

Study of the Construction of Sports and Health Service Platforms for the Disabled in China

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the economy, the living standards of Chinese people have generally improved. Consequently, sports facilities have been improved and the concept of sports has been redefined. The implementation of the national fitness program has stimulated the public's interest in sports. However, the popularization and development of sports for the disabled still face a series of obstacles. To enhance the quality of disabled sports public services in China, safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities, and foster societal harmony, this paper adopts a multifaceted approach. Drawing upon literature review and logical analysis, it aims to provide policy guidance, optimize service delivery, enhance supervision mechanisms, facilitate feedback mechanisms, and implement scientific management practices. Drawing from successful cases in the United States, this paper aims to address key challenges in the provision of sports public services for individuals with disabilities in China. By examining the service content offered by relevant platforms in the US, specific solutions are proposed to overcome existing shortcomings in China's disabled sports public services. Additionally, the paper outlines a construction model for sports health service platforms catering to people with special needs.

Keywords: Sports for the disabled; National fitness program; Public sports services; Sports power

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1. Introduction

Fitness has become a social trend in China, and sports and fitness services for the disabled have also emerged. By 2022, the total number of disabled people in China had exceeded 85 million, accounting for 6.34% of the country's total population, involving 260 million families. Due to the large number of disabled people, the demand for physical fitness is also huge. According to the China Disabled Persons' Federation, in 2021, there were about 38 million people with certified disabilities in China, and 1.267 million disabled people participated in sports and fitness activities. Sports and fitness activities for the disabled are an important part of the development of mass sports. The Sports Law also highly encourages the participation of the disabled in national fitness activities. It is essential to identify the practical problems in the health services for the disabled. By 2020, China has achieved the great feat of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, successfully meeting the basic living needs of the majority of its population, including individuals with disabilities. Despite

this significant milestone, the sports industry for the disabled is still relatively underdeveloped, and the sports service system for the disabled is still imperfect. The construction of a sports service platform specifically for the disabled has become a new demand. In foreign countries, the establishment of health service platforms for individuals with disabilities has been a prominent social concern and has been actively implemented. For instance, in the United States, the government established the Olympic Committee and sports associations for individuals with disabilities. Since 2007, collaboration with community organizations has led to the formation of a nationwide network of community sports clubs for individuals with disabilities. These clubs provide opportunities for disabled individuals to engage in various sports activities within their communities. Sports service platforms for special groups such as Move United have emerged. In contrast, there is no fitness service platform for the disabled in China, the disabled do not have access to professional sports guidance. The 2021-2025 National Fitness Plan (2021-2025) promulgated by The State Council in 2021 has set off a new upsurge in China. The plan proposes the organization of competitive events for individuals with disabilities and emphasizes the integration of the disabled into sports health initiatives. Furthermore, the state has implemented special measures to safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities to engage in sports activities. It mandates that public sports facilities provide free or low-cost access to disabled individuals, aiming to transition from a mere notion of formal equality to one of substantive equality. In view of this, the construction of a health service platform should be highlighted. Therefore, this paper will describe the status of sports health services for the disabled, the related services in the service platform, and the path of constructing the platform. This paper is written with the goal of ensuring the feasibility of the health service platform and meeting the needs of health support for disabled individuals.

