

Study on the Improvement of Civic Behavior in the Urban Environment through Neighborhood Sports Activities

Ciprian PRISĂCARU¹
Gheorghe FLUCUȘ²
Andrei Claudiu TUDOR³
Georgian BĂDICU⁴

Abstract

This research aims to assess the impact of neighborhood sports activities on civic behavior in the urban environment. Based on the observation that adolescents are an easily influenced group and that the environment in which they live can significantly influence their behavior, we want to explore how participation in community sports activities can improve social engagement and civic attitude in young people.

Through a program called "Neighborhood Sports", which was carried out in 12 neighborhoods of Târgoviște Municipality for nine months, we monitored the participation of 111 young people aged between 14 and 30 years in the proposed sports activities. Using a set of assessment tools, including initial and final questionnaires, we examined progress in their civic behavior and involvement in sports activities.

The results indicated a significant improvement in civic behavior and engagement in sports activities among participants. This improvement was noted in both the frequency of participation in sports activities and changes in attitude and involvement in community issues. An increased sense of neighborhood pride and a stronger intention to stay in the community were also highlighted.

These findings suggest that community sports activities can have a significant impact on civic behavior and social cohesion in the urban environment, thus providing a valuable perspective for the development of future intervention programs in this direction.

Keywords: civic behavior, neighborhood sports activities, monitoring, questionnaire

JEL: Z32; Z320

DOI: 10.24818/mrt.24.16.01.07

¹ National University of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest, Romania, c_prisacaru@yahoo.com

² Bod High School, Brașov, Romania, tucaflucus@yahoo.com

³ Scoala Gimnaziala 190, Bucuresti, andrei.tudor@eam.ase.ro

⁴ Department of Physical Education and Special Motricity, Transilvania University, Brașov, Romania, georgian.badicu@unitbv.ro



1. Introduction

The organization and social training of young people, seconded by the renewal of economic structures in social life, the absorption difficulties of society and the periods of economic prosperity and recession, were more difficult to capture as such in Romania (Șchiopu et al., 1997, p. 265).

Human beings were created to live in a community with other people, and to this end, they are indisputably bound to and affected by the relationships established between those of their kind. The society in which humans carry out their activities offers, or rather should offer them, the right framework for the expression of personality and the appreciation of the work they do, of course, for a beneficial purpose (Teodorescu, 2010).

Our world is important not only in the sense that it is the space in which we live, but it must express our desire to progress and climb the ladder of humanity. Those who will ensure the continuity of human endeavour and thought are the adolescents of today, the adults of tomorrow.

Therefore, the relationships with those around them are largely the result of the education acquired during childhood and do not depend very much, as is commonly believed, on the quality of being an adolescent. Young people are indeed impulsive and easily influenced, but their value lies in their power to distinguish right from wrong and to correct themselves when they make mistakes; this is only possible in the context of good moral education instilled by the family (Cucuș, 2004).

Adolescence, although a troubled and turmoil-filled time, is the age of nonconformist intelligence, of great sincerity. Imagination, creative power and insight are at their peak.

As regards sport, it can be played in various ways, can be structured as a means for the development of personality in order to strengthen health, can be played for personal pleasure or to achieve sports performance. Generally speaking, sport can have an impact on the younger generation regardless of the individual's social status; by its very nature, physical exercise could have a positive influence on any young person regardless of social condition, nationality or gender. (Triboi, n.d.)

The fundamental feature of sport is competition, which is predominantly challenging but also formative in nature and is present in both elite sports and sports for all. Sport has complex functions that have an impact on participants, responding to the need for the movement of young people everywhere. The correspondence between the various forms of practicing physical education and sport and their effect or impact reflects upon social life at large, bringing structural continuity to the entire formative and educational system. In the field of physical education and sport, there are objectives with physiological functions, others with instructive-educational functions and also objectives with social functions. If we



combine the functions related to profession, education, relaxation, entertainment, hygiene, competitiveness and self-improvement, we will get to the interpersonal relationships, which are so important in the development of youth and society in general. (“Sport – Fenomen social cu caracter universal”, n.d.)

