighting the information to be analyzed, culminating in inferential interpretations; it is the moment of intuition, reflection, and critical analysis.

The categorical analysis consists of breaking down the text and then regrouping it into categories based on analogies. After material selection and fluent reading, the categories were established based on Bardin's considerations (2011), and the study was conducted by means of coding. This classification of elements into categories requires the researcher to examine what each element has in common with the others. It is their commonality that allows elements to be grouped together. The coding process encourages the researcher to problematize the language used by survey participants in order to analyze it (Bardin, 2011).

After transcription and analysis of the interviews, they were categorized according to the steps described in Fig. 1.

Table 1. Stages in the process of categorizing research data.

Initial Category	Guiding Concept	Intermediary Category	Final Category
First impressions of the current situation of the organization being studied and the results of the codification of the transcribed semi-structured interviews. Each category is made up of selected passages of the interviewees' words, supported by the theoretical framework adopted.	Explanation of each category for the purpose of clarifying what was found.	Refinement of the data analysis based on the initial category.	Synthesis of the apparatus of meanings identified during the process of analyzing the data in the study using previous categories

Results and discussion

To achieve the research project's goals, the researcher attempted to express the process by which an understanding of the characteristics, structures, or models behind the message fragments was constructed. While not separate from the other stages, data analysis aims to understand what was collected, to confirm or disprove whatever the research assumptions may be, whether planning, monitoring, or evaluating public sports policies in the municipality of Lavras, their theoretical basis, or the role of the administrators who implement them. In addition, data analysis makes it possible to broaden our understanding of contexts beyond surface appearances.

The results analyzed consisted of the interviews conducted separately with the teachers and the main sports administrator during the exploratory phase (Stage 1) and after the seminar presentation phase (Stage 2), as it was not possible to carry out the action plan phase.

Analytical categories - Stages 1 and 2

To provide a systematic view of the gradual construction of the analytical categories that emerged from the initial categories and guiding concepts based on interviews with the research subjects during the diagnosis in the exploratory phase (Stage 1) and during the seminar presentation (Stage 2). The synthetic construction of the intermediary and final categories is shown in Fig. 1 (teachers) and 2 (administrator).

In the analysis of the final categories of stages 1 and 2, the teachers spoke about the difficulty the experienced understanding the process of planning, monitoring, and evaluating public sports policies. In their opinion, planning is conducted by each teacher on his or her own, without any input from the public during this process. A lack of understanding was apparent with regard to the meaning of monitoring and evaluation. When discussing their evaluations, the teachers limited themselves to technical and tactical aspects, such as attendance rolls and team records, without approaching the broader sense of evaluation of public sports policies.

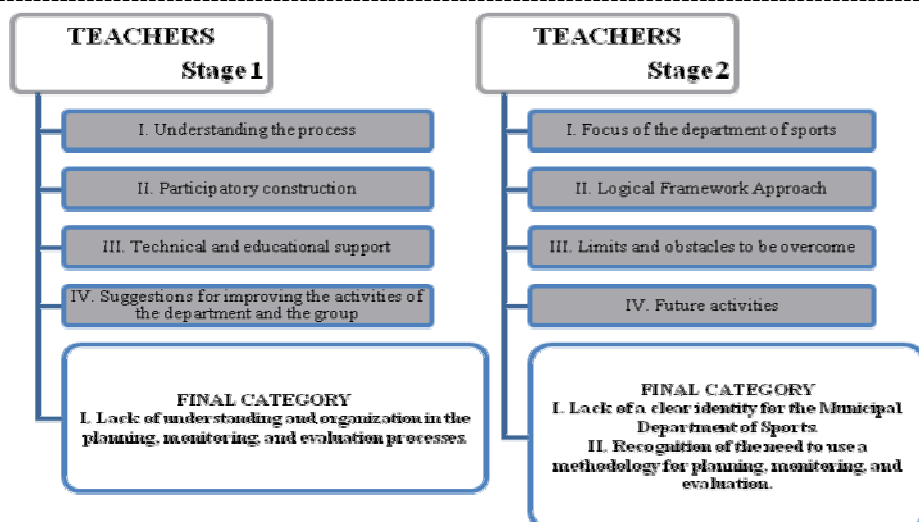


Fig. 1. Intermediate and Final Categories for Stages 1 and 2 – Teachers.

