

Leisure workers in the City Sports and Leisure Program: an approach to defining their profile

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Abstract: The article aims to describe the profile of workers in the City Sports and Leisure Program. The analysis was based on the definition of leisure workers as an occupational status. Data were collected through a questionnaire at national level and in the Federal District. The results show coincidence in profiles in the spheres studied. The discussion of data indicated an association between time spent at the program, participation of agents in training meetings and knowledge of the program's core concepts. Continuing education is a key strategy for achieving the policy examined.

Keywords: Recreation Workers, Public Policy, Recreation.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a nationwide study whose main goal was to analyze the “City Leisure and Sports Program” (*Programa Esporte e Lazer da Cidade*, PELC), implemented by Brazil's

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Ministry of Sports. One major specific goal is to build a profile of leisure workers – the program’s social agents – considering socioeconomic factors, length of stay in the program, the process of continuing education, and knowledge of goals, principles and guidelines.¹ Therefore, it is the result of part of a research whose methodology was case study and which included several investigation stages in addition to that presented in the following text.

The City Leisure and Sports Program aims to ensure sports and recreation as a social right and thus contribute to full exercise of citizenship (TELLES, 1999). From this perspective, sports and leisure are approached as cultural goods whose access follows the principle of universalization and social inclusion, which, in turn, guide the “National Policy on Sports and Leisure” (BRASIL, 2006). For this purpose, the program is developed by a group of social agents who act at “Centers for Sports and Leisure”, which are located in cities nationwide. Note that those agents both execute the program and are members of the communities where they operate by providing sports and leisure activities such as gymnastics, *capoeira*, games, dance and sports (FIGUEIREDO; ALMEIDA, 2010, ALMEIDA *et al.*, 2012).

Therefore, establishing the profile of leisure workers implies understanding who those social actors are. In this work, we chose to consider them as an organized or quasi-organized occupational status (SOROKIN, 1979) to develop community sports and leisure activities. Knowing their profile has implications for building strategies for their continuing education and therefore provides elements for the best design of the social program in terms of type of action/intervention performed in communities. Besides leisure, community agents prove to be important social actors for public policy in other areas such as health. They are the link between the community and the State, mediating community needs and the demands of political actions. This emphasis shows the need for

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further studies on their occupational and social profile and their training process” (CORIOLANO *et al.*, 2012, p. 54).

To characterize these social actors from the perspective of defining leisure workers as an occupational status, the research is not based only on national data, but also on local data – in this case, the Federal District and its surroundings. The choice of locus is justified by the desire for a deeper understanding of reality in Brazil as well as the Federal District and its surrounding areas. The latter is usually seen as unique for Brazil, taking into account socio-economic indicators such as those presented by the Human Development Index – HDI. We must consider that when taking macro-structures as the basic unit of analysis, “[...] inequalities and problems are invisible [...]” (POCHMANN; AMORIM, 2003, p. 19.), because working with figures can reveal one face of the problem while others remain hidden.

Therefore, we used a comparative analysis anchored in descriptive data, whose variables are mostly independent, but which help, in their own ways, to show the profile of the group that includes leisure workers according to their occupational status. Those data were collected through a questionnaire whose information will be used for the analysis proposed by this article.

2 PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES OF THE CITY SPORTS AND LEISURE PROGRAM

The City Sports and Leisure Program was created in 2003 with the primary goal of “promoting access to recreational sports and leisure”, in line with the Multi-Year Plan (2004-2007) called “Brazil: a country for/of all” (BRASIL, 2008). It is based on the understanding that a significant portion of the population has unequal access to sports and leisure, which imposes the need for policies and programs aimed at correcting this difference in access (FIGUEIREDO, 2009; FERES NETO; VIEIRA; ATHAYDE, 2012). The program received R\$ 730 million from the federal government in 2004-2008. At the time, it was the largest investment in sports and leisure for educational and participation purposes, placing it in a prominent position in the

current situation of public policies (ALMEIDA; MARCHI JÚNIOR, 2010).

As a social program, the PELC includes the guiding principles of the National Sports Policy (NEP) organized as follows: a) On reversal of the current situation of social injustice, exclusion and social vulnerability; b) On sports and leisure as everyone's right and a duty of the State; c) On universalization and social inclusion; c) On democratization of management and participation (BRASIL, 2008).