The purpose of the research is to improve the civic/social climate by increasing the opportunities for guided practice of neighbourhood sports activities so that, by acting on the cumulative amount of motor activity per participant, to positively influence the level of civic/social behavior of young people included in the “Neighborhood Sports” program.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The research was carried out in 12 neighbourhoods of Târgoviște Municipality for nine months, between October 2022 and September 2023, and involved a group of 111 participants aged between 14 and 30 years (Table 1).

Composition of the experimental group according to age

Table 1

Composition of the experimental group according to age			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	14-18 years old	30	27.0
	19-30 years old	81	73.0
	Total	111	100.0

2.2 Methodology of the experimental activity

For our analysis, the responses of young people aged 14-18 and 19-30 were considered as the initial assessment. The questionnaire applied showed a low level of civic behavior and involvement in sports activities.

The collection and interpretation of initial data was followed by the implementation of a sports program called “Neighborhood Sports” with all its recreational sports sub-programs, namely football, football-tennis and basketball. A platform was also created (website: www.sportincartier.ro) for young people to find information, register, get access to the schedule of the proposed sports activities and planned competitions, as well as interact with neighbourhood leaders and even the organizing board. The next step consisted in monitoring the selected young people, from the perspective of their participation in the planned neighborhood sports activities. Records of participation in the sports program were kept by the leader of each neighborhood included in this study. Neighborhood leaders also sent weekly feedback to participants (via WhatsApp) regarding the



sports offers to be implemented in the “Neighborhood Sports” program.

It is worth noting that we used this method of data transmission due to the impossibility of monitoring all participants. In addition, we mention that the research participants were coded by entering the initials of each person’s name and surname, ordering them according to age, gender and the amount of sports activities performed. Their monitoring involved the types of sports activities in which they took part throughout the “Neighborhood Sports” program. The average activity per month and per week was calculated by age for the period between January and August 2023, and the frequency of sports activities between the initial assessment and the final assessment was comparatively analyzed.

After completing all sports activities (offered by the sports program) during the 8 months, the civic/social behavior questionnaire was administered at the end of the project. Following the collection of transmitted data, the levels of social engagement and civic attitude were calculated by making a comparative analysis between the initial assessment and the final assessment.

3. Results

3.1 Comparison of the initial social/civic profile with the final social/civic profile

To determine the level of civic/social behavior, the scores for items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11 and 12 regarding social engagement and civic attitude were added up.

A high score indicates high civic/social behavior.

At the initial assessment, the average score for civic/social behavior was 13.32, while at the final assessment, its value was 17.53.

In order to see whether the score for civic/social behavior increased significantly at the final assessment compared to the initial assessment, the Paired Samples *t* Test was applied. The obtained results indicate a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.001$) in this behavior (Table 2; Figure 1).

Statistics for paired samples

Table 2

Statistics for paired samples					
		Mean	N	Standard deviation	p
Pair 1	Civic/social behavior - initial assessment	13.32	111	2.175	.000
	Civic/social behavior - final assessment	17.53	111	1.892	