2. The status of sports and health services for the disabled in China

2.1. Abundant policies but lack of enforcement and platforms

The development of sports for the disabled has been highlighted by the government in recent years, and many corresponding policies have been issued. For instance, the “Opinion on Further Strengthening Disabled Sports Work” issued by the General Office of the State Council emphasizes the significance of sports activities for individuals with disabilities, advocating for inclusive mass sports events tailored to their needs. Furthermore, Article 15 of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Disabled Persons, enacted in 2008, mandates that government entities at all levels and relevant departments take measures to facilitate the rehabilitation of disabled individuals. This includes establishing and enhancing rehabilitation service systems, implementing targeted rehabilitation projects, and supporting disabled individuals in regaining or compensating for lost functions to enhance their participation in social life ^[1]. The “2021 National Fitness Plan (2021-2025)” advocates for enhancing the accessibility of public fitness facilities and conducting rehabilitation and fitness activities specifically tailored for individuals with disabilities ^[2]. The 14th Five-Year Plan by the State Council also proposed to strengthen health services for individuals with disabilities, enhance the quality of rehabilitation services, and promote comprehensive development in sports for this demographic ^[3]. Article 11 of the Plan for the Development of Sports for the Disabled during the 14th Five-Year Plan period outlines the organization of three major activities to establish a national platform. These activities include the annual “China Ice and Snow Sports Season for Individuals with Disabilities,” “Fitness Week,” and “National Special Olympics Day,” among others. The aim is to build a platform for disabled rehabilitation fitness sports activities, foster collaboration across all levels, promote disability rehabilitation fitness, disseminate health knowledge, advocate for resilience, and cultivate a caring social atmosphere for individuals with disabilities ^[4]. Moreover, the newly revised Sports Law of the People’s Republic of China in 2022 encompasses five laws related to sports participation for

individuals with disabilities. It repeatedly underscores the importance of prioritizing the development of sports activities tailored for the disabled. Despite the favorable policy environment and substantial market demand, the popularization of services for individuals with disabilities remains insufficient in China. A comprehensive sports service system tailored for this demographic is yet to be established, including large-scale professional sports and health service organizations. Presently, only a few regions, such as Shanghai's Xuhui District, have initiated similar service initiatives. For instance, in Changqiao Street, Xuhui District, Shanghai, the Wisdom Sunshine Kangjian Garden stands as the first facility in Shanghai to undergo digital transformation for sports services. It offers sports fitness, functional rehabilitation, social entertainment, and other services specifically designed for individuals with disabilities. As a regional pilot street, Changqiao Street adheres to the principle of "nearby, convenient, and comprehensive" by establishing a community rehabilitation fitness point within the core community of Luoxi New Village. This facility, in conjunction with neighboring community resources such as Sunshine Home and Sunshine Heart Garden, forms an integrated rehabilitation service network for the disabled^[5]. However, the services provided in these places are generalized and not comprehensive, and they cannot meet all needs of the disabled. Therefore, it is urgent to build a professional sports and health service platform for the disabled in China.

2.2. Lack of special venues for sports and health services for the disabled

The material foundation for individuals with disabilities to access sports and health services begins with the availability of appropriate sites and facilities. Suitable and convenient exercise venues and equipment for individuals with disabilities are an essential objective prerequisite for them to enjoy sports and health services. In 2020, The State Council issued Document No.36, which brought the development of national fitness venues and facilities to a new level. Even though more effort has been placed on the construction of the national fitness public service system the facilities for the physical and psychological needs of the disabled are still largely neglected. Currently, special sports fitness venues for individuals with disabilities primarily serve as training bases for disabled athletes, primarily focused on preparing them for participation in the Paralympics or related competitive events. Unfortunately, there is a lack of dedicated infrastructure for sports health services tailored to individuals with disabilities who are non-athletes. Moreover, the sports needs of individuals with disabilities are diverse and individualized. In addition to age and gender considerations, factors such as the type, severity, and location of disability play a significant role in determining the appropriate sports and health services needed. The preferences for sports activities, including the choice of sports, intensity, and method of participation, also vary greatly among individuals with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to develop tailored and flexible sports health service options that cater to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. It is necessary to choose fitness venues according to their physical conditions and make personalized arrangements. For example, swimming pools need to be designed in a way that considers the way that disabled people enter and exit the waters. The operation of barrier-free swimming pools has been notably successful in Qiantang District, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, particularly at the River Zhuang Street Style Center Barrier-Free Swimming Pool. This facility has implemented various measures to ensure accessibility, including elevators, accessible channels, retractable ramps, light auxiliary plates, and equipped water aids and internal shuttle devices for wheelchair users and individuals with mobility impairments. These efforts have enabled individuals with disabilities to access the swimming area comfortably and safely.

