

University of Athens

From the Selected Works of Yanni D Afthinos

1997

Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA) in Greece

Yanni D Afthinos, *University of Athens*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/yanni_afthinos/11/

Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA)
in Greece

Yanni D. Afthinos, Ph.D.

Lecturer
University of Athens
Department of Physical Education & Sport Science

Member of the Greek Secretariat General of Sport's
Scientific Committee for the National Sport for All Programs

Promotion of Health Enhancing Physical Activity: Development of
Policy, Network and Walking Programs.

Project Meeting
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
November 15-16, 1997

Health enhancing physical activity can be found in Greece as non-organized (self-directed) and in form of organized services provided by state, non-for-profit and private organizations.

With regard to non-organized physical activity, a study by Hatziharistos (1990) showed that 22.4% of those who live in the two most populated Greek cities (Athens and Thessaloniki) aged between 30 to 60 years, do engage with some form of physical activity regularly (3 times per week, for 60 minutes each time). It was also found that those with higher education had a tendency to exercise more. Among the most popular physical activities reported in the study were: walking (20.2%), swimming (19.0%), gymnastics (17.7%), jogging (16.6%), cycling (10.8%), sport (10.0%), other (4.7%). As for the most important reason for participation in any form of physical activity, it was reported the "improvement and maintenance of health" (61.7%). The reason for not participation was "lack of time" (42.1%).

With regard to organized exercise services provided in Greece by private companies, there is an estimated number of approximately 600 health clubs operating, with legal status, in Greece, half of which are located in Athens Metropolitan area. There is, however, another approximately 600 health clubs, which is suspected to operate in Greece with no proper licenses. The corresponding number of all health club members is estimated to be approximately 165.000 individuals (KEPE Study Group, 1996).

In the public sector, there are organizations operating at national, regional or local level, i.e., Forestry Directorate, Greek Tourism Organization, religious organizations, institutions for juvenile delinquents, prisons, institutions for the handicapped, worker unions and the army, which provide fitness and recreational sport services in form of installations or full programs. Among these, the leading organization providing leadership and financial support to every non-for-profit agency offering HEPA to the public under the title «Sport for All» (SfA) programs, is the Ministry of Culture through its Secretariat General of Sport (Chart 1).

Sport for All Programs

Sport for all programs consist of physical activities for individuals of all age and abilities. These programs are designed / implemented by local authorities and other organizations, targeting groups of primary school age, adolescents, adults, seniors and individuals with special needs.

There are also intermediate target groups involved, which are activated for the application of the SfA programs, such as physical educators, local level politicians, parents and guardians. The settings that SfA programs take place are communities, schools, institutions for individuals with special needs, sport centers and the outdoors.

The aim of the programs is to increase participation in HEPA, while the objectives are: (a) to set up efficient and effective local-level health enhancing physical activity delivery systems, (b) to provide all organizations involved with the necessary financial support to deliver

HEPA services to the public, and (c) to provide updated knowledge to HEPA professionals through in-service training. The SfA activities are provided in form of: general, special, innovative and short-period programs.

General SfA programs:

Movement education for preschool-age children. This program can be seen as a pilot, since only a few local organizations provide such service. Its content is focusing on the children's physical ability enhancement, introduction of sport and outdoor active living through play, music and movement enriched environments.

Exercise for elementary school-age children. This program aims at the physical education of all elementary school children by physical educators. Up to 1990s school physical education had been provided solely by elementary school teachers.

Exercise for adolescents. This program consists of "trendy" fitness and recreational activities (i.e., aerobics, step, dance, BMX and MTB bicycling, skateboarding, outdoor adventure activities) during participants' free time.

Exercise for young people. The same as for the adolescents.

Exercise for adults. This program consists of sport, fitness and recreational activities for adults, especially men focusing at bodybuilding and sport participation.

Exercise for women. This program consists of fitness and recreational, mainly, activities focusing at body composition, weight control and active living.

Exercise for seniors. This is a program of fitness and recreational activities focusing at health maintenance and wellness. It includes cardiorespiratory activities (i.e., brisk walking, folk dancing) and muscle strength-maintenance exercises.

Special SfA programs

Exercise for individuals with special needs. Institutions for people with special needs, hire physical educators with specialization in adopted physical education, for the provision of fitness and recreational sport services to their members, as a means of health improvement and constructive use of free time.

Exercise for prisoners and Juvenal delinquents. Physical educators with specialized knowledge are hired by the Secretariat General of Sport (SGS), in order to organize and lead fitness and recreational sport activities in detention centers around the country.

Exercise for substance abusers. Sport, fitness and physical recreation activities are organized by communities as part of their drug prevention programs and as a means of social acceptance of those who have been detoxicated. Institutions of drug rehabilitation also include HEPA activities, as part of their detoxication programs and therefore participate in the SfA activities.

Exercise for people in mental institutions. Mental institutions hire, through SGS, physical educators with specialization in adopted physical education, to provide fitness and recreational sport activities to patients.

Exercise for college and university students. SGS provides support to public universities, in order to improve and/or expand their SfA and physical recreation services to students, as a means of constructive use of their free time.

Exercise for soldiers. SGS provides support to army base neighboring communities, in order to include into their programs special SfA activities targeting the improvement of wellness and the constructive use of soldiers' free time.

Exercise for workers. SGS supports SfA activities designed and implemented by workers' organizations, as a means of health maintenance and improvement.