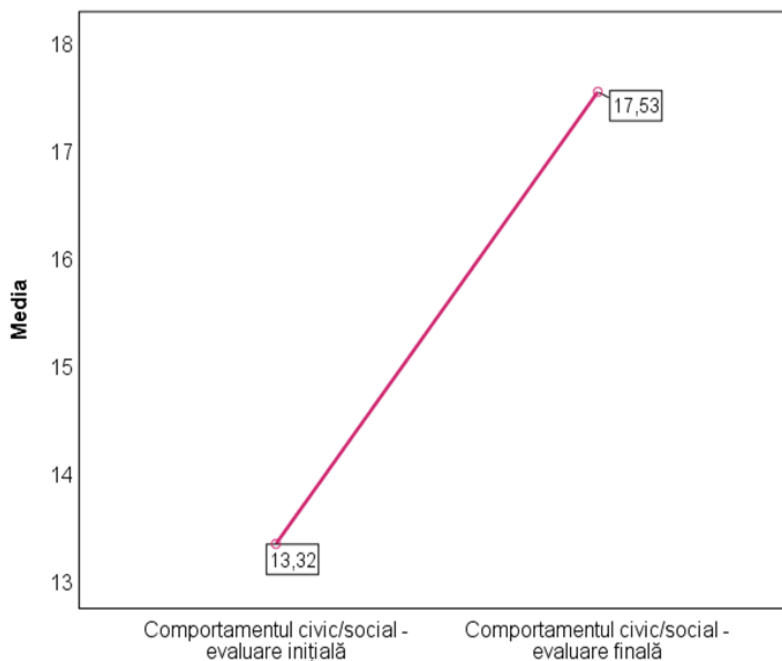


Figure 1. Statistics for paired samples

Progress in civic/social behavior was also assessed separately for each analyzed age category.

A statistically significant improvement in civic/social behavior was found in both participants aged 14-18 ($p < 0.001$) and participants aged 19-30 ($p < 0.001$) (Table 3; Figure 2; Figure 3).

Statistics for paired samples

Table 3

Statistics for paired samples					
Age		Mean	N	Standard deviation	P
14-18 years	Civic/social behavior - initial assessment	13.67	30	2.249	.000
	Civic/social behavior - final assessment	18.10	30	1.348	
19-30 years	Civic/social behavior - initial assessment	13.20	81	2.147	.000
	Civic/social behavior - final assessment	17.32	81	2.024	

