# Insights from Parents of Children and Young Adults With and Without Disability Who Play Sports

Lea Ferrari[a]

[a]*University of Padova, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, Padova (Italy)*

*Abstract:* There is a general agreement that regular physical and sporting activity contributes decisively to people's psychophysical well-being and this is true also for people with disability. Advantages are generally referred to health, socioemotional regulation, and social participation. A key role in promoting physical and sporting activities of children and youth is played by parents. In this study the point of view of parents of children with and without disability who play sports is explored. The semi-structured interview allowed to identify many similarities as concern advantages and barriers that practicing sports has for their sons, the changes they advocate as well as the benefits they perceived for themselves as parents. Attention to the individual characteristics of their children, to the relational contexts involved and to the possibilities of learning emerged as crucial. The presence of attitudes and actions that stimulate a sustainable vision of sport, which is realized through policies and inclusive actions for the participation of athletes with and without disabilities and their families appears as a salient result of the study.

*Keywords:* sport, people with disability, parents

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lea Ferrari, University of Padova, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA), Via Venezia 14, 35131, Padova, Italy, email: lea.ferrari@unipd.it*

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## Introduction

There is a general agreement that regular physical and sporting activity (PA&S) contributes decisively to people's psychophysical well-being. Also in the case of children and young adults with disabilities, the advantages are generally referred to health, socioemotional regulation, and social participation (Marquis & Baker, 2015).

PA&S improve the health of the skeleton and prevent or delay the arrival of chronic diseases; strengthen muscle tone and facilitate balance and walking; improve resilience, speed, and strength; and facilitate the decrease in heart rate, thereby optimizing breathing. Doing exercises also has a positive influence on cognitive abilities, such as executive functioning, concentration, and reaction times (Best, 2010). In the case, for example, of people with Down syndrome, PA&S promotes the control of chronic health problems, such as obesity, hypothyroidism, reduced basal metabolic rate, decreased muscle strength, muscular hypotonia, disorders of motor coordination, diabetes, insomnia, and cardiovascular disorders (Gonzalez-Aguero et al., 2010; Slevin et al., 2014).

On a psychological level, motor activity allows an individual to gain greater confidence, thus restoring self-confidence and helping to build a positive self-image to stimulate self-determination (Kwan et al 2013; Hutzler & Korsensky 2010). Moreover, PA&S as known benefits on mood thanks to the release of neuromediators, such as acetylcholine and endorphins, which produce feelings of analgesia and well-being. Other advantages include reducing the frequency of difficult (Gabler-Halle et al., 1993) and self-injurious behaviors (Neri & Sandman, 1992).

In terms of participation, going to a gym, a swimming pool, or a sports field allows one to establish relations with other people in environments that are different from those normally attended, stimulating and developing social skills with the aim of entering relationships with others. Athletes also develop friendly relationships with coaches and sports staff (Goldstein, Kaczmarek, & English, 2002; Lieberman et al., 2012; Martin, 2006). In a recent work, Klenk, Albrecht, and Nagel (2019) conducted a systematic review of 25 studies that focused on the social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sports in separated and inclusive settings. Results show that most of the studies found positive social benefits in people with disabilities for both separated and inclusive settings, especially in terms of social contacts, interactions and friendships, identity development, self-perception and acceptance, social support, and community integration.

Despite the advantages involved in practicing PA&S, the data concerning Italy are not entirely comforting. Istat data (2017) show that 34.3% of the

population practice one or more sports, 26.5% practice some form of PA&S, and 39.1% do not practice any form of PA&S at all. Of the more than 3 million people with disabilities, only 8.5% reported that they practice some sports or physical activity. Considering children and young people aged 3–14 years, 60% practice some sports, but the percentage drops to 45% when disability is present (Istat, 2018).

