

Research on Rural Sports Development in Baicheng City, Jilin Province

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Abstract: This study examines rural sports development in Baicheng City, Jilin Province, employing literature review, field surveys (in 12 administrative villages across Taobei District, Zhenlai County, and Tongyu County), and statistical analysis to assess current status, challenges, and improvement strategies. Findings reveal that while rural sports facility coverage has increased, issues like uneven distribution and aging infrastructure persist. Participation rates show a "high at both ends, low in the middle" pattern: 72% are middle-aged/elderly, 18% youth, and only 10% young adults. Traditional Yangge dance and square dancing dominate activities (68%), with insufficient promotion of modern sports. Organizational management relies on temporary coordination between village committees and lacks professional guidance. The study proposes a development roadmap featuring "facility upgrades, content integration, and organizational empowerment" to support high-quality rural sports development in the context of rural revitalization.

Keywords: Rural Sports; Rural Revitalization; Health China

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The Rural Revitalization Strategy Plan (2018-2022) clearly states "to promote the development of rural sports and enrich the spiritual and cultural life of farmers"; the "Healthy China 2030" Outline requires "improving the physical health level of rural residents." As a major agricultural city in western Jilin Province (with 45.6% rural population), Baicheng City regards rural sports as an important vehicle for building civilized rural customs. However, its development currently lags behind urban areas, hindering comprehensive rural revitalization. With the deepening implementation of the rural revitalization strategy and the comprehensive promotion of the national fitness strategy, rural sports, as part of rural public services, have become one of the key indicators for measuring rural social progress and farmers' quality of life [1-2].

1.2 Research purpose

This study examines the current state and challenges of rural sports development in Baicheng City, proposing targeted solutions to optimize resource allocation and boost farmer participation. It also explores development models tailored to local conditions, offering replicable experiences for similar regions to advance rural sports initiatives.

2. The Development Status of Rural Sports in Baicheng City

2.1 Facility construction: Coverage rate is improved but the quality is uneven

By the end of 2023, Baicheng City had achieved 78% coverage of rural sports facilities (a 23 percentage point increase from 2018), primarily consisting of village square fitness equipment (56%), basketball courts (28%), and table tennis tables (16%). However, significant regional disparities exist: Taobei District (urban outskirts) maintains a higher compliance rate of 85%, while Tongyu County (remote areas) only reaches 62%. Approximately 35% of facilities show varying degrees of aging and damage, including loose screws on fitness equipment, cracked basketball court surfaces, and faded or deformed table tennis tables, all failing to meet basic safety requirements. Some villages lack

diversified facilities such as multi-purpose sports fields, indoor gyms, and badminton courts, making it difficult to cater to the varied exercise needs of farmers across different age groups and interests. Particularly during adverse weather conditions like rain or snow, sports activities essentially come to a standstill.

2.2 Participation characteristics: "mainly left-behind groups, lack of young and middle-aged people"

The participation rate of farmers in the sample village was 61% (participating once or more times a week), including:

Middle-aged and elderly (over 55) accounted for the highest proportion, reaching 72%, and mainly participated in activities with moderate rhythm and strong sociality, such as yangge and square dance (accounting for 83% of their activities);

Teens (under 14 years old) account for 18%, mostly rely on school physical education or holiday time to participate in basketball, jump rope and other competitive and fun activities;

Only 10% of young adults (aged 15-54) participate in sports, and most lack the time and motivation to do so due to migrant work (65%) or the perennial agricultural busy season (28%).

In addition, the proportion of women in the participating groups is significantly higher than that of men, especially in traditional cultural and sports activities such as yangge and square dancing, which reflects the structural imbalance of rural sports participation.

2.3 Activity content: The imbalance between tradition and modernity

Rural sports activities remain predominantly traditional folk events, accounting for 68% of the total, such as the dragon and lion dances during Spring Festival and daily Yangge performances. Modern sports like basketball, badminton, and aerobics make up only 32% of the total, with most activities relying on villagers' spontaneous organization (75% of cases), lacking systematic promotion and guidance. For instance, only two sample villages have attempted a "Rural Basketball League" with fewer than 50 participants, and both competition formats and training programs lack standardization. Modern sports face weak foundations in rule dissemination, skill training, and event organization, failing to establish a sustainable and vibrant grassroots sports ecosystem.