Based on these guiding principles, the program's guidelines were established as: a) community self-organization; b) collective work; c) inter-generational character; d) promotion and dissemination of local culture; e) respect for diversity (BRASIL, 2008). In this particular aspect, the first two guidelines – “community self-organization” and “collective work” – together with the guiding principles that consider sports and leisure as rights and democratization of management and participation, they are crucial to understand the analysis we now intend to develop. This is because the relationship of those guidelines with these principles allows us to understand the program's emphasis on training social actors who participate in it, particularly social agents, here understood as leisure workers.

3 DEFINING THE PROFILE OF SOCIAL ACTORS

Profiles were defined based on the following assumption: “In order for each of them to have a nature of its own, it must also have living conditions that are peculiar to it” (Durkheim, 1987, p 129).² This means that, based on typological characterization of leisure workers, we can envision causal arrangements in whole-part and

²It is necessary to clarify that the use of Durkheim's contribution to defining typological characterization has nothing to do with the theoretical approach followed throughout the research. The use we made of Durkheim's view is strictly related to the possibility of building profiles – the analysis conducted by the author for the definition of suicide cases, based on is methodical approach, is taken as an example (Durkheim, 1987).

part-whole relationships, and thus between society and individuals. Along the process, the definition will allow an understanding of the social workers who work with the City Sports and Leisure Program. Thus, to better understand this universe, it was necessary to carry out theoretical and methodological mediations based on the perspective of Sorokin (1979) and Weber (1991).

We can assume that turning groups into profiles may provide elements for understanding who the program's leisure workers are. On the other hand, according to Sorokin (1979), for whom economic and occupational ties, even when used separately, exert strong influence on subject's body and mind, it is possible to understand these actors' behavior and way of life. The author further explains that:

People who have essentially similar occupations, economic status – we would add education levels – and rights and duties become similar in many other ways, both in behavior and physically, mentally and morally, even though that does not mean equality, but rather the possibility of inclusion of those subjects in social groups (SOROKIN, 1979, p. 87).

The descriptive characteristics expressed herein, such as sex, age range, education, among others, are only one part of the whole, i. e., they are elements that allow tracing the profile of social actors implementing the program in their communities, especially when combined with their length of stay – their period of activity –, to the process of continuing education and knowledge about its objectives, principles and guidelines.

Correspondingly, research on the continuing education of community health care agents has shown a positive correlation between continuing education practices and agents' action in their communities. In addition to professional development, continuing education is a significant strategy to produce a “new outlook” by agents on their social practice. The goal is to direct that outlook by taking into account the special situations found in each reality and

seeking to act in partnership with the community. Above all, it offers conceptual tools and technologies that enable community agents to change their professional practice and the very organization of work, approaching, on the one hand, the needs of the community and, on the other hand, fundamental notions of public policy. According to the concept of continuing education widespread among community health care workers, workers' activity can be the starting point for the training process, thus generating their subsequent learning (CORIOLANO et al., 2012, STROSCHEIN; ZOCHE, 2012, MODESTO et al., 2013).

The definition of occupational, economic and legal status – to use the terms coined by Sorokin (1979) – combined with the subjects' schooling and sex status, help composing the framework to define the profile of leisure workers. Again, as social actors, they are subjects who build intervention actions through sports and leisure activities in their communities. However, we must add that their social practices are guided by the behavior of other individuals, whether it is past, present or future expected behavior. These are, in turn, meaning-making actions, establishing the concept of social action in Weber (1991).

4 METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

As noted earlier, our goal was to identify the characterization of the profile of leisure workers in the City Sports and Leisure Program, considering socioeconomic factors and mode of action/intervention in communities. We note that, under the program, such workers are called “social agents”. These agents are in charge of implementing the program and integrating the respective communities in which they operate at “Sport and Leisure Centers”. Apart from sports and leisure, they meet occasionally at their centers in pedagogical and national meetings, to participate in an educational activity called “continuing education”, which,

according to the program's guidebook, is one of their goals (BRASIL, 2008).

