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# Experiences and Implications of Leisure Sports Management Policies in the United States

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**Abstract:** Leisure sports is a kind of sports and cultural activities derived from social development, which is welcomed and participated by more people because of its dual value of entertainment and physical exercise. The nature of leisure sports determines the social value of its development, and to a certain extent it can show the state of social and cultural civilization. Therefore, China should learn from the development experience of developed countries, vigorously raise the level of mass consumption of sports and fitness, and actively promote the development of the sports, fitness and leisure industry, which is not only a necessary way for the development of the sports industry from a new growth point of the national economy to a pillar industry, but also an important task for building a country strong in sports.

**Keywords:** The United States; Leisure Sports; Sports Policies.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of leisure sports first originated in the United States, and then evolved over time to become the cultural forerunner of the modern leisure sports industry. The policy of leisure sports in the United States has probably gone through the transformation of sports to education; [1] the tendency of sports programs to be organized and managed by associations, and the establishment of alliances for modern athletic programs; the innovation and transformation of sports programs and consciousness, which added a lot of American elements; the emergence of relevant legal policies, and the beginning of professional sports being supported by the policies of the United States government and the protection of the law and other phases. (As show in table 1)

**Table 1.** The Development of Sports in the United States from the Mid-19th Century to the Early 20th Century [2]

| In 1848 | In the 1860s | In the 1880s | In the 1890s | In the early 20th century |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The first sports association organization in the United States was founded, opening a chapter in the organization of social sports in the United States. | The Morrill Act of 1862 required public schools to implement military training. | In 1895, The American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education (AAPE), the predecessor of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), was founded. | In 1891, physical education was officially incorporated into the school curriculum by the National Education Association (NEA). In 1883, the NEA established the Department of Physical Education and Health. | In 1901, the first U.S. master's degree program in physical education was established, and the standard U.S. high level of training in physical education was raised. |
| | In 1865, city workers began organizing sports programs. In 1866, California legislated sports into schools. | In 1888, New York passed the first outdoor sports protection law. | | In 1905, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was founded and formed to organize and administer intercollegiate athletics on a hierarchical and classified basis. |

China's development of leisure sports is relatively late, and the industrial layout is also relatively single, and has not formed a diversified system pattern. On January 1, 2023, the official implementation of the newly revised "Sports Law of the People's Republic of China" for the development of sports in the new era to provide legal protection. [3] The development of China's sports industry policy can be divided into the following three stages:

## 2. The U.S. Leisure Sports Management Policy Experience

### 2.1. Strong Policy Support and Funding

Legal policies in most developed countries make significant investment in public sports a governmental responsibility. Government grants are one of the main sources of funding for public sports, and local government investment is generally higher than that of the central government. The

United States government attaches importance to the development of recreational sports and has formulated relevant policies and provided financial support. The formulation of policies and the investment of funds have played an important role in promoting the development of recreational sports. [5]

**Table 2.** Stages of development of China's sports industry policy [4]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Phase I (1978-1992)** | ● China's sports industry policy was in the preparatory and initial stages of moving to a deeper level.<br>● Encouraging the sports system with decreasing institutions to develop from undertaking-driven to operation-driven.<br>● Attracting social capital to alleviate the shortage of funds for the development of the sports cause. |
| **Phase II (1992-1997)** | ● The exploration and practice stage of China's sports industry policy has also made sports industrial gradually.<br>● Policies on the establishment of the status of sports industry.<br>● Policies on the development of sports industry related to the reform of sports cause.<br>● Policies specifically targeting the sports industry or its industrial sectors |
| **Phase III (1997 to date)** | ● In the overall reform of sports, the general direction of industrialization has been maintained and clarified.<br>● Focused promotion of the sports industry.<br>● Specialized sports industry policies have further matured.<br>● Overall planning policies for the development of the sports industry. |

## 2.2. Focus on Community Cooperation and Participation

The United States focuses on community cooperation and the participation of community residents, encouraging residents to actively engage in recreational sports activities and promoting the construction and management of community sports facilities. In order to encourage low-income families to participate in community sports, community centers in the United States have introduced a participation benefit bonus system that grants $1,000 to families eligible for funding. [6] Government departments, social organizations and non-profit sports organizations interact positively to improve the quality of public sports products and services to meet the public's demand for recreational sports. For example, policies have been enacted in the category of national fitness (As show in table 3).