2.3. Limited special sports service talents and unsatisfactory quality of service

Many individuals with disabilities lack experience and knowledge in sports participation. For instance, blind

individuals may face safety concerns when participating in most sports, while wheelchair users may find it challenging to engage in sports independently. In such cases, the assistance of social sports service providers becomes crucial. These providers play a vital role in lowering the “threshold” for individuals with disabilities to participate in sports, ensuring that users can engage in sports activities easily and safely. However, the current landscape of disabled sports providers is plagued by both quantity and quality issues. There is a shortage of such providers, and those that do exist may vary in their capacity to deliver high-quality services. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to increase the number of disabled sports providers and enhance their capacity to deliver effective and inclusive sports services to individuals with disabilities. By the end of 2021, the number of social sports instructors in China will be about 2.7 million, with an average of 1.92 social sports instructors per 1,000 people ^[6]. Nowadays, there are relatively few colleges and institutions specializing in training sports service personnel. It is difficult for existing social sports instructors to meet the actual market demand, and the number of sports service personnel for the disabled is even rarer. By the end of 2021, there were 11,260 rehabilitation institutions for the disabled in China, with 318,000 people on duty, including 232,000 people with business personnel ^[7]. However, most of them lack professional training, so they are not capable of providing high-quality services. Therefore, the construction of a professional and mature sports service talent team has become the top priority to realize the development of sports for the disabled.

2.4. Lack of social interaction between the disabled group and a public service social platform

Transportation is difficult for disabled people, so they are less motivated to participate in sports activities. This makes the support of families and social organizations all the more crucial. Disabled people are often stigmatized and discriminated against. Such negative experiences can lead to feelings of inferiority and reluctance to engage in social interactions and communication. However, they are often quite prideful and refuse to show their physical impairments in public. Consequently, they may be less inclined to participate in sports activities. Therefore, it is essential to create a sports discussion platform for disabled individuals so that they can connect with like-minded people and engage in more social interactions. This platform can play a pivotal role in liberating individuals with disabilities from their psychological constraints, empowering them to overcome societal stigma and discrimination while promoting their active participation in sports and social activities.

2.5. Insufficient publicity for the disabled community

Currently, the promotion of sports and health initiatives for individuals with disabilities is limited in scope and lacks diversity in its dissemination methods. Publicization is usually carried out by government organizations such as the China Disabled Persons' Federation and the General Administration of Sport of China. However, these efforts often fail to effectively leverage popular streaming media platforms, resulting in relatively monotonous and less impactful forms of publicity. Sports and fitness for the disabled are still largely overlooked or even discriminated against by the public, which leads to the slow development of sports for disabled people. Fitness has been a popular topic in the society but sports for the disabled have not received the same amount of attention.

3. Service content of the sports and health service platform for the disabled

Building upon the lessons learned from creating sports health service platforms for people with disabilities overseas, and taking into account the present state of sports services for individuals with disabilities in

China, we propose the following recommendations. These suggestions are rooted in the principles of legality, reasonableness, and qualification, and cover various areas including policy development, service delivery, supervision, and management (Figure 1).