The literature recommends that the methodology of analysis for public policy should consider the programs' social context. In order to understand the complexity of the process to make and implement those policies, it is important to focus on elements beyond the concept of policies as a State strategy. Among these, understanding agents' social relations is suggested, since they are an important aspect to be analyzed by experts in the field (STAREPRAVO; SOUZA; MARCHI JUNIOR, 2011).

The research universe included (N) 3,256 subjects, which covers the total population of social agents of the program at national level (according to data from 2007 to 2010). Working with a sampling error of 5%, sample size was defined by a basic calculation corresponding to: sample (a) is equal to $1/E^2$ (estimated error squared). The sample size obtained was 400 subjects and confidence was 95%. The survey comprised the national and the local spheres – the latter covered the Federal District and its surroundings. To ensure uniformity of procedures, we also kept the same sample for the two spheres surveyed. Therefore, the results expressed here include information on 800 subjects – 400 national and 400 local ones.

The research was a case study aimed at building an initial assessment of subjects' profile. For that assessment, we used a questionnaire consisting of twenty-four questions of the "closed-ended multiple choice", "scalar", and "mixed" types and one open-ended question. The latter asked for an evaluation of the program and comments about that evaluation. All items had the same weight, except for the last question, since it was open-ended. In other words, no distinguishing marks were attributed to the questions. The questionnaire had been tested in 2006.

Its application occurred at two different times. Firstly, at the national level, during the National Meeting of Social Agents of the

City Sports and Leisure Program^{3,4}, which included respondents from 15 Brazilian states: Acre, Amazonas, Bahia, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Minas Gerais, Pará, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina and São Paulo, as well as the Federal District, comprising a total of 45 cities. The second moment coincided with the intention of conducting a more detailed study of the reality of the Federal District and surrounding areas. Centers established in Ceilândia, Taguatinga, Samambaia, Cruzeiro and Núcleo Bandeirante were analyzed in the Federal District. The cities of Valparaíso and Cidade Ocidental also participated. They are located in the state of Goiás, but were considered part of the surroundings of the Federal District. In both spheres surveyed, the questionnaire was applied during the training process of social workers.

Information obtained at the national level and in the Federal District and its surrounding areas is analyzed here in a comparative way, through description. For the analysis, we used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences – SPSS version 15.0.

5 RESULTS: POINTING OUT CHARACTERISTICS

Interpreting data on the constitution of profiles is part of descriptive research activity. We could hardly understand a program's process of intervention – a policy in action – without clearly knowing the profile of its social actors. That is because, according to Weber (1991), political action involves the exercise of legitimate domination by those actors. In effect, faced with the challenge of analyzing a program in progress, a key aspect to be

³The program's training policy consisting of educational meetings and national meetings is related to the educational action, which, according to official documents on the program's website, regards "continued training of managers, agents, community leaders, researchers, legislators and other partners active at federal, state and local public spheres, with a view to formulating and implementing public policies for sports and leisure based on social and cultural inclusion" (BRASIL, 2011).

⁴Questionnaires related to data expressed at national level were obtained during the First National Meeting of Social Agents of the City Sports and Leisure Program, which took place in Brasília in 2006. This meeting was primarily aimed at promoting continued training of leisure workers, being associated with the educational action strategy of the program under the Ministry of Sports.

considered is the identification of its social actors.

Based on the results obtained through questionnaires, variables were crossed in the process of analysis, aiming both at their graphical representation and at their correct interpretation. According to Bourdieu (1983, p. 86), “groups invest entirely, with everything that opposes them to other groups, in the common words expressing their identity, i. e. their difference”. Thus, common features express socially marked speech, laden with social connotations, which may contribute to the characterization of social actors’ profiles.

Sex, age and education, for instance, are independent variables. However, even though, from a statistical point of view, these variables present answers by themselves, we cannot interpret them alone. Therefore, we combined the set of variables or indicators so we can outline the expected design more clearly, i. e., the definition of profile of the City Sports and Leisure Program’s leisure workers.

a) Gender and age ranges of leisure workers

As for the distribution of leisure workers by sex, it was found that 54% at the national level were men and 46% were women. In the Federal District and surrounding areas, men accounted for 60% and women for 40%. Therefore, there was clear proportionality between data obtained in the two research spheres.