**Table 3.** Enactment and implementation of the Healthy Citizen policy [7]

| | Healthy Citizen 1990 | Healthy Citizen 2000 | Healthy Citizen 2010 | Healthy Citizen 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Date of enactment** | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
| **General targets** | Organizing rational physical activities to improve health; eliminating health disparities and improving the nation's quality of life. | Increasing the number of years of healthy life; improving the supply of preventive health services; and reducing health disparities due to age, gender, race, geography, etc. | Eliminating health disparities at different levels of the population and helping nationals of all ages to improve their quality of life and extend their healthy lifespan. | improving health behaviors at all ages; meeting the need of quality lifestyles, preventing diseases, and reducing mortality rates; building a social environment for the health of all; eliminating hierarchical health disparities and achieving health equity. |
| **Leading departments** | Department of Health & Public Services | Department of Health & Public Services | Department of Health & Public Services | Federal Agencies Working Group, Department of Health & Public Services |
| **Dissemination methods** | press releases, brochures | community outreach, press releases, web portals | community outreach, press releases, web portals | portals, community outreach, press releases, social networks |

## 2.3. Fairness and Inclusiveness

The United States advocates for fairness and inclusiveness in recreational sports, encouraging people of all ages, genders, and social backgrounds to participate in recreational sports activities and creating a fair and equitable sports environment. Data from the Pew Research Center showed that in 2013, 55% of the total number of couples in the United States participated in outdoor sports with their children as a family unit, and most people participate in outdoor sports in addition to exercise, but also increasing the opportunity to spend time with family and friends is also an important reason. The Social & Demographic Trends report released at the end of 2015 revealed that 73 percent of families in the United States whose children participate in a variety of sports activities, 54 percent participate in extracurricular art classes, such as music and dance, while only 36 percent participate in a variety of tutoring classes. [9]

## 2.4. Diversified Sports Programs Choices

The United States provides a rich and diverse selection of recreational sports programs to meet the needs of different groups of people and encourages people to actively participate in various forms of sports activities. At the same time, it has adopted technological innovation and digital management, applying scientific and technological innovation in the field of recreational sports, promoting digital management, and providing convenient online

booking and activity information query services to facilitate residents' participation in recreational sports activities.

# 3. Problems with China's Leisure Sports Management Policies

## 3.1. Lack of Popularization and Wider Application

The popularity of recreational sports is still relatively low, and many people still lack awareness and motivation to actively participate, leading to difficulties in promoting recreational sports among the general public, and a lack of professional management and guidance. At present, in some places, there is a lack of specialization and dedication among the institutions and personnel responsible for the management and guidance of recreational sports, leading to a low level of management. At the same time, the development of leisure sports requires a wider cultural atmosphere of sports and social cognition of sports, which requires the joint efforts of the government, media and society. At present, the operation mechanism of leisure sports-related policies in China is not perfect enough, lacking an effective supervision and evaluation system, and the degree of goal achievement needs to be improved urgently. Besides, local protectionism still exists to a certain extent. For example, the implementation of the vacation system is not effective. Some private enterprise employees are forced to work overtime, and the paid annual leave "discount" phenomenon is prevailing. According to the 2013 Domestic Travelers' Willingness Survey Report, "whether there are enough vacations and time" (31%) ranked No. 1 among the main factors affecting travel confidence. Meanwhile, the environment for outdoor sports and recreation consumption is not safe enough. Local protectionism has led to a "significant reduction" in the implementation of many policies. The 2017 China Travelers' Willingness Survey Report showed that among the factors affecting the quality and feeling of tourism and leisure trips, 31% of travelers were most concerned about safety factors, accounting for the highest percentage. Finally, community sports venues and facilities are insufficient. China has certain requirements for the area of green space in new communities and the construction standards of sports centers, but there are more problems in the actual implementation. [8]

## 3.2. Increased Government Investment and Efficiency

Although in recent years the government has continued to make efforts in the field of public sports venues and facilities construction, such as the "people's fitness trail", "smart sports park", "people's gym", "community fitness center", "people's physical fitness monitoring center" and others. Through those projects, at the end of 2019, China's per capita area of sports venues was raised to 2.1 square meters per person, which was a substantial increase compared with the previous. In 2020, the national sports venues totaled 371.34 million, with the largest number of venues for basketball, national fitness paths and table tennis, accounting for 73.19%. But there is still a considerable distance between the per capita area of recreational sports venues currently owned and that of developed countries. Overall, since the reform and opening up, most of China's government sports investment has been used for the construction of large-scale and high-level competitive stadiums and facilities, while less funding has been spent on small and medium-sized mass fitness venues that are practical and widely accessible, and even less on the construction of outdoor recreation routes, camping bases and outdoor sports bases. The construction of leisure and sports facilities in some areas is lagging behind, with insufficient venues and outdated facilities restricting participation and development, and there is a lack of diversified leisure and sports programs; leisure and sports programs are relatively single, lacking in diversity and innovation, and failing to meet people's needs for different leisure and sports activities.