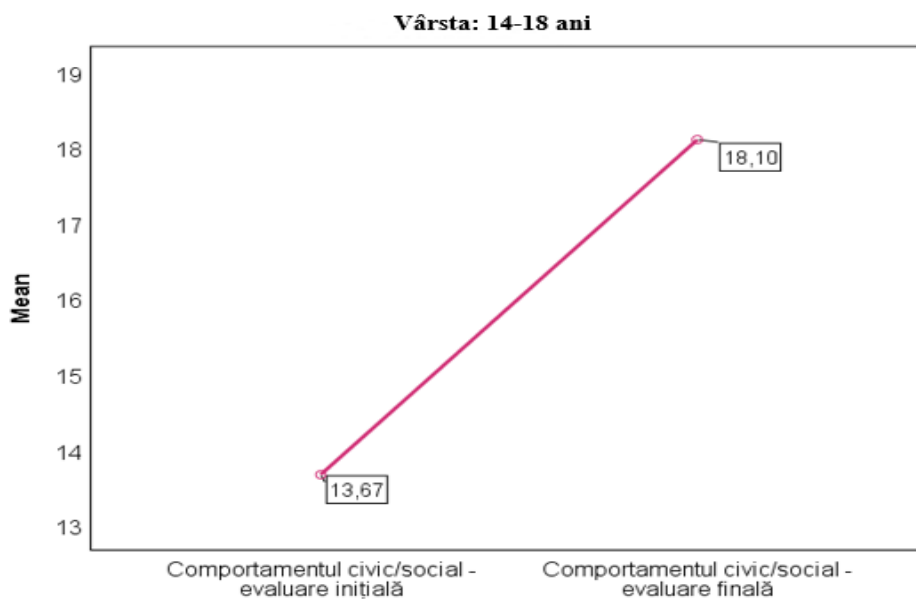


Figure 2. Statistics for paired samples: participants aged 14-18

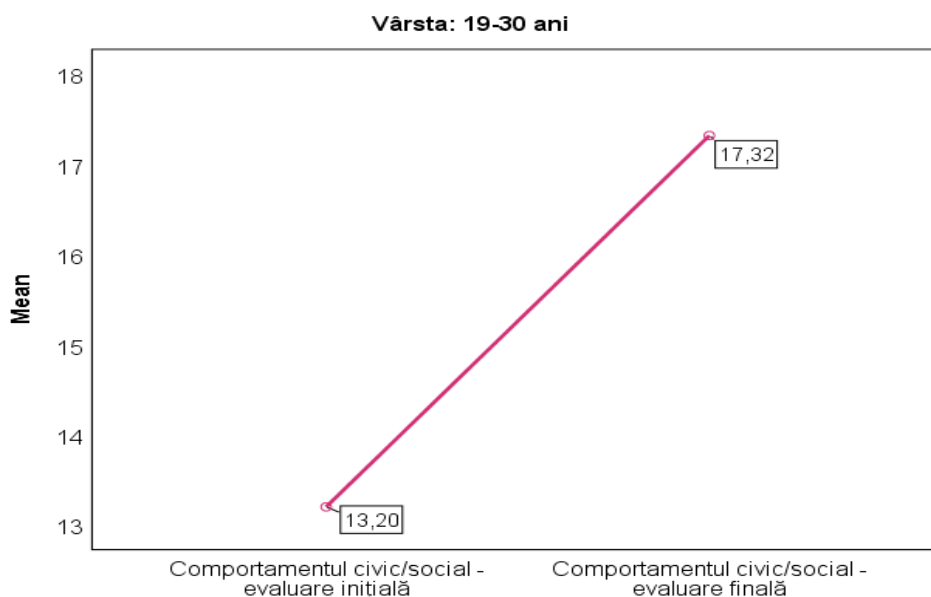


Figure 3. Statistics for paired samples: participants aged 19-30



3.2 Comparison of initial physical activity level with final physical activity level

Frequency of sports activities – a comparative analysis between the initial assessment and the final assessment

Regarding the relationship between the frequency of sports activities at the initial assessment and the frequency of sports activities at the final assessment, a statistically significant association is found ($\chi^2 = 15.903$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.014$) (Table 5).

Slightly more than one third (36.8%) of those who used to participate in sports activities only once a week currently participate daily in neighborhood sports activities (Table 4).

Of those who used to participate only once a month, during the study, 41.7% participated daily, and 38.9% weekly (Table 4).

Of those who had never participated before, during the study, 52.0% participated daily, 36.0% weekly, and 12.0% monthly, these data indicating an improved frequency of participation in neighborhood sports activities (Table 4).

Frequency of sports activities - initial assessment * Frequency of sports activities - final assessment

Table 4

			Frequency of sports activities - final assessment			Total
			Daily	Weekly	Monthly	
Frequency of sports activities - initial assessment	Daily	Frequency	12	0	0	12
		%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Weekly	Frequency	14	16	8	38
		%	36.8%	42.1%	21.1%	100.0%
	Monthly	Frequency	15	14	7	36
		%	41.7%	38.9%	19.4%	100.0%
	Never	Frequency	13	9	3	25
		%	52.0%	36.0%	12.0%	100.0%
Total		Frequency	54	39	18	111
		%	48.6%	35.1%	16.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Test

Table 5

	Value	df	p
Pearson's Chi-Square	15.903	6	.014
Cramer's V	.268		.014
Number of valid cases	111		

