

## Beyond sport and physical activity: the concept of movement in health promotion

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*Public health literature is full of evidence regarding various health effects of exercise and physical activity. For example: High levels of physical activity have been associated with lower risks of cardiovascular diseases, lower risks of developing colon and breast cancer, lower risks of suffering from Diabetes Type II and an overall prolonged life expectancy. Further, physical activity has been associated with increasing quality of life, and some studies have suggested that physical activity may improve mental conditions such as anxiety and depression.*

*However, the concepts of sport and exercise as well as the more recently established concept of health enhancing physical activity have been defined within a traditional public health framework. As such, they are of limited use within a health promotion context. Accordingly, there is not much research on how sport or physical activity relate to healthy public policy and supportive environments. There are not many studies on how sport and physical activity may contribute to empowerment, social capital, community development etc... Instead, the narrow bio-medical focus of the traditional concepts of sport and physical activity concentrates research on respective bio-medical processes and outcomes:*

- The concept of sport and exercise which dominated public health research and recommendation until the 1990s mainly focused on processes of training and physiological adaptation. For example, 15–60 minutes exercise bouts with 60%–90% maximum heart rate on 3–5 days per week had been recommended by the American College of Sports Medicine to improve fitness and (physical) health.*
- The concept of health enhancing physical activity (HEPA) which is dominant in public health since the mid-1990s expanded the context of processes to be considered. In particular, the contexts of work and transportation have been added to the traditional context of leisure time*

*(sport) activities. Accordingly, public health recommendations shifted towards an accumulated 30 minutes of almost all kind of moderate physical activity, preferably on all days of the week. Nevertheless, HEPA kept the traditional public health interest in processes of physiological adaptation: “calories counting”, i. e. measuring calories expenditure, became a major topic of research and intervention.*

*Given the increasing importance of issues around sport and physical activity in international public health discussion on the one hand, and the marginal linkage between the traditional sport or physical activity concepts and key domains of health promotion on the other, a new concept is needed which may be able to bridge the gap. This concept should follow a new public health paradigm to define relevant processes and outcomes within the health promotion context. I'll call it the concept of “movement”<sup>1</sup>.*

- First of all, movement is a fundamental educational category which closely relates to individual development and independence: From the first steps in our life, where we learn to explore and cope with our environment, until the oldest age where fragility may limit physical capacities, our potential to control the determinants of our life very much rely on our ability to move. In this context, movement e. g. can increase cognitive performance and learning capacity as well as self-esteem and self-efficacy.*

<sup>1</sup> In German, three different notions are used to reflect different contextual meanings: „Bewegung“ may include all connotations related to the concept of movement. In contrast, the German term „Sport“ more specifically refers to the English “sports” and “exercise” while the German term “Körperliche Aktivität” fits quite well with the narrow focus on “bodily movement” which characterises the concept of “physical activity”.

- *Secondly, movement is a fundamental social category. We have to “move ourselves” – in a physical and sometimes also in a mental way – to get together with others. The context of movement creates specific opportunities for social networking: Someone may become better friends with their neighbours by joining them regularly for walking, or: people who primarily came together to exercise in a sport club may develop closer social relationships and experience social support.*
- *Thirdly, movement is a fundamental policy category. The term “social movement” directly refers to the potential of movement for community engagement. For example, promoting safe walking and cycling has functioned as a catalyst for discussions about the reduction of inner city car traffic and has thus supported policy efforts for a healthier environment. In the meantime, urban planning has identified and called for community designs that are attractive for movement.*
- *Fourthly, movement is a fundamental environmental category. Movement is not only a prerequisite for coping with or changing the environment as mentioned above in the context of education. The context of movement may*

*also create better environmental conditions for a healthy living. For example, studies have shown relations between neighbourhood safety and physical activity. Neighbourhoods with higher crime rates inhibit residents to walk for transport or, reversing causality, neighbourhoods where residents walk for transport feature lower crime rates.*

*To conclude, the paradigm shift from traditional public health to new public health which was closely related to the development of the concept of health promotion in the last quartile of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not yet implemented in the increasingly important area of sport and physical activity. Here, concepts and research are still dominated by a narrow bio-medical focus. A new concept, i. e. the concept of movement, may help to overcome insufficiencies of previous concepts with regard to the specific health promotion context. In particular, movement is defined as a fundamental educational, social, political and environmental concept and as such will help to concentrate further interventions and research in this area on the core issues of health promotion.*

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