## 3.3. More Support for Social Capital and Sports Clubs

Compared with developed countries, China's support for social capital is relatively small, which seriously hinders the development of China's leisure sports industry. The proportion of leisure sports venues and facilities invested by pure social capital in China is relatively small, and the proportion of enterprises participating in the sports industry is low. Among them, funds for the construction of large-scale stadiums and outdoor recreational sports bases are relatively less. China's participation in mass leisure sports is mainly in the form of casual self-help, lacking effective organization, and outdoor landscape recreation is even more so; sports clubs can generally enjoy fewer preferential policies, and there is more room for the development of formally registered and operated private sports clubs, both in terms of quantity and quality.

# 4. Implications of the United States Leisure Sports Management Policies for the Development of Leisure Sports in China

## 4.1. Leading and Encouraging Multi-party Participation in Leisure Sports Activities

Leisure sports management policies in the United States encourage social participation. Social organizations and groups play an important role in the development of recreational sports. For example, the United States has established the National Parks Conservation Association and the Outdoor Foundation, which are committed to promoting the development of recreational sports and protecting the natural environment. Therefore, in the management and development of recreational sports in China, we should pay attention to and encourage all parties to participate in sports activities together, and introduce many preferential policies and activity programs to promote the long-term development of recreational sports in China. At the same time, attention is paid to laying a foundation for young people to form a lifelong interest in sports through basic education. In the U.S., groups of different ages will participate in different sports, and the overall participation is very high. In the light of the experience of developed countries in emphasizing the development of intramural sports courses, after-school sports activities, outdoor hiking and camping, intramural sports interest groups and even youth groups, and the high popularity of sports activities and organizations in schools, the government has introduced a variety of policies to promote the link between sports clubs or community sports centers and schools, allowing students to become members of the clubs and enjoy preferential treatment, while the clubs assist schools with sports teaching, training and activities.[10]

### 4.2. Strengthening Policy Support, Formulating and Improving Policies for the Leisure Sports Industry

The leisure sports management policy of the United States is strongly supported by the government. The government has set up specialized agencies and funds for the promotion of recreational sports. For example, the United States has set up the National Park Service (NPS) to provide quality leisure and recreational activities for the public. In addition, the government has set up a specialized sports fund to support grassroots sports projects and the construction of community sports facilities. Leisure sports industry policy is an important tool for the government to manage and regulate the development of the leisure sports industry from a macro perspective. It is the prediction of the trend of changes in the organization and structure of the leisure sports industry within a certain period of time and the setting up of development goals, as well as the proposal of policy measures to achieve the development goals. The core content of leisure sports industrial policy includes two aspects: one is industrial structure policy and the other is industrial organization policy, both of which constitute the two wings of leisure sports industry policies. Among them, the industrial structure policy is an economic policy that pushes the existing leisure sports industry organization to an industrial structure with better economic benefits, and on this basis makes the balanced and coordinated development of the various parts and modes within the leisure sports industry in a certain period of time. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the policy support, select the leading leisure sports industries for priority development and set reasonable goals for the leisure sports industry structure, so as to plan and guide the basic direction of the development of the leisure sports industry; the industrial organization policy is that under the conditions of the market economy, the government chooses the form of high-efficiency and effective industrial organization by maintaining or changing the existing market order, so as to promote the reasonable flow and effective use of resources. [11]

### 4.3. Improving Legislations and Achieving Diversified Development

Recreational sports management policies in the United States are guaranteed by legislation. The Congress has passed a series of bills to provide legal protection and support for the development of recreational sports. For example, the United States has passed the National Park Service Act and the Outdoor Recreation Act, which provided a broad space for the development of recreational sports. Therefore, in the management of recreational sports policy in China, we can learn from the experience of developed countries to protect the rights and interests of outdoor activity organizers, initiators and companions, and at the same time improve the compensation mechanism for outdoor sports accidents, with financial compensation mainly accomplished through social security and commercial insurance, and increase the supervision of insurance companies' compensation in accordance with the law. In addition, the recreational sports management policy of the United States focuses on diversified development, and the U.S. government encourages the development of various types of recreational sports programs, including outdoor sports, fitness, yoga, etc. Our country should combine the traditional sports characteristics of our own nation, focus on international sports exchanges and cooperation, and work with other countries to promote the development of global recreational sports. [12]

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the recreational sports management policy of the United States focuses on government support, legislative protection, social participation and diversified development, and these experiences and practices can provide some inspiration and reference for the development of recreational sports in China. These experiences and inspirations provide some directions for China's recreational sports management policies to learn from and refer to, such as focusing on policy support and financial investment, encouraging community cooperation and participation, providing diversified sports program choices, advocating fairness and inclusiveness, and applying scientific and technological innovation and digital management. However, the development of recreational sports in China still needs to take into account the national realities, and on the basis of fully drawing on the recreational sports management policies of the United States, China can further innovate and explore, and formulate management policies and measures in line with its own characteristics.

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