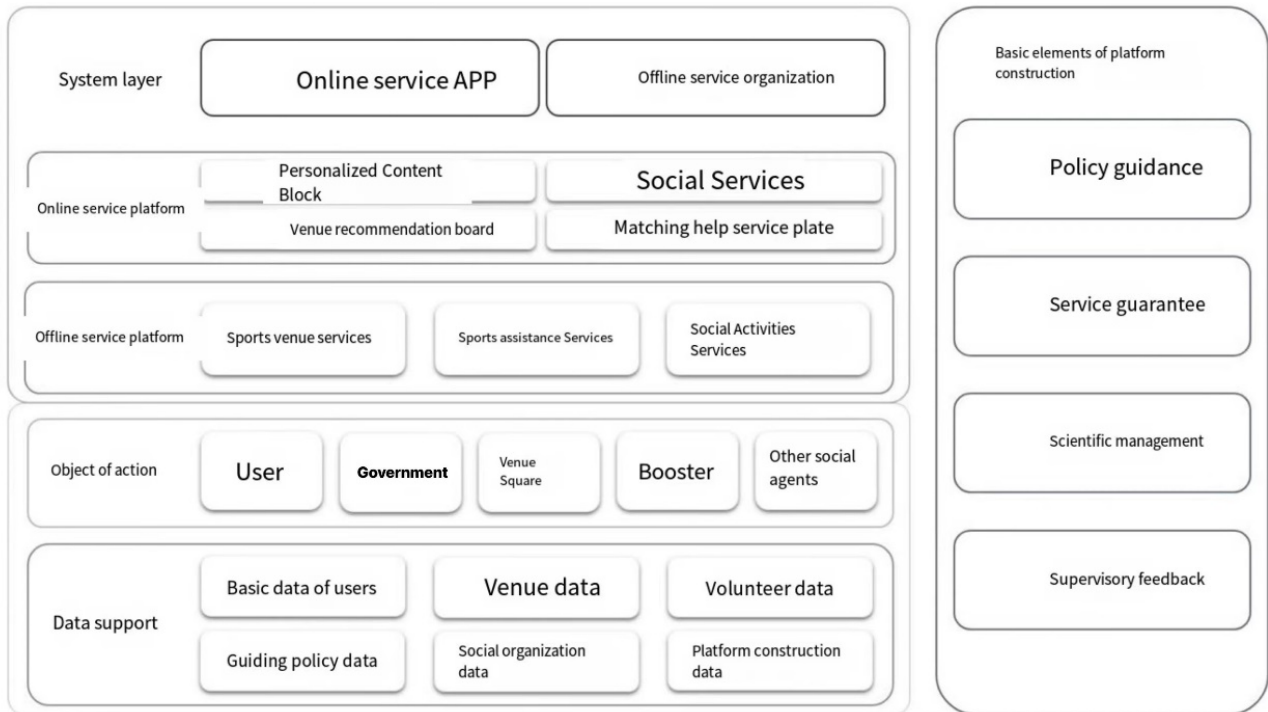


Figure 1. Framework of the platform

3.1. Addressing the problems in health services for the disabled based on the needs of the disabled

Meeting fundamental physical health needs serves as the foundation for all service activities. Prioritizing this foundational work involves providing accessible sports and fitness facilities and offering guidance for individuals with disabilities, enabling each user to participate in sports more easily and conveniently. People with disabilities have limited access to exercise facilities. The pandemic further exacerbated the situation, with sports venues closing for an average of three months in 2020 and experiencing a significant decline in revenue. Many stadiums remain underutilized, highlighting the inefficiencies in current social sports resource planning and utilization. To address this issue, platforms need to capitalize on this opportunity by collaborating with social venues, establishing equitable benefit distribution, standardizing venue and service facilities, and determining specialized opening times, locations, and service formats for disabled people. This approach ensures the provision of professional recreational sports venues exclusively for individuals with disabilities, simplifying the process of accessing sports facilities. By taking these simple steps, the basic needs of the users can be met, while also promoting the rational allocation of social public sports resources. Additionally, it is essential to recognize the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities in their daily lives. Given their limitations in participating in regular sports activities, it is crucial for the health service platform to cater to their needs. This entails tailoring service content and delivery modes to meet the personalized requirements of each user.

3.2. Cultivating sports service personnel to aid disabled people in performing sports activities

The subject of social transformation is always the people. Hence, when constructing a sports and health service platform for individuals with disabilities, it's imperative to embody this principle by prioritizing the needs of disabled users. Additionally, leveraging the expertise and capabilities of the public sports service talent pool is crucial for successful implementation. An excellent public sports service team can both meet the demands of sports service personnel for disabled individuals and realize the multi-faceted and coordinated development of the public health service system. Professional sports service talents should be trained to help users participate in sports activities and ensure the safety of the participants. Helping users participate in sports should be the main purpose of the platform. An ideal service platform would streamline the process by allowing users to request relevant assistance directly through the platform, thereby enhancing the user experience and meeting the sports needs of most users. In establishing a professional and high-quality public sports service talent team, priority should be given to leveraging the expertise of major sports universities. These institutions serve as excellent reservoirs for talent development and educational training in the sports field. Currently, there is a surplus of sports professionals; however, due to intense competition, challenging employment conditions, limited internship opportunities, and insufficient work experience, many highly skilled graduates in the sports field struggle to secure satisfactory employment or even gain effective internship opportunities prior to entering the workforce.