2.4 Organizational management: relying on administrative promotion and lack of professionalism

Rural sports activities are primarily led by village committees (81% of cases), with a minority organized by local artists (19%). There is a widespread shortage of professional sports instructors, as only one village in the sample has a part-time coach. Funding sources heavily rely on government subsidies (76%), while social sponsorships (12%) and village self-funding (12%) account for relatively low proportions. This results in limited scale and poor sustainability of sports activities. Events like the "Farmers' Sports Meet" are typically held only during off-seasons, averaging just 1-2 times annually. Additionally, the lack of scientific incentive mechanisms and effectiveness evaluation systems in organization hampers improvements in management efficiency and service quality, ultimately constraining the healthy development of rural sports [3].

3. Problems in rural sports development in Baicheng City

3.1 Facility supply: insufficient quantity and uneven distribution coexist

In remote areas like Xianghai Township of Tongyu County, limited local funding and poor transportation infrastructure have resulted in significantly lower sports facility coverage than urban areas. Some administrative villages lack basic public fitness facilities altogether. Even when equipped with basic fitness equipment, many villages face low utilization rates due to ineffective maintenance systems—rusting or damaged equipment often goes unaddressed, leading to idle resources. Moreover, existing facilities are often undiversified, failing to cater to the varied needs of different age groups. For instance, basketball courts, table tennis tables, and multi-purpose fitness zones specifically designed for youth activities are notably scarce, making it difficult to meet the demands of all population segments.

3.2 Participation motivation: the loss of young and middle-aged people and the low matching degree of demand

While young adults are the driving force behind rural sports development, the massive outflow of migrant workers (with Baicheng City recording a 38% rural labor migration rate) has resulted in an aging population and a youth deficit in rural communities, creating a critical gap in sports participation. Current activities remain predominantly traditional forms like Yangge (a folk dance) and square dancing, which lack appeal for younger generations, leading to a talent shortage in rural sports. Moreover, these programs fail to align with farmers' daily routines and seasonal agricultural cycles. The lack of flexible scheduling and down-to-earth organizational approaches makes it challenging to establish consistent exercise habits and foster community sports culture.

3.3 Content system: Insufficient integration of tradition and modernity

While traditional sports like Yangge (a folk dance) and dragon dance have certain grassroots following, they remain largely confined to festival performances. Their lack of adaptation to daily fitness routines and outdated formats show insufficient innovation to meet contemporary aesthetic and exercise needs. Modern sports like aerobics, badminton, and yoga face low adoption rates among rural residents due to inadequate professional guidance and insufficient promotion, with participation barriers remaining high (60% of surveyed farmers admitted "not knowing how to do aerobics"). Overall, rural sports in Baicheng City have yet to effectively integrate local cultural resources with modern sports concepts, resulting in unappealing activity content and limited outreach impact.

3.4 Organizational guarantee: lack of professional talents and financial support

Rural areas face a critical shortage of certified sports instructors, with only 0.3 per 10,000 residents—far below the national average of 0.8. Most instructors work part-time or volunteer, lacking professional expertise and scientific training methods to provide effective guidance. Sports programs primarily rely on government funding, with limited participation from private capital [4]. The funding sources are singular and unsustainable, making it difficult to maintain regular activities (e.g., the "Rural Sports League" was discontinued after just one edition due to lack of sponsorship). Furthermore, underdeveloped grassroots sports organizations and ineffective coordination among multiple stakeholders—including village committees, schools, and social groups—have hindered the comprehensive advancement and sustainable development of rural sports.

4. Countermeasures for rural sports development in Baicheng City

4.1 Facility upgrading: Optimize layout and diversified supply

Targeted delivery: For remote areas such as Tongyu County and Zhenlai County, we will increase financial transfer payments and sports public welfare funds, give priority to the construction of basketball courts, fitness paths, multi-functional sports fields and other basic sports facilities, and make up for the shortcomings of public services.

Resource integration: Promote the "off-time opening" of rural schools (such as village playground), cultural squares, idle public buildings and other places during after-school and holiday hours to improve the comprehensive utilization efficiency of the sites.

Maintenance mechanism: Build a three-party collaborative facility management and maintenance system of "government + village collective + farmers", clarify the responsibility mechanism of government regular inspection, village collective daily management, and farmers' supervision and feedback, and introduce a digital management platform to establish electronic facility archives and real-time repair reporting system to extend the service life of facilities.