The age range of leisure workers at the national level varied from 14 to 60, with a strong concentration in the 25-40 age group. At the local level, age varied from 14 to 59, concentrated on the 20-40 range.

b) Leisure workers’ education

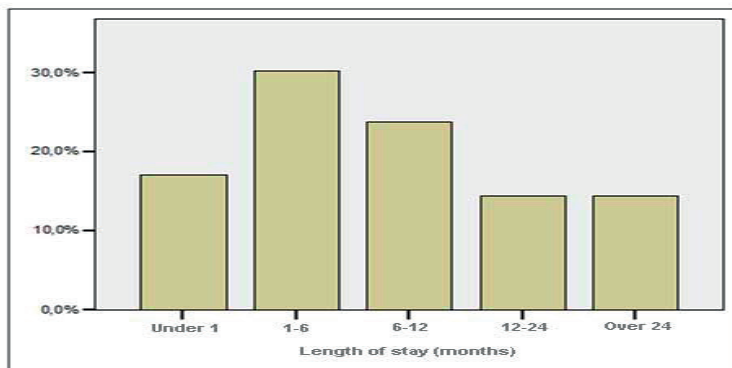
One of the most important factors for establishing social indicators is educational level. It helps to have a strategic understanding of what needs to be done, in terms of social policy, to secure the population’s right to education (GUTIÉRREZ, 1988). In the case of leisure workers, identifying their level of education is necessary for planning educational activities geared specifically to the continuing education of those social subjects.

In order to analyze respondents' level of education, we distributed the sample universe in six strata: incomplete and complete primary education, incomplete and complete secondary education, incomplete and complete higher education. We found that 48% of respondents at the national level had complete higher education; 24% had incomplete higher education; 18% had complete secondary education; 4% had incomplete secondary education; and 6% had complete elementary education. There is no record of anyone with incomplete primary education. At local level, 8% had complete higher education; 10% had incomplete higher education; 40% had complete secondary education; 20% had incomplete secondary education; 10% had complete elementary education; and 12% incomplete elementary education.

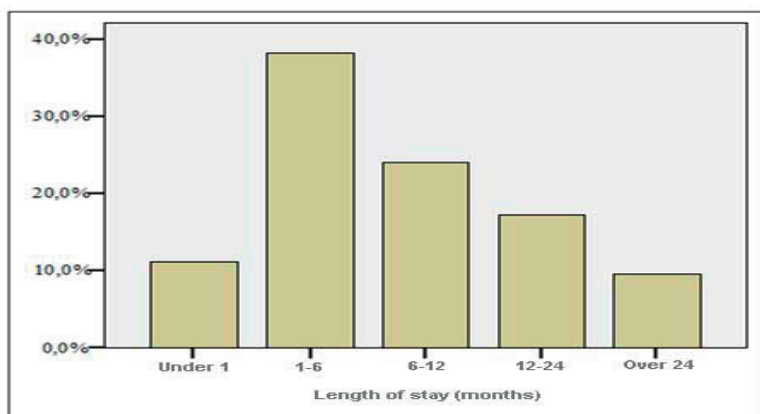
c) Leisure workers' length of stay at the City Sports and Leisure Program

Another relevant aspect to understand the characterization of the profile of leisure workers concerns length of their stay, i. e., the time they work for the program. Its relevance is determined by the finding that continuity of the intervention and knowledge of its strategies are linked to the time during which workers perform their activities in the program, as shown in Charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1 – Length of stay at the (national) program



Source: Authors (2010).

Chart 2 – Length of stay at the (local) program

Source: Authors (2010).

Comparing Charts 1 and 2, it appears that the largest group of workers is in the 1-6 months range. This aspect confirms the existence of considerable transitoriness, since only about 15% of respondents at the national level stayed more than two years in the program, while at local level that percentage drops to about 10%.

According to data presented, approximately 75% of respondents remain in the program for less than a year. This information is interesting because the recognition of community leaders may be related to their charisma and the ability for intervention in their communities, including the training of new staff. However, staff training does not occur continuously, since there is transitoriness in relation to the time that leisure workers remain in the program.