The organization and administration of the SELT are precarious, which leads to a lack of a sense of identity, as each teacher does as he or she pleases, without regard for what the community wants. The research subjects identified the lack of structured planning and the need for a methodology for planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

Fig.2 shows the results of the data gathered from the administrator responsible for the department following the same structure as that shown for teachers.

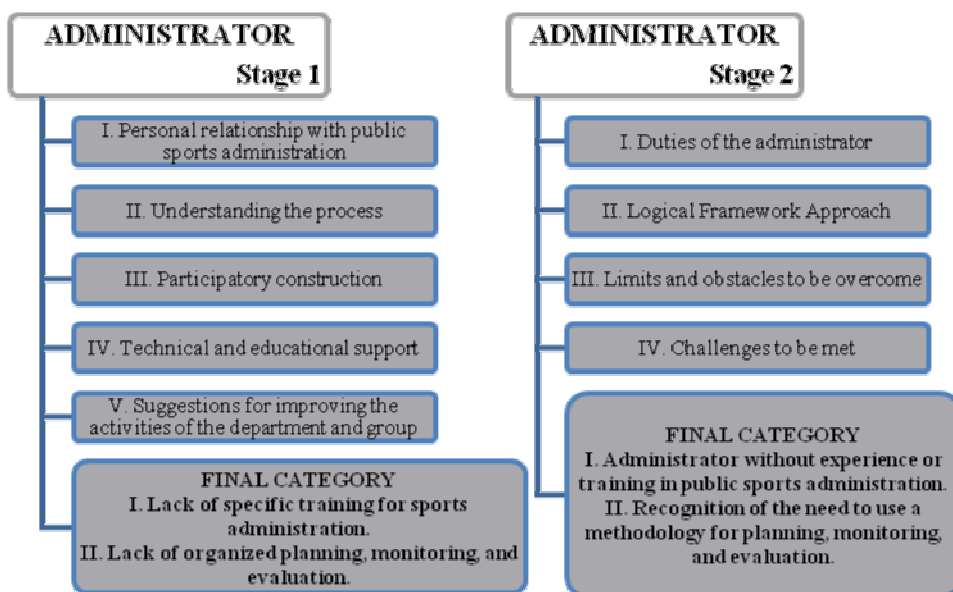


Fig. 2. Intermediate and Final Categories for Stages 1 and 2 – Administrator.

The categorical analyses that were revealed by breaking down the texts into categories and regrouping them analytically made it possible to perceive the subjects' situations with regard to their planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

The administrator of the SELT also noted challenges in understanding the planning, monitoring and evaluation processes of public sports policies. Although he taught and coached a sport, he did not possess the qualifications or experience necessary to work as a sports administrator. He recognized that he had never participated in any sports administration training or education.

The administrator emphasizes that he uses his intuition to decide issues related to planning activities, and he recognizes that he does not employ techniques or methodologies from the field of administration/management to conduct his activities. When asked about his experience as a sports administrator outside this department and whether he faced difficulties working as a sports administrator, the Municipal Secretary of Sports gave these answers, respectively: "I've always been an intuitive guy and always try to do better on the technical parts of reports and planning and stuff, but I have always worked more on intuition, so I think that's a shortcoming I have that needs to be corrected" and "I have some difficulty because, like I said, I'm

sort of intuitive, but now with this new job, I'm having to get up to speed on the situation, on the laws, and I'm trying to study to be able to do a good job because it's really hard, as it's a big commitment and a lot of responsibility..."

Based on these statements, one might conclude that the administrator of the SELT does not match the profile provided by Amaral (2015, p. 20), namely, that "a sports administrator should be able to unify policies, define the mission of the service that is being rendered or the business that is being run, and be knowledgeable about management and marketing techniques..." This quotation refers to a context outside of the public sector, but it should also be contemplated for the public sector because the authors describe desirable qualities in a sports administrator in any field.

In this sense, the role of a public administrator in any field should be catalyzing community development.

In general, there was no common discourse around community participation in decisions made by the SELT. Some interviewees said that the community participates; others said the community does not participate but should. These interviews confirmed the researchers' initial impression that the department lacks structured planning.

In the present study, it was possible to observe that the SELT is administered in a way that is inimical to the idea of participative administration, which Spink (1993, p. 74) describes as "the terrain of administration by the public; of the direct, rather than indirect, presence of the citizen in the public sphere as someone 'present,' a citizen with rights and duties to the other members of society."