As Cotè (1999) has already highlighted, parents play a crucial role in promoting the PA&S of their sons. In fact, during the growth of their children, parents move from proposing various types of sports so that their children can learn about new activities and have fun (Sampling years, 6–13 years), to supporting their children in the sports they have chosen to practice (Specializing years, 13–15 years), and finally to providing support in the face of the difficulties that doing sport can bring (investment years, more than 15 years). Generally speaking, parents can support their sons through direct or indirect reinforcement and, in both cases, the children become more physically active than those whose parents do not apply these types of behaviors (Beets et al., 2010; Moore, Lambordi, White, Campbell, Oliveria, & Ellison, 1991; Welk, Wood & Morss, 2003).

Past studies have investigated the factors that impact the participation of children with disability in PA&S and defined an explanatory model that can be used in understanding the system of influence and planning strategies for intervening and promoting participation. In a review of 20 articles, Willis and colleagues (2016) identified 10 crucial and interrelated elements that contribute to meaningful participation in community and leisure activities for children and youth with disability. They are grouped into three main ambits: the person-based ambit, which includes having fun, experiencing success, belonging, experiencing freedom, and developing an identity; the environment-focused ambit, which includes authentic friendships, the opportunity to participate, role models, and family support; and the activity-related ambit, which includes learning.

More complex patterns of interactions among similar personal, relational, and contextual elements were described more recently by the same authors, who developed a three-level model for explaining the impact of PA&S participation in a group of 31 children aged 5–17 and their 44 parents who were involved in a PA&S intervention program (Willis et al., 2018). The context includes four conditions: (i) a safe environment that allows children for explore the environment, feel confident, and share their thoughts and feelings; (ii) learning and fostering (new) skills and behaviors; (iii) the opportunity to find new friends and develop a network; and (iv) the importance of family presence, especially during new activities and challenges. Meanwhile, the mechanisms that impact willingness to participate

include the following: (i) choice, that is, the opportunity for children to participate in goal setting and having their voice heard; (ii) how fun the proposed activities are; (iii) friends with whom the children spend time, having fun and supporting each other; (iv) specialized health professionals or staff who are able to adapt the PA&S to the needs of each son, thus enabling goal success; and (v) time or the need to give children more time to engage and learn. Outcomes and advantages include the following: (i) achievement, which refers to the successful learning experiences attained, (ii) aspirations or thoughts about future goals, (iii) friendship, which means having a higher number of friends and a safe network, (iv) the independence acquired by the children as they become more able to practice PA&S, (v) the sense of enjoyment felt while participating in PA&S and the feeling of being motivated, and finally, (vi) body functions, which refer to health and functional benefits.

More recently Mc Gartly and Meleville (2018) conducted a systematic review on parental perception of facilitators and barriers to physical activity for children with intellectual disability and found only 10 relevant studies. Family (i.e., parents understanding of benefit of activity, parents providing opportunities for activity, parental advocacy, family role models for activity), child factors (i.e. abilities), inclusive programs and facilities (i.e., accessible facilities, coach knowledge), social motivations (i.e. having family members or friends who share same interests) and child's experiences of physical activity (i.e., positive experience) were identified as the main themes that could turn as barriers or facilitators based on the information and the education of family members and coaches. In all these studies the sample included only parents of children with disabilities.

Examining specifically the Italian context, Alesi and Pepi (2015) interviewed 13 parents of 13 youth with Down syndrome to identify their beliefs as well as the facilitators and barriers that impact their children's PA participation. The support derived from family, the availability of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) expert instructors and coaches, and the challenging nature of sport activities emerged as the facilitators. The lack of APA expert coaches and specialized gyms, the characteristics of Down syndrome, and the parental beliefs and worries were classified as the barriers.