In this regard, some questions are important: What is the cause of that transitoriness since, at the time of the survey, the program had been in place for over three years, but a relatively low percentage of workers had been active since its inception? How is it possible to consolidate a social program – under Brazil's social

policy – with such a transitory situation like this?

d) The process of continuing training of leisure workers

We also sought information on continuing education during the intervention of social agents. There are two types of training processes. The first one, based on national meetings, is conducted under the Ministry of Sports. The second one, which occurs in places where the program's centers are established – and therefore where leisure workers live – is run by partner institutions, which receive resources to conduct training and must later report to the Ministry Sports. To know whether or not there was participation in the training process, the question was presented in a bipolar way, i. e., respondents could only answer “yes” or “no”. It was found that over 85% of respondents at the national level had participated in some training or qualification process and almost 80% said they had done it at the Federal District and its surroundings. There is a clear approximation between the results, since affirmative answers prevail in the two spheres (national and local).

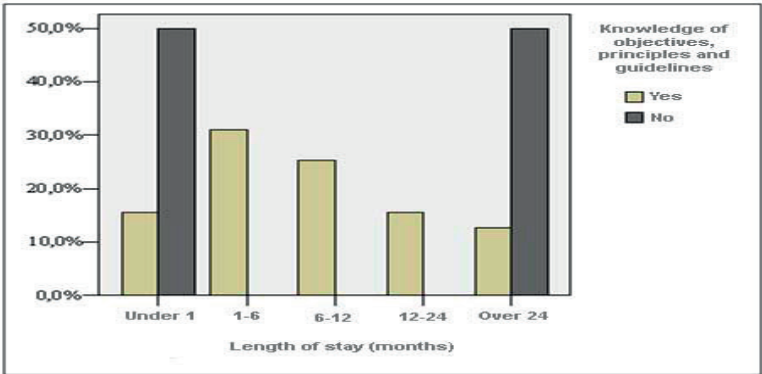
e) Employees' knowledge about objectives, principles and guidelines of the City Sports and Leisure Program

Leisure workers' level of knowledge about the program's objectives, principles and guidelines was also an object of interest in this research. That question aimed at understanding the extent to which subjects mastered and understood the program in which they worked, as well as whether or not they were aware of their performance. The question posed for this purpose was: “Do you know the objectives, principles and guidelines of the City Sports and Leisure Program?” For better data analysis, we crossed them with the numbers recorded about length of stay in the program.

Given the complex distribution of respondents by length of stay in the program and in order to build a detailed analysis of this category, we performed analytical description according to the following group distribution: Group 1 – under one month in the program; Group 2 – over one month and under six months;

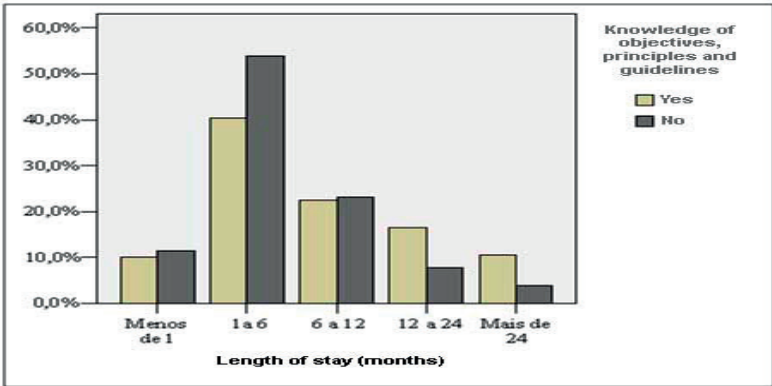
Group 3 – over six months and under one year; Group 4 – over one and under two years; and Group 5 – over two years. We generated Charts 3 and 4, which are interesting to understand the universe surveyed, according to analysis presented later.

Chart 3 – Knowledge of objectives, principles and guidelines X Length of stay (National)



Source: Authors (2010).

