

Sport Facilities and Social Change: European Funds as an Opportunity for Urban Regeneration

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Abstract—It is well known that sport is a factor of social cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between people. From this point of view, the aim is to demonstrate how, through the (re)generation of sustainable structures, it is possible to give life to a new social, cultural and economic pathway, where possible, in peripheral areas with problems of abandonment and degradation. The aim of this paper is therefore to study realities such as European programs and funds and to highlight the ways in which planning can be used to respond to critical issues such as urban decay, abandonment, and the mitigation of social differences. For this reason, the analysis will be carried out through the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) package, the next generation EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund, and other managed funds. The procedure will rely on sources and data of unquestionable origin, and the relation to the object of study in question will be highlighted. The project lends itself to be ambitious and explore a further aspect of the sports theme, which as we know, is one of the foundations for a healthy society

Keywords—Sport, social inclusion, urban regeneration, sport facilities, European funds

I. INTRODUCTION

IT is now well recognized and culturally accepted that today sport is more than functional and important to our lives. The positive effects of sport are numerous and affect many aspects of people's economic and social lives, and it is also a source of health and wellbeing for the individual. Sport is considered a fundamental value among those promoted by the UN and its member states so much, so that it has been included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In paragraph 37, it recognises: “the growing contribution of sport to the realisation of development and peace through the promotion of tolerance and respect and through contributions to the empowerment of women and youth, individuals and communities, as well as to goals in the areas of social inclusion, education and health” [1].

In 2017, UNESCO, during the Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (Mineps VI), made operative the *Kazan Plan*, a global agreement linking sport policies and the sustainable development goals [2].

Specifically, sport contributes to many of the goals set: it ensures a healthy life and promotes the wellbeing of all people, ensures quality education, gender equality, promotes economic growth and decent work, reduces inequalities between countries, makes cities resilient, safe and sustainable

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and, finally, promotes peaceful societies.

The European Union, with its *White Paper on Sport*, has made it clear that sport, as well as contributing to the values of European solidarity, has an enormous potential to bring together and reach out to all, regardless of age or social origin. The important role of sport in European society and its specific nature were recognised in December 2000 