This study aims to explore the perceptions about sporting activities of the parents of children and young adults with and without disability and to give them voice about the perceived barriers to play sports as well as possible solutions and suggestions to improve participation. For what we know it is the only study conducted at least in Italy, which takes into consideration the parents' points of view in exploring the benefits available to young people and attempts to find suggestions for addressing critical aspects especially for those

who are experiencing disability. A similar set of themes for both groups of parents is expected that refers to (a) the family, with the importance attributed to sports and the need to provide concrete supports (i.e. transporting); (b) the child, with the new learning from a physical point of view but also form a personal and social perspective; and (c) the role of sport clubs and coaches in promoting participation of all children. It is also expected that peculiar elements could merge in both groups of parents related to specific needs of their children. Attention was also given to the perceived parental advantages of taking care of the sport activity of their children. See their child overcoming difficulties, learning skills, experiencing success could strength several parental perceptions and finding with other parents that could experience similar challenges could increase a sense of belonging. Moreover, parents could have acquired an agentic role toward inclusion. The research outcomes shall inform stakeholders about the specific needs and intervention designs that are appropriate for developing a positive partnership among parents and sport staff and for improving the participation of people with disability in sporting activities. Insights for future research and policy will also be discussed.

## Method

### Participants

In this study, 26 parents were involved. Their ages ranged from 40–72 years (M = 50.64, ds = 8.82) and 33 (82.1%) were mothers. As for their educational qualifications, 10 (38.5%) have a middle school diploma, one parent has a professional qualification (50.0%), 13 have a high school diploma (%), and three have a master's degree (11.5%). Of these parents, 12 (46.15%) practiced sports, such as swimming, basketball, volleyball, cycling, athletics, soccer, pilates, aqua gym, dance, and zumba.

Children and young adults with disabilities participating in the study were aged between 9 and 30 (M = 19.69 SD = 12.38), whereas the children and youth without disabilities were aged between 9 and 20 years (M = 9.74 SD = 3.2). All children and young adults perform sporting activities at least once a week, 15 (57.7%) go to a swimming pool and 11 (42.3%) go to a gym or playground where they played volleyball, basketball, football, or karate. Among the participants with disabilities, five (38.4%) attend environments in which they are involved in sporting activities with other athletes without disabilities and two (15.3%) play sports at a competitive level. Of the group of parents, 13 have sons without disabilities and 13 have sons with disabilities, of which three (23.1%) have an intellectual disability; three (23.1%) have a

motor disability; one (7.7%) has mild motor and intellectual disability; one (7.7% ) has motor disability, Angelman syndrome and intellectual disability; four (30.7%) have Down Syndrome; and one (7.7%) has the X Fragile syndrome.

## Measure

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview with the aim of exploring parents' perceptions of the benefits and barriers to the sporting activities of their sons with and without disability. The interview protocol included a demographic information section followed by open-ended questions to allow the exploration of detail, expression of opinions, and provision of examples where appropriate. Following the analysis of the literature and the general aim of the study, questions were develop with the aim of understanding parental perceptions in terms of ideas and opinions about the advantages that sport has for their son, the barriers, obstacles and support that impact their son participation in sport activities, what are the actions that they suggest for improving sport participation and finally what are the advantages this involvement provide to them as parents. The interview duration ranged from 30 to 40 min. All the interviews were conducted by the same researcher.

Prior to data collection, the interview guide was discussed with one parent of a child with Down Syndrome and a coach working with people with and without disability. Minor modifications were made following this consultation process. Moreover, the parents were informed about the aim of the study and the content of the interview.

In this study, the results of the following four questions are presented: *What is the thing you consider more important about the fact that your son practices sports? What are the difficulties your son has encountered in doing sports? What would change or what should happen because it was easier for your son to play sports? As a mother/father, what are the benefits that you have gained from the fact that your son practices sport?*

## Procedure

*Data coding and analysis.* Following the work of Downs et al. (2014), interviews were transcribed verbatim and the researcher read the transcripts numerous times in order to become familiar with the transcripts. Once the meaningful quotes were identified, similar quotes were clustered into categories, essentially highlighting the common themes among the

participants' perceptions. A frequency count was then conducted for each category, noting how many participants considered each point as relevant.