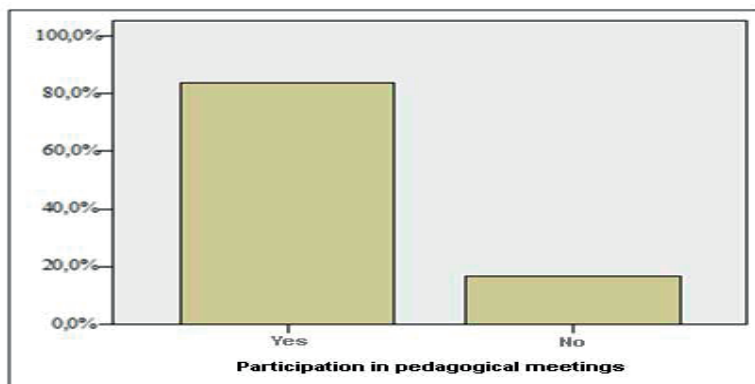
Chart 4 - Knowledge of the objectives, principles and guidelines X Length of stay (local)



Source: Authors (2010).

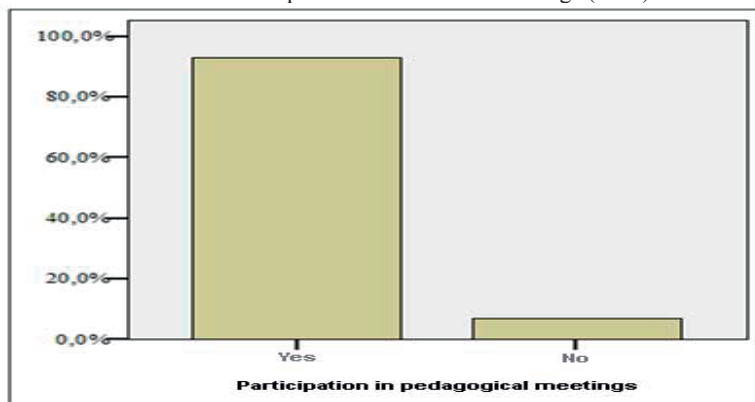
Finally, as can be seen from Charts 5 and 6, at the national level we found that 16% of leisure workers did not participate in pedagogical meetings dedicated to planning, implementation and evaluation of activities at centers. At local level, about 6% of respondents said they did not attend those meetings. The fact that participation in such events was mandatory points to the need for more effective monitoring of that stage of the program by managers.

Chart 5 – Participation at pedagogical meetings (national)



Source: Authors (2010).

Chart 6 – Participation in educational meetings (local)



Source: Authors (2010).

6 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The discussion we now present concerns firstly the profile of leisure workers as an occupational status in their work for the City Sports and Leisure Program. For that, data obtained at the national and local levels were analyzed. As “local”, we considered the Federal District and its surroundings.

In general, it might be said that leisure workers’ profiles coincide at the spheres surveyed for the categories “sex”, “age range” and “length of stay at the program”. Considering the notion of Sorokin (1979), the results suggest homogeneity among leisure workers at local and national levels.

Some dispersion is noted at the national level, since 2% of male workers were under 18, while 10% of female agents were over 50. In the Federal District and its surroundings, more dispersion showed that 2.5% of female workers were 14 years old and about 2.5% of males were already 59. Nevertheless, the relationship between workers sexes and age ranges was similar at national and local levels, since there is concentration on the 20-40 age range.

It is also necessary to observe that workers’ ages were relatively homogeneous, with a negligible difference of five years. The predominant age group of men working in the program was 25-40, while women were predominantly 30-40 years old. This occurred both at the national level and in the Federal District and its surrounding areas. Therefore, there was an indication that men enter earlier in the program, while women take longer to join it.

It is interesting to note the large age range of PELC leisure workers, from 14 to 60 years of age. This is explained by a peculiarity of the program, which allows participation of people under 18 as “social agents”. The program’s goal is working with community leisure which, on an enlarged scale, may include physical activities and competition sports such as football, but also body practices such as skateboarding and hip hop. When hiring social agents as

interns for the program, the main concern is that they have skills with a leisure body practice as well as their involvement with the community (FIGUEIREDO; ALMEIDA, 2010, ALMEIDA et al., 2012).

Considering the information obtained nationally with respect to schooling, data show that 48% of respondents have a college degree, while more than half of the 42% with secondary education have incomplete higher education and therefore have had some form of access to higher education. It must be stressed that only 10% of respondents have just primary education. Finally, the lack of uneducated leisure workers at the national level of the program shows their satisfactory schooling condition.