3.3. Creating exclusive social channels to improve the mental health of the disabled

The goal of socializing is not only to exchange information and establish relationships. Nowadays, socializing has changed in form, purpose, and nature. Entertainment-driven social communication has surged in popularity, redefining social interaction as more than just a functional tool but rather as a form of entertainment in itself. Through social communication, individuals can achieve emotional connection and personal gratification. A conducive social environment and healthy interpersonal relationships play pivotal roles in an individual's overall development and well-being. Many disabled people in China lack social interactions in their lives due to their physical disabilities. Because of their visible impairments, they often struggle with feelings of inferiority and face discrimination, questioning, or even unfair treatment in their daily lives. As a result, they may choose to withdraw from society and avoid communicating with others. Such unhealthy and abnormal psychology also affects their attitude toward sports. Given these problems, the disabled a special platform dedicated to sports for the disabled should be created. By doing so, disabled individuals will get to establish their own social circle and connect with each other, which will improve their mental health.

3.4. Strengthening the publicity of sports for the disabled

Presently, in China, attention towards sports for the disabled predominantly revolves around events like the Paralympic Games and the Winter Paralympic Games, focusing solely on competitive sports at a specialized level. However, few consider whether disabled individuals can actively participate in sports and experience an active lifestyle. Therefore, in constructing a sports service platform for the disabled, the target audience should not be limited solely to the disabled community but should aim to enhance the overall social sports service system for disabled individuals. This effort requires broadening the scope of stakeholders involved, including diverse social entities, to address the lack of awareness about sports for the disabled. Firstly, the successful establishment of such a platform sets a pioneering example in China's specialized sports service sector, garnering attention and interest from various sectors. Secondly, through proactive engagement with diverse segments of society and employing multiple communication channels, including various forms of publicity and outreach, awareness about disabled sports can be raised. This concerted effort aims to draw more

attention to disabled sports, mitigate discrimination and bias, and foster a supportive societal environment for the development of sports for disabled individuals.

4. The construction path of the sports and health service platform for the disabled in China

4.1 Adhere to policy guidance and give full play to the leading role of the government

The advancement of sports initiatives for disabled individuals should be based on government leadership and policy guidance. Government policies play a pivotal role in steering the development of sports programs for the disabled, providing essential support and direction. Policy support tailored to the needs of the disabled community serves as the cornerstone for establishing a comprehensive health service system. It is only through the implementation of public sports services grounded in well-defined policies and regulations that fairness and equity can be ensured for all individuals with disabilities^[8]. The current employment, health care, education, and other aspects of the public service system for disabled people are yet to be perfected. Better policies are needed to safeguard the rights and interests of disabled individuals, facilitating the advancement of special sports and the creation of a barrier-free sports environment within a disabled-friendly society. The government must intensify its efforts in managing barrier-free sports facilities and venues, ensuring accessibility for disabled individuals to engage in sports activities. Moreover, policies should be formulated to encourage active participation from various social entities in the development of disabled sports initiatives. Enterprises and social organizations should be incentivized to contribute to this cause, fostering balanced urban and rural development of disabled sports and expanding opportunities for constructing sports service platforms tailored to the needs of disabled individuals. While adhering to government guidance, platform builders should also exercise autonomy and innovation. By increasing the involvement of diverse social entities and reducing excessive government intervention, platforms can strive towards transforming and upgrading the social public sports service system.

4.2. Meeting user needs and optimizing the service content

The platform should be able to fulfill most user needs and its services should be updated from time to time according to user feedback, so as to improve user satisfaction. The platform should always be “people-oriented” with serving the people as its main goal. It should provide users with high-quality and personalized services. Second, user feedback channels should be created so that users can express their needs and services can be optimized according to their needs. The feedback channels should be easy to operate. For instance, establishing a flexible and user-friendly feedback mechanism allows service providers to gather feedback from users during the service delivery process. This feedback helps guide improvements to the service. Additionally, social platforms should be designed to foster a sense of community among users. Users should be able to connect with others who share common interests or characteristics, enabling group sports activities and social networking. Fourthly, the content and services for each user should be personalized. Furthermore, accessibility issues should be considered in the construction or upgrading of sports. Moreover, sports service providers must demonstrate professionalism and enthusiasm. Sports helpers should treat every user equally and seriously and professional sports guidance tailored to the needs of disabled individuals. In addition, the platform should fully connect social organizations, such as the Disabled Persons’ Federation and sports associations for the disabled to leverage their social influence to organize sports activities for disabled individuals and provide assistance services for their participation.