## Results

For the first question, *What is the thing you consider more important about the fact that your son practices sports?* the advantages identified by the parents referred to the six areas are summarized in Table 1 and listed below.

| | Without disability | | With disability | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Socio-relational advantages | 7 | 53.8 | 6 | 46.2 | 13 | 50.0 |
| Benefits for physical development | 5 | 38.5 | 3 | 23.1 | 8 | 30.8 |
| Satisfaction of the need for personal fulfillment | 0 | 0 | 3 | 23.1 | 3 | 11.5 |
| Acquisition of strategies of self-regulation and responsibility | 4 | 30.8 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 15.4 |
| Fun | 1 | 7.7 | 2 | 15.4 | 3 | 11.5 |
| Vent | 1 | 7.7 | 2 | 15.4 | 3 | 11.5 |
| Educational importance in general | 4 | 30.8 | 6 | 46.2 | 10 | 38.5 |
| Total | 23 | 25.3 | 22 | 24.2 | 45 | 24.7 |

Table 1. *Categories for the question, "What is the thing you consider most important about the fact that your son plays sports?"*

Socio-relational advantages: when a reference was made to being with others and teaming up. Parents, in fact, state that practicing a sporting activity "is an excellent opportunity for integration and socialization" (g3d) as it allows children "to relate to peers and learn to share" (g28n).

Benefits for physical development: when parents emphasized the usefulness of sports for musculoskeletal strengthening, movement, and harmonious growth of the body. Parents claim that "it helps physical development, especially if there are motor limitations" (g5d) and allows the children "to develop the body well and help coordination" (g18n).

Satisfaction of the need for personal fulfillment: when parents emphasized that sports allow a son to be fulfilled, engage in what he/she likes and considers important, pursue goals, and even face one's limits. It is recognized, for example, that one's own son "is a child who is always on the move with will and determination to do everything, to go beyond his limits" (g14d).

Acquisition of strategies of self-regulation and responsibility: when parents emphasized that sports allow self-discipline, the acquisition of autonomy to perform self-management, and help them learn to manage

situations involving anxiety, frustrations and failures. Through sports, children "learn to stand by the rules, to lose and to win" (g23n).

Fun: when reference was made to spending time in a pleasant and healthy way within controlled environments. Parents, in fact, claim that "it is a healthy way to have fun and to pass the time" (g13d).

Vent: when sport was recognized for its ability to relax and reduce accumulated stress and is considered "necessary to vent" (g11n).

Educational importance in general: when parents generically underlined the importance of sport, hoping that it can become a habit, saying that "it is an excellent thing" (g17n) and they "should do more" (g12d).

For the second question, *What are the difficulties your son has encountered in playing sports?*, parents' responses highlighted the presence of five barriers (Table 2).

| | Without disability | | With disability | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Technical | 0 | 0 | 5 | 38.5 | 5 | 19.2 |
| Emotional | 1 | 7.7 | 4 | 30.8 | 5 | 19.2 |
| Contextual | 2 | 15.4 | 1 | 7.7 | 3 | 11.5 |
| Relational | 2 | 15.4 | 2 | 15.4 | 4 | 15.4 |
| Failure management | 1 | 7.7 | 1 | 7.7 | 2 | 7.7 |
| Total | 6 | 9.2 | 13 | 20.0 | 19 | 14.6 |
| None | 7 | 53.8 | 3 | 23.1 | 10 | 38.5 |

Table 2. *Categories for the question, "What are the difficulties your son has encountered in doing sports?"*

Technical: when reference was made to the performance of the exercises and activities adequately and satisfactorily. These difficulties are generally attributable to the presence of limitations due to the specific disability, as evidenced by the "motor type difficulties, difficulty in moving the legs, to coordinate legs and arms. He overcame them by doing a lot of exercise" (g5d).

Emotional: when reference was made to emotions and fears that must be overcome in order to participate and carry out satisfactorily the sports activities undertaken, such as "The fear of water and the difficulty of being under water with your face because you could not hold your breath and felt suffocated. He overcame it with a lot of will and exercise" (g8d) or "overcoming one's limits and fears. He overcame them by trying, falling and getting hurt" (g21n).