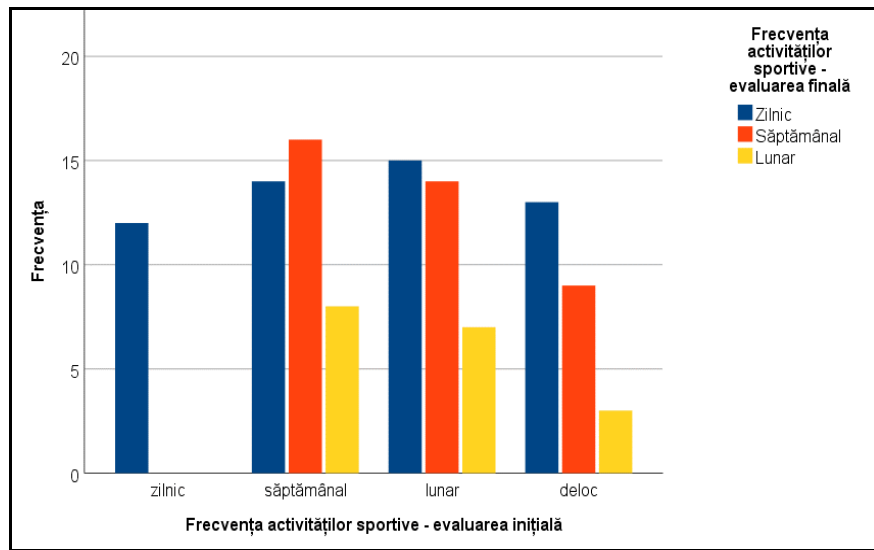


Figure 4. Frequency of sports activities - a comparative analysis between the initial assessment and the final assessment

3.3 Calculating the amount of neighbourhood sports activities

Type of sport activities

Neighbourhood sports activities implemented in the program were football, football-tennis and basketball.

Football was played by 70.0% of the participants aged 14-18 years, football-tennis by 53.3%, and basketball by 30.0% (Table 6).

Of the participants aged 19-30, 77.8% played football, 38.3% football-tennis, and 28.4% basketball (Table 6).

Age * Type of sports activities

Table 6

		Age				Total	
		14-18 years		19-30 years			
		Frequency	% of Age	Frequency	% of Age	Frequency	% of Total
Type of sports activities	Football	21	70.0%	63	77.8%	84	75.7%
	Football-tennis	16	53.3%	31	38.3%	47	42.3%
	Basketball	9	30.0%	23	28.4%	32	28.8%
Total		30		81		111	100.0%

Percentages and totals are based on the number of respondents.



Frequency of sports activities

More than half of those under the age of 18 (60.0%) participated in neighbourhood sports activities daily, 36.7% weekly, and 3.3% monthly (Table 7).

Of those aged between 19 and 30 years, 44.4% participated daily, 34.6% weekly, and 21.0% monthly (Table 7).

Age * Frequency of sports activities - final assessment

Table 7

		Age				Total	
		14-18 years		19-30 years		Frequency	% of Total
		Frequency	% of Age	Frequency	% of Age		
Frequency of sports activities - final assessment	Daily	18	60.0%	36	44.4%	54	48.6%
	Weekly	11	36.7%	28	34.6%	39	35.1%
	Monthly	1	3.3%	17	21.0%	18	16.2%
Total		30	100.0%	81	100.0%	111	100.0%

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to improve the civic/social climate by increasing the opportunities for guided practice of neighborhood sports activities so that, by acting on the cumulative amount of motor activity per participant, to positively influence the level of civic/social behavior of young people included in the “Neighborhood Sports” program.

The research results allow us to draw the following conclusions:

- There is a significant association between knowledge of neighborhood problems at initial testing and knowledge of neighborhood problems at final testing ($p = 0.012$).

- Slightly more than half of those who only sometimes participated in cleanup and sanitation activities (59.1%) currently always participate in such activities carried out in their neighborhoods. Of those who never participated, now 29% always participate and 54.8% sometimes, these data indicating an improvement in this aspect.

- 81.8% of those who only sometimes volunteered currently always volunteer, and of those who never volunteered, now 52.4% always volunteer and 38.1% sometimes. A study attesting to this was conducted in Los Angeles. Starting from a small gesture, Andrea Ambrose and her partner, John Lobato, decided to clean up a trash-strewn block in their neighborhood. On the following weekends, accompanied by Andrea’s mother, they continued to clean up other neighborhood locations. As time went on, other people joined them, initially a few, and then in



increasing numbers. It follows that, from a spontaneous initiative, more and more people joined them over time. (Center for Community Health and Development, 2024)

- Exploring how the number of nominated neighbours changed from the initial to the final assessment, an increase was observed in all cases, with the number of those nominated at the final assessment being significantly higher than the number of neighbours nominated at the initial assessment ($p < 0.001$).