4.3. Multi-subject collaboration and the expansion of supervisory channels

The successful operation of the sports health service platform for the disabled relies on the collaborative

efforts of multiple stakeholders. It requires the establishment and expansion of supervision channels to achieve coordinated development among various parties. The platform's establishment should challenge the perception that the government is the sole driver of the social sports service system. Instead, it should harness the synergistic capabilities of multiple actors such as professional associations, market enterprises, and social universities. Each social subject involved in the platform should assume the role of a supervisor, not only contributing to its construction but also actively fulfilling its supervisory responsibilities. This will help establish a robust supervision and management model characterized by "multi-party collaboration." The social circle function in the platform should be established and improved to provide a space for users to communicate and interact. In terms of operation and management, the platform operators should review the content in the social platform to ensure the quality of information in the social circle. A good social environment should be created for users so that users can feel comfortable using the services provided by the platform and actively provide feedback for the continuous improvement of the platform. Users should not only be considered as partners or clients but also as integral contributors and sources of feedback. During the platform's development, it is crucial to engage in meaningful dialogue with its users through interviews and surveys. By encouraging the users to share their insights and recommendations, a deeper understanding of specific challenges and situations within each aspect of its services can be obtained. This will enable the operators to swiftly address issues, implement solutions, and ensure that their services remain relevant and updated. Lastly, throughout the entire development process, the platform must be subject to government oversight and regulate its own conduct. This primarily involves two key aspects: First, during the initial establishment of the platform, it is essential to closely align with government policies, adhere to legal requirements, and strictly refrain from engaging in any illegal activities. Second, during operations, maintaining open communication with relevant government agencies at the regional level is crucial. The platform developers should actively seek and incorporate feedback from these agencies, inviting them to participate in platform operations. Furthermore, the operations of the platform should also be regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with relevant policies and regulations, thereby ensuring that its management practices adhere to established standards.

4.4. Scientific management to improve the efficiency of the platform operation

To ensure effective planning and management, several key aspects should be considered: leveraging policies, facilitating venue communication, enhancing interaction between the platform and users, and coordinating the allocation of other social resources. Firstly, platform builders should proactively align with policy directives, leveraging policy support and translating policies into practical initiatives that address the specific needs of the disabled. Government policies should serve as the primary guiding principles for platform construction, informing decision-making and implementation processes. Moreover, it's essential to establish clear objectives and develop specific forecasts for policy implementation, regularly comparing the progress of implementation with expected outcomes. Secondly, in managing the sports service provider team, a clear command hierarchy should be established, with defined management positions and the selection of competent managers. Job responsibilities should be clearly defined, and the overall process of services should be standardized for efficient operation. Clear reward and performance evaluation mechanisms should also be formulated to motivate the sports service providers. In addition, regular training should be conducted for the sports services providers to improve the quality of the services provided. These training sessions can also help improve the providers' mindset, allowing them to better understand the importance of their work and encouraging greater participation in serving the disabled community.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines relevant national policies and explores exemplary cases of foreign sports service organizations catering to disabled individuals. By analyzing their construction framework and service models, it aims to draw insights and feasibility experiences for constructing a suitable service platform for the disabled community in China. The goal is to chart a path and develop unique service content tailored to the disabled population. A mature sports health service platform for the disabled can drive the advancement of disabled sports while facilitating the rational allocation of social sports resources. It encourages the participation of various stakeholders, ignites enthusiasm for sports services, and catalyzes the transformation and enhancement of the sports operation model. This endeavor contributes to China's sports sector evolving towards specialization and high quality, ultimately transitioning from being a sports powerhouse to a leading force in sports.

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Disclosure statement

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