Contextual: when reference was made to difficulties with coaches or with the company that were available to meet the difficulties of each specific son. This is clear from phrases such as "finding people and companies that allowed

them to do so" (g9d) and "in the relationship with the various coaches, he solved them with dialogue" (g28n).

Relational: when referring to the difficulties in interacting specifically with other athletes, as shown in the following statement, "I do not remember any particular difficulty except for some misunderstanding with the comrades resolved with dialogue" (g17n).

Failure management: when reference was made to the fact that one cannot always win and that sometimes it was necessary to have to start over. A parent, for example, said "he is very competitive, he would always like to win. It has not yet passed this thing and he still tends to abandon the activity" (g20n).

None: Some parents claimed to have encountered no difficulties.

The analysis of co-occurrences revealed a significant difference regarding the category of technical difficulties between parents of children and youth with and without disabilities, $\chi^2_{(1,26)} = 6.190$, $p = .039$ (Fisher Test).

For the third question, *What would change or what should happen because it was easier for your son to play sports?*, the categories identified are summarized in Table 3 and shown below.

| | Without disability | | With disability | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Inclusiveness of the associations | 0 | 0 | 5 | 38.5 | 5 | 19.5 |
| Mobility and transport | 3 | 23.1 | 1 | 7.7 | 4 | 15.4 |
| Economic availability | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7.7 | 1 | 3.8 |
| Individual involvement | 2 | 15.4 | 3 | 23.1 | 5 | 19.2 |
| Structural–organizational investments | 2 | 15.4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 7.7 |
| Equity | 1 | 7.7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.8 |
| Total | 8 | 10.3 | 10 | 12.8 | 18 | 11.5 |
| Nothing | 5 | 38.5 | 4 | 30.8 | 9 | 34.6 |

Table 3. *Categories for the question, "What would change or what should happen because it was easier for your son to play sports?"*

Inclusiveness of the associations: when reference was made to the need to have more associations available and equipped to accommodate even children and youth with disabilities. This can be seen from the statement "that there are more sports associations or more placements. In order not to retreat in his abilities he surely needs continuous stimulation" (g1d).

Mobility and transport: when reference was made to the difficulties faced by children and youth to reach sports venues autonomously due to the lack of enough services and the consequent need to involve other members of the community. Parents, for example, affirmed the importance of "being able to reach the place independently or with a dedicated transport, being able to

count on people other than family members during the lessons" (g2d) and "[the facilities] should be closer to one's own home, therefore making them more autonomously accessible" (g26n ).

Economic availability: when reference was made to the fact that the family's economic difficulties prevented free access to leisure activities, which can be seen from the statement "should improve the family's economic situation so he could also do other sports" (g8d).

Individual involvement: when reference was made to specific difficulties that hindered the participation of children and youth, thus affecting their involvement and motivation. This can be seen from the statement "involvement and more fun and motivation in reaching a goal" (g11d).

Structural–organizational investments: when reference was made to the need to modernize the structures and have flexible schedules, making it possible to use these aggregation spaces. All these require multi-level involvement as a "municipal aid in strengthening gyms and equipment" (g21n).

Equity: when reference was made to the difficulties with the coaches and the need for them to be impartial. This can be seen from the statement "… maybe they should all treat the same way without differences" (g26n).

Nothing: Some parents said they did not want to change anything.

The analysis of co-occurrences revealed a significant difference regarding the category of associations between parents of children and young adults with and without disabilities, $\chi^2_{(1,26)} = 6.190$, $p = .039$ (Fisher's exact test).