- There is an increase in the number of neighbours with whom the questionnaire respondents have friendly, supportive or leisurely relationships, as revealed by the final assessment compared to the initial assessment. This statement is also reinforced by the fact that sport has a strong potential to bring people from various communities together, regardless of their level of engagement, be they professionals or amateurs. At the same time, sport can generate a sense of belonging and solidarity among those involved. (ChildFund Australia, 2021)

- As regards the relationship between the intention expressed at the initial assessment to change current residence and the intention expressed at the final assessment to change current residence, a statistically significant association ($\chi^2 = 13.394$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.010$) is also found.

- At the initial assessment, the top actions that could influence how people get involved in civic activities were the following: better communication of local and neighborhood projects (reported by 93.7% of respondents), engagement of certified and dedicated people in this type of activities (41.4%), additional funds (40.5%), local community pressure (37.8%) and involvement of sports personalities (17.1%). At the final assessment, the top remained somewhat similar, only the share of those who specified each of the actions increased: better communication of local and neighborhood projects (reported by 96.4% of respondents), additional funds (57.7%), engagement of certified and dedicated people in this type of activities (46.8%), local community pressure (36.9%) and involvement of sports personalities (19.8%). A study conducted at the University of Minnesota shows that civic engagement is crucial because it contributes to building a more just and equitable society and allows individuals to express their views on shaping the future of communities. This fosters solidarity, bringing people together with shared values and beliefs to work toward a common cause and achieve positive and sustainable change. (University of Minnesota, 2023)

- Social engagement not only has a significant impact on society as a whole but also has a profound effect on the individual who gets involved. Moving beyond personal concerns and focusing on the needs and problems of an entire community can bring a lot of personal benefits. It makes you happier and more fulfilled because your actions contribute to the common good and to improving the lives of those around you. Civic engagement can provide a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, boosting self-confidence and reducing anxiety and depression. (Din Țara Ta, 2019)



- 30.4% of people who initially said they only sometimes reacted when someone was in a degrading situation now say they always react, 20% of people who initially said they never reacted when someone was in a degrading situation now say they always react and 60% say they sometimes react. The results obtained after applying the Chi-Square Test highlight a statistically significant association. However, these results are in conflict with a study claiming that some people do not get involved for several reasons, for example: diffusion of responsibility (each bystander believes they have less responsibility because there are others present who could also respond), confusion (bystanders are not sure that help is needed, so they are less likely to help), danger (the bystander is afraid of becoming a target of bullying or of social exclusion) and fear of disapproval (the bystander may not be sure they have the right skills to help or will be judged negatively). (Working Against Violence, Inc., n.d.)

- Examining progress in the frequency of participants' intervention in an ongoing conflict from the initial to the final assessment, we found a significant association between the frequency of intervention in an ongoing conflict at initial testing and the frequency of intervention in an ongoing conflict at final testing ($p < 0.001$). More specifically, 25% of those who said at the initial assessment that they used to intervene only sometimes declared at the final assessment that they always intervened in an ongoing conflict. Of those who had never intervened, at the final assessment, 40.9% reported they sometimes intervened in an ongoing conflict. A 2019 multinational study (Reneau, 2021) confirms and supports these results, finding that at least one bystander (but usually more) will intervene in 9 out of 10 public conflicts.

- The neighborhood sports activities implemented in the program were football, football-tennis and basketball. Football was played by 70.0% of the participants under 18, football-tennis by 53.3%, and basketball by 30.0%. Of the participants aged 19-30 years, 77.8% played football, 38.3% football-tennis, and 28.4% basketball.

- 53.3% of the participants under 18 played only one of the neighborhood sports, 40% played two of the mentioned sports, and 6.7% played all three neighborhood sports. Of those aged 19 to 30 years, 61.7% played only one sport, 32.1% played two sports, and 6.2% played three sports.

- More than half of those under the age of 18 (60.0%) participated in neighborhood sports activities daily, 36.7% weekly, and 3.3% monthly. Of those aged between 19 and 30 years, 44.4% participated daily, 34.6% weekly, and 21.0% monthly.