Exercise for immigrants and gypsies. Communities where individuals of these group categories reside, create reach-out programs in order to include immigrants and gypsies into their SfA activities, as a means of health enhancement and mainstreaming.

Innovative SfA programs:

In the Athens Metropolitan area, SGS operates two centers for the development/improvement (design and pilot testing) of new exercise programs (i.e.: family exercise, exercise for preschool children, and exercise for people with special needs).

Furthermore, financial support (after a positive evaluation) is provided to new exercise activities, suggested by organizations participating in the national SfA delivery system.

Short-period SfA programs

Winter or summer programs. These programs consist of downhill ski, swimming, outdoor adventure, and sea sport activities for communities close to resort areas.

Administrative Process of the SfA Delivery System

The Secretariat General of Sport requests from local governments to submit a proposal (every September) with SfA year-long programs. These proposals are evaluated for their feasibility and content, according to a set of guidelines (i.e., activities for certain target groups, as a means for securing minimum service quality). Following, those programs that meet the minimum standards are financed 75 to 100%. Also, seminars are organized in order to keep the SfA leaders' knowledge up to date.

General Statistics of the SfA Programs

The total national economic support to the SfA programs by the Secretariat General of Sport, is approximately \$9.500.000 USD.

The number of participating organizations is 500 municipalities and communities, as well as 250 social-service organizations, employing 900 physical educators as leaders. Research data, based on all Municipalities with population of more than 10.000, indicate that the demographic characteristics of the local SfA organizations in Greece, are the following (Afthinos, 1993):

- 51% operate in the legal status of «public entity»
- 67% employ 1 - 2 SfA managers
- 47% use no volunteers in SfA programs and
- 78% organize various SfA programs in addition to those officially sponsored by the state.

Furthermore, there are 3.684 general program exercise groups, with 15 to 20 persons per group and 1.300 special program groups, with 7 to 12 persons per group, corresponding to a total number of 90.000 approximately participants in Greek SfA programs.

Bibliography

- Afthinos, I. (1993). An analysis of perceived competencies of sport for all managers in Greece. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. New York University, New York.
- Committee of Sport Programs (23/10/97). Mass Sport. General programs (Report). Athens: Ministry of Culture, Secretariat General of Sport.
- Committee of Sport Programs (23/10/97). Mass Sport. Special programs (Report). Athens: Ministry of Culture, Secretariat General of Sport.
- Hatziharistos, D. (1990). Participation of Greek urban residents in physical activity. Book of abstracts of the world congress on sport for all. Tampere, Finland.
- KEPE Study Group (1996). Economy and Sport. (Report 24). Athens: Center of Programing and Economic Research.

Further information:

Yanni D. Afthinos, P.hD.
Member of the Secretariat General of Sport's
Sport for All Scientific Committee.
Lecturer
University of Athens
Department of Physical Education & Sport Science
41 Ethnikis Andistaseos Avenue
17237, Dafni, Greece

CASE STUDIES: EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS

Outline framework: State-supported health enhancing physical activities (HEPA) in Greece.

Title of project: Sport for all (HEPA) programs.

Brief summary: Physical activities for target groups of all age and abilities, financed by the Secretariat General of Sport, designed / implemented by local authorities and other organizations.

Category: National promotional programs.

Lead organization: Secretariat General of Sport.

Other organizations involved: Municipalities/communities, institutions for juvenile delinquents, Prisons, institutions for the handicapped.

Main target groups: Primary school age, adolescents, adults, seniors, individuals with special needs.

Intermediate target groups: Physical educators, local level politicians.

Setting: Community, schools, institutions for individuals of special needs.

Aims and objectives:

Aim: To increase participation in HEPA.

Objective: To set up efficient and effective local-level health enhancing physical activity delivery systems. To provide all involved organizations with the necessary financial support to deliver HEPA services to the public. To provide updated knowledge to HEPA professionals through in-service training.

Duration of project: The project started in 1983 and it is in its maturation phase.

Annual cost and sources of funding: The project is financed by the Ministry of Culture, under of which the Secretariat General of Sport operates. The total annual national cost is approximately \$9.500.000 USD.

Brief description of main activities carried out: The Secretariat General of Sport requests from local governments to submit a yearly proposal (every September) with SFA (HEPA) year-long programs. The proposals are evaluated for their feasibility, their content according to a set of guidelines (i.e., activities for certain target groups, means for securing minimum service quality). Following, a number of programs that meet the minimum standards are financed 75 to 100%.

Method of evaluation: The programs are evaluated nationally, by the total number of individuals served (quantitatively) and by 52 perfectual supervisors (qualitatively).

Impact measured to date: There is no formal study done to date to measure the impact of these programs. However, to the targeted individuals, especially to seniors and people with special needs, these programs are the only means of any physical activity and, therefor, have large impact.

Lessons learned: Sport for All (HEPA) programs should be designed and implemented by local governments as social service, therefore the central government's role is to decentralize; that is to provide policy guidelines, financial support and know how.

Published reports available:

Committee of Sport Programs (23/10/97). Mass Sport. General programs (report). Athens: Ministry of Culture, Secretariat General of Sport.

Committee of Sport Programs (23/10/97). Mass Sport. Special programs (report). Athens: Ministry of Culture, Secretariat General of Sport.

Further information:

Yanni D. Afthinos

Member of the Secretariat General of Sport's

Sport for All Scientific Committee

University of Athens

Department of Physical Education & Sport Science

41 Ethnikis Andistaseos Avenue

17237, Dafni, Greece