For the fourth question, *As a mother/father, what are the benefits that you have obtained from the fact that your son practices a sporting activity?*, the parents' answers highlighted a series of advantages centered mainly on the son (Table 4).

| | Without disability | | With disability | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| Socialization and appreciation of the son by others | 4 | 30.8 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 15.4 |
| Satisfaction of the son | 0 | 0 | 6 | 46.2 | 6 | 23.1 |
| Son’s self-regulation | 4 | 30.8 | 2 | 15.4 | 6 | 23.1 |
| Son’s motivation | 0 | 0 | 2 | 15.4 | 2 | 7.7 |
| Psychological growth of the son | 3 | 23.1 | 2 | 15.4 | 5 | 19.2 |
| Environmental safety | 1 | 7.7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.8 |
| Parents’ advantages | 1 | 7.7 | 1 | 7.7 | 2 | 7.7 |
| Total | 13 | 14.3 | 13 | 14.3 | 26 | 14.3 |
| None | 4 | 30.8 | 2 | 15.4 | 6 | 23.1 |

Table 4. *Categories for the question, "As mother / father, what are the benefits that you have obtained from the fact that your son practices a sporting activity?"*

Socialization and appreciation of the son by others: parents were satisfied because the son "socializes" (g15n) and "my daughter is a well-liked child" (g23n).

Satisfaction of the son: the parents emphasized seeing the son satisfied with what he/she was doing. For example, they said they were satisfied in "see his dreams come true as any normal boy" (g9d).

Son's self-regulation: when the parents emphasized the fact that the son had learned to manage his/her own duties independently and respect the rules, e.g., "time, discipline, respect for appointments" (g4d).

Son's motivation: when parents referred to the commitment and involvement that the son manifests and they "see [him] motivated" (g3d).

Psychological growth of the son: when parents referred to the acquisition or strengthening of individual psychological abilities, such as "I see him [as being] a little safer" (g12d), or "he overcame his shyness [and became] more confident in his actions" (g16n).

Environmental safety: when parents referred to the knowledge that the son spent his/her time in a safe and controlled environment, e.g., "the fact that my daughter attends a safe, controlled environment" (g28n).

Parents' advantages: when parents referred to personal advantages, such as being able to have "a bit of tranquility when [the child is] out" (g14n) or "getting to know other parents and traveling" (g17n).

None: Some parents declared that they did not perceive advantages.

The analysis of co-occurrences revealed a significant difference regarding the category of seeing the son satisfied between the parents of children and youth with and without disabilities, $\chi^2_{(1,26)} = 7.800$, $p = .005$ (Fisher's exact test).

## Discussion and Conclusion

In general, as expected answers provided by parents mention family, children and club or coach aspects. A dimension related to policy is also emerged as concern strategies to improve sport participation. More in detail, parents who participated in the research generally have a positive opinion of the sporting activities of their children and attested to their importance. They are also particularly appreciative of the fact that such activities allowed their children to enter relations with their peers and learn to relate to other figures, such as their coaches and other staff. The parents also considered significant the advantages of PA&S in terms of the physical development and strengthening of their children's body structures, regardless of the presence or absence of disability. Specifically, for parents of children with disabilities, doing sports seems to take on a value that goes beyond empowerment, as the

training helps reduce certain specific physical-motor difficulties associated with impairment.

Results also show that, for all these parents, sport is an activity that involves pleasure and fun and allows the children's psychophysical activation levels to be re-established by acting as a coping strategy for stress reduction. The two categories seem to take on a distinct character for the two groups of parents. Those who have sons with disabilities seem to ascribe particular importance to the sense of personal fulfillment experienced by a son thanks to the participation and success derived from the sporting activities. Those who have children without disabilities seem to attach importance to their sons' acquisition of a sense of responsibility in managing their commitments, thus increasing their independence and autonomy.

In the categories mentioned by these parents, it is possible to find some similarities with the model of Willis and colleagues (2016). On the one hand, the person-based ambit includes having fun, relaxing, and achieving psychophysical development, whereas the environment-focused ambit includes the possibility of entering a relationship with the various actors involved. The activity-related ambit, on the other hand, appears to be transversal to the two previous areas: parents stated that sport allows children to learn from both relational as well as psychological and physical points of view.