The SELT does not involve the public in planning, monitoring, or evaluation. This is evidenced by the lack of meetings and, principally, by the lack of activities with the Parliamentary Front for the Support of Sports or the Municipal Sports Council.

All the research subjects recognize that they do not know whether there are written guidelines on the subject, do not know about these issues, and do not know where to look or who to turn to. Moreover, some participants show no interest in seeking out this knowledge. Some respondents indicated that recent changes in the municipal government had negatively affected the continuity of the department's activities because the Municipal Secretary of Sports is a political appointee who serves at the mayor's pleasure, while the teachers are hired through public examination and retain their positions regardless of which political party is in office.

All interviewees noted the need for improving their actions: effective planning, monitoring and evaluation; restructuring the department through legislation; creating departmental regulations; and improving professional development courses. These results show that research subjects have some interest in changing how the department is managed and their related behaviors.

In short, in the present study, all subjects surveyed identified a lack of structured planning and recognized the need for a methodology for planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Intermediate categories led to an understanding that the department does not have a central focus, that is, there is no sense of identity, as evidenced by the lack of a mission statement, a vision for the future, and institutional values that could guide the work of professionals and public sports and recreation policies in the city.

Some teachers are uncertain about their role and responsibilities under a new framework. Other factors contributing to this situation include a lack of infrastructure and a lack of involvement by teachers. Participants identified these factors as barriers and limitations that must be overcome by all.

Both the administrator and the teachers pointed to a lack of knowledge about management as a barrier in their profession.

Conclusions

Based on the perceptions of the research participants, the LFA was recognized and valued as a useful tool for planning, monitoring, and evaluation in the context of the SELT. However, cultural barriers played an important role in impeding changes in the practice of sports administration in the city. The administrators reported difficulties in relation to creating a structure for public policy planning. The lack of understanding of the meaning and importance of monitoring and evaluation were even more obvious.

Graduates of physical education degree programs had learned to evaluate only the technical and strategic aspects of sports activities, and the only form of monitoring they were familiar with was taking attendance in class. They had not yet reached the level of evaluating public sports policy, nor did they feel pressure to learn more about the subject or put it into practice. Planning and evaluation in the field of sports continue to be associated only with municipal, regional and state-wide competitions, which ends up reinforcing inequality in access to sports programs, as all eyes are focused only on the most talented athletes.

A lack of time during the workday is not a valid argument for failing to plan. The fact that the city government does not require planning, monitoring or evaluation of city-sponsored public sports policies seems to indicate the low status of this field in comparison with other areas of public service.

Accounts by participants in this research project tend to corroborate Silva and Nascimento's assertion (2012) that while studies on the organization and evaluation of public sports policies exist, in Brazil, they have not produced needed changes or mobilized communities and administrators around their goals.

A lack of coordinated political action with regard to public policies on sports can lead to inequality in access to these types of programs and projects. This inequality in access could be avoided, according to Werle (2010), if the needs and interests of citizens from different socioeconomic strata of the community were heard. The use of the LFA method made it possible to perceive the importance of discussing the possibility of developing mechanisms for decentralization and civil society participation as useful and important ways to promote the restructuring of public policies with regard to sports.

Programs that prepare professionals to work in sports administration should focus on management functions, independently of who performs them. Sports administrators frequently have no experience or training in public sports administration, as many of them are political appointees, which often contributes to a lack of continuity in activities, as the staff may change with each new administration. According to Estevam (2010), administrative and public policy discontinuity interrupts projects and produces significant changes in priorities, with political and party considerations tending to prevail over technical considerations. In this context, degree programs in management should make it a priority to train students to be competent in all aspects necessary for establishing objectives and goals, monitoring activities and conducting participatory evaluations of results.

An important aspect to be overcome is the role of ingrained practices in cities that cause public servants to feel powerless in the face of aspects they consider beyond their control, such as guidelines, programs, and action programs.

In the academic field, scholars must go beyond public sports policy research that confines itself almost exclusively to reporting empirical data, reviewing the scientific literature, and studying the activities of social programs and projects (Starepravo, 2013) but lacks specific evaluative practices based on a consistent theoretical foundation.

Finally, the present study should not end here. It is hoped that more researchers will join this discussion, seeking strategies that make it possible to broaden the debate methods of planning, monitoring, and evaluating public sports policies, as this study makes evident the need for more attention to and research in this area.

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