4.2 Demand orientation: Stimulate the motivation of different groups to participate

Attracting young adults: By combining the holiday return home peak, organize activities such as "Rural Basketball League" and "Aerobics Training Camp" that meet the interests of young people, and strengthen publicity through short video platforms such as TikTok and Kuaishou to enhance influence and participation.

Focus on teenagers: Relying on the "double reduction" policy, traditional sports courses (such as Yangge, dragon dance, martial arts, etc.) will be opened in rural primary and secondary schools to combine sports with cultural inheritance, so as to cultivate teenagers' local identity and sports interest.

For middle-aged and elderly people: While preserving traditional activities like Yangge dance and board games, promote modern fitness programs suitable for this age group, such as Tai Chi, fitness balls, and brisk walking. This should explore a family oriented "family sports" model, establish family sports days, and encourage everyone to participate.

4.3 Content innovation: Integration of tradition and modernity

Brand building: Deeply explore the "Northeast folk culture" resources of Baicheng City, and create regional characteristic brand activities such as "Farmer Yangge Competition", "Rural Dragon Dance Festival" and "Ice and Snow Folk Sports Fair" to enhance cultural confidence and influence of activities;

Project integration: Promote the combination of traditional sports and modern fitness methods, such as the development of "yangge fitness exercise" and "wushu fitness dance" and other integrated projects, enrich the forms of expression and improve the exercise effect.

Promotion and Popularization: The Municipal Sports Bureau will continue to organize "Sports to the Countryside" activities, where professional coaches and social sports instructors will visit villages and households to provide free instruction in basketball, badminton, and square fitness exercises. Additionally, they will develop visually rich, easy-to-understand local sports manuals and online video tutorials to help farmers practice independently and maintain regular exercise [5].

4.4 Organizational empowerment: Strengthening professional talents and financial support

Talent Development: Establish a three-tier social sports instructor training system at county, township, and village levels. At least one part-time sports instructor needs to be trained in each administrative village through a combination of regular training and certification programs. Promote cooperation with universities such as Baicheng Normal University, implement the "Rural Sports Volunteer Program", and deploy college students to provide professional services in rural communities.

Multiple funding sources: actively guide enterprises, chambers of commerce and other social forces to participate in rural sports through sponsorship, naming, donation and other forms, promote the establishment of "rural sports development fund", and form a multi-input mechanism of government guidance, enterprise support, collective supplement and villagers' participation.

System guarantee: The Implementation Plan for the Development of Rural Sports in Baicheng City was studied and issued, clarifying the responsibilities and division of labor of governments at all levels in the construction of facilities, the organization of activities and the training of talents. The rural sports work was included in the annual performance appraisal system of townships, and the incentive and accountability mechanism was established to ensure the effective implementation of various measures [6-8].

5. Conclusion

In recent years, rural sports development in Baicheng City has achieved notable progress. A public sports infrastructure network covering several villages and towns has been established, while diverse community sports activities have been organized, significantly enhancing rural residents' health awareness and enthusiasm for physical participation. However, challenges remain, including uneven distribution of sports facilities, slow updates to outdated equipment, insufficient farmer engagement in sports activities, repetitive and locally distinctive sports programs, as well as weak management capabilities and a shortage of professional talent in grassroots sports organizations.

To further advance high-quality development of rural sports, we should adhere to the core approach of "facility upgrades, demand-oriented strategies, content innovation, and organizational empowerment". Specifically, this requires increasing public financial investment to upgrade and expand sports facilities, while improving fitness trails and multi-functional sports fields in administrative villages. Services should be tailored to meet the actual sports needs of rural residents, enhancing their relevance and satisfaction. By integrating regional cultural characteristics, we can

innovate sports activities by incorporating traditional sports and modern recreational sports. Additionally, strengthening the functional positioning and management capabilities of village-level sports organizations, cultivating local social sports instructors, and stimulating internal motivation will be crucial.

The analytical framework and proposed strategies developed in this study are not only applicable to Baicheng City but also provide practical references for other agriculture-dominated regions in Jilin Province (such as Songyuan City and Siping City). These findings hold significant practical value for promoting coordinated development of rural sports initiatives. Future research could further explore cross-sector integration mechanisms between rural sports and tourism, folk cultural preservation, and healthy village construction. This would help identify multidimensional pathways for sports-driven rural revitalization, ultimately establishing development models with enhanced comprehensive benefits and sustainability.

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