- Regarding the relationship between the frequency of sports activities at the initial assessment and the frequency of sports activities at the final assessment, a statistically significant association is found. Slightly more than one third (36.8%) of those who used to participate in sports activities only once a week currently participate daily in neighborhood sports activities. Of those who used to participate



only once a month, during the study, 41.7% participated daily, and 38.9% weekly. Of those who had never participated before, during the study, 52.0% participated daily, 36.0% weekly, and 12.0% monthly, these data indicate an improved frequency of participation in neighborhood sports activities.

- At the initial assessment, the average score for civic/social behavior had the value 13.32, while at the final assessment, its value was 17.53. The obtained results indicate a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.001$) in this behavior. By participating in sports activities, a community can promote social cohesion and contribute to the formation of a stronger civic spirit among its inhabitants. "Using sport can help teach citizens their shared responsibilities towards the country by showing everyone that they are part of something bigger than just themselves." (Thibodeau, 2020)

- Progress in civic/social behavior was also assessed separately for each analyzed age category, and a statistically significant improvement was found in both participants aged 14-18 and participants aged 19-30.

References

1. Cucuș, C. (2004). *Pedagogie* [Pedagogy]. Polirom.
2. Șchiopu, U., & Verza, E. (1997). *Psihologia vârstelor. Ciclurile vieții* [Psychology of ages. Life cycles]. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
3. ChildFund Australia. (2021). *How does sport connect people and communities?* <https://www.childfundrugby.org/2019/05/02/how-does-sport-connect-people-and-communities/> [Accessed 15 April 2024]
4. Center for Community Health and Development. (2024). *Implementing promising community interventions* (Chaper 26: Changing the physical and social environment, Section 11: Conducting neighborhood cleanup programs). <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/physical-social-environment/neighborhood-cleanup-programs/main> [Accessed 17 April 2024]
5. Teodorescu, L. (2010). *Rolul adolescentului în societate* [The role of adolescents in society]. <http://www.asociatia-profesorilor.ro/rolul-adolescentului-in-societate.html> [Accessed 16 April 2024]
6. *Sport – Fenomen social cu caracter universal*. (n.d.). [Sport – A universal social phenomenon]. Universitatea Ecologică din București, Facultatea de Educație Fizică și Sport. <https://www.creeaza.com/familie/sport/SPORT-FENOMEN-SOCIAL-CU-CARACT476.php> [Accessed 17 April 2024]
7. Thibodeau, D. (2020). *Sport and citizenship*. <https://www.sportsforsocialimpact.com/post/sport-and-citizenship> [Accessed 17 April 2024]
8. Reneau, A. (2021). *Contrary to news headlines, bystanders actually do step in to help folks most of the time*. <https://www.upworthy.com/bystanders-actually-intervene-in-9-out-of-10-incidents> [Accessed 15 April 2024]



9. Triboi, V. (n.d.). *Construcția și dezvoltarea Sportului pentru Toți* [Building and developing Sport for All]. USEFS. <https://www.usefs.md/PDF/Cursuri%20electronice/CONSTRUCTIA%20SI%20DEZVOLTAREA%20SPORTULUI%20PENTRU%20TOTI.pdf> [Accessed 14 April 2024]
10. Working Against Violence, Inc. (n.d.). *Why bystanders don't take action?* <https://www.wavi.org/assets/docs/uploads/youth-vip/bystander-intervention-youth-handbook-pages.pdf> [Accessed 17 April 2024]
11. Din Țara Ta. (2019). *Implicarea civică – de ce e o idee bună să o practicăm?* [Civic engagement – why is it a good idea to practice it?]. <https://din-tara-ta.ro/povesti/implicarea-civica-de-ce-e-o-idee-buna-sa-o-practicam> [Accessed 15 April 2024]
12. University of Minnesota. (2023). *5 societal issues that can benefit from civic engagement*. <https://ccaps.umn.edu/story/5-societal-issues-can-benefit-civic-engagement> [Accessed 15 April 2024]