With regard to the difficulties that come with the participation in sporting activities, the results suggest that parents of children and young adults with disabilities find themselves in a situation wherein they tend to be more critical than other parents. What appears to be particularly limiting for this group of parents is not so much the impairment in itself as its consequences which, on a sporting level, make it more difficult and complex to train and successfully complete what is required. This is the reason why parents of children with disabilities specifically wish to have associations that are concretely inclined towards inclusion. This could include specific training activities for the staff as well as further actions to promote inclusive attitudes and behaviors for all those who participate in various ways in community life, including the athletes and parents of children without disabilities.

The consequences of these limitations above seem to be accompanied by the need to learn how to manage emotional aspects, to challenge one's fears, and to persist in what one is committed to. Both groups of parents also referred to difficulties of relational orders associated with interacting effectively with other athletes and contextual orders associated with the presence of sports associations and staff, who are not always inclined to interface with the difficulties resulting from children's disabilities. Finally, parents reported the specific difficulties involved in managing the failure that practicing a sport

can entail, especially on an emotional–motivational level. To cope with these problems, both groups of parents wish for greater individual involvement for their sons, which is characterized by greater equity in treatment and the possibility of reaching sports venues more easily. Educational proposals that focus more on fun rather than competitive performance as well as initiatives that can facilitate the achievement of accessing different locations could increase participation levels and even the satisfaction experienced by the participants. Thus, the possibilities of being able to access more facilities and having more time to participate (not just the time strictly foreseen by the training sessions or dedicated to the planned activities) could give sporting activities an even more significant value in terms of social sustainability. In line with this, parents also referred to the need for economic facilities that can allow them to support their children's participation in sporting activities consistently, especially when substantial investments are required to buy equipment and gain access to facilities.

The answers to the question related to the advantages a parent is believed to have received due to the sporting activities carried out by the son confirm what has emerged in the previous answers. What is evident is that both groups of parents describe their advantages through the growth and achievements of their sons. For parents of children and young adults with disabilities, it seems particularly important that their son is satisfied with what he does and can feel a sense of fulfilment from the activity. It is also important that the son continues to be motivated to take part in sports activities and persist despite the difficulties he/she may encounter due to his/her limitations. This category is not at all present in the parents of children and youth without disabilities who, instead, seem to concentrate on the importance of other parents and the sporting community recognizing the value of their son.

Possibly, these parents build their value through comparison with others, and this mechanism is not so relevant to other parents who do not seem to claim to be so attentive to the opinion of others. Among the advantages mentioned by the parents, they included the acquisition of greater autonomy and independence as well as psychological growth, which can contribute to reducing the parents educational tasks and can give them the feeling of being successful educators. This is also in tune with the idea that attending a gym, or a playground is a protected environment wherein the concern that something uneasy can happen to one's son is reduced.

Finally, few parents are actually focused on their own personal advantages. Above all, they mention the possibility of traveling, getting to know other parents, and then confronting each other. This suggests the importance of encouraging events and proposing initiatives that heighten their

sense of being part of a group and stimulating them through the proposal of strategies to adopt inclusive and supportive attitudes towards each other.

In summary, there are many similarities in the parents' perceptions of the advantages and difficulties involved in having sons with and without disabilities who play sporting activities. Many of them refer to the individual characteristics of their children and to the relational contexts involved. The possibilities of learning are configured as element that transversally concerns both areas. The presence of attitudes and actions that stimulate a sustainable vision of sport, which is realized through policies and inclusive actions for the participation of athletes with and without disabilities and their families, appears as a peculiar and salient result of the study. Although further work is needed to ensure the reliability of what has been emphasized, the explanatory models developed to explain the role of sports in the lives of people with and without disabilities could benefit from this contribution. The results can also increase the likelihood of formulating effective proposals to pursue sustainability goals set in the 2030 UN agenda.

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