Some disagreement can be seen between data obtained at national and local levels. The disagreement lies in the fact that workers with college degrees prevail at the national level, while complete secondary education prevails locally. This shows that the notion of invisibility of social inequities in the Federal District and surrounding areas is enhanced. This finding supports the idea previously presented that the snapshot shown by the “Atlas of Social Exclusion in Brazil” may not correspond in many respects to the reality studied; yet it serves as a parameter to get a general sense of the geopolitical situation of Brazil’s several federal units (POCHMANN; AMORIM, 2003).

On the other hand, such information is important to implement the program because one of its main activities is its training policy for leisure workers, aiming at community actions/interventions in the areas of sport and leisure. Thus, training directly related to cultural, artistic or sporting aspects (BRASIL, 2008, FIGUEIREDO; ALMEIDA, 2010) is required. The training of social agents is a crucial factor in the quality of their educational and political action under the PELC. However, specific training would not be enough to compensate for the unevenness of PELC social agents’ schooling, evidenced in the Federal District compared to the national universe.

The analysis of these data also shows that, given the complexity of the scenario presented, the definition of the parameters for the program's training policy requires an understanding of the assessment and the construction of a proposal which can encompass people with different levels of schooling. That assumes not only specific training different from the existing one, but also disparate ways of understanding social reality, since different training results in different understandings of reality.

On the relationship between participation in the training process, knowledge of the objectives, principles and guidelines and length of stay of leisure workers in the program, we stress the following considerations.

The lack of knowledge about goals, principles and guidelines by group 1 – under a month at the program – seems clear, since it gathers subjects who had started working in the program recently and had not participated in training processes. Furthermore, in percentage terms, few respondents indicated ignorance, both at national and local level. The same can be said of group 5 respondents – over two years at the program – who reported having no knowledge of the issues highlighted in the question. The amount is very small when compared with those who said they were aware of those issues, taking into account the data collected in both spheres. However, it seems curious that groups 2, 3 and 4 – over one month and under six months; over six months and under one year; over one and under two years, respectively – are homogeneous in this regard, suggesting that either there was no proper understanding of the question by group 5 respondents or the appropriation of the program's objectives, principles and guidelines generates doubts in those who are no longer at the program. The latter hypothesis may indicate a failure in the training process or in the monitoring of who actually participates in such processes, as evidenced by the percentage of participants who reported not having attended pedagogical meetings, which were respectively 16% nationally and 6% locally. Thus, we concluded that the disagreement with the data collected with regard to knowledge

of the objectives, principles and guidelines of the program may also be associated with training. This finding suggests the need for evaluation and review of activities during pedagogical meetings, as recommended by Coriolano et al. (2012), Stroschein and Zocche (2012), and Modesto et al. (2013), especially when they show the need for professional training as a strategy for building another outlook for social agents – here understood as leisure workers – in their social practice at the community. This is because continuing education contributes to redefine concepts normally considered inexorable, but which, on the training process, can be reworked.

7 FINAL REMARKS

Considering the data presented and discussed, we can infer that leisure workers as an occupational status have similar profiles at national and local levels. Some discrepancies were observed regarding schooling, which at the national level shows predominance of workers with complete higher education while complete secondary school prevails locally.

As for the time spent in the program and knowledge of its objectives, principles and guidelines, there is a clear association between length of stay, attendance to training meetings and knowledge of the programs' fundamental concepts. Thus, the longer leisure workers stay in the program and the more training meetings they attend, more clarity they will have about objectives, principles and guidelines when building their community intervention.

Finally, it is important to highlight the previously mentioned fact that there is certain transitoriness of leisure workers in the program, which may ultimately limit the training of local leaders – and that should be the focus of public managers' attention. On the one hand, that transitoriness may imply discontinuity, which would limit the program's progress toward fulfilling its primary purposes. On the other hand, transitoriness tends to generate fragmentation and difficulty for an action oriented around matriciality. It places public administration as a platform for intensive integration of

programs and organizations. Matriciality is a methodology that enables the shared construction of intervention projects among different interlocutors. Furthermore, such a perspective would allow workers' personal and collective growth while producing goods and services of public character (AMARAL; COSTA, 2012, p. 212). It is a theoretical-methodological approach to the management of public policies to achieve results that aim to overcome social exclusion and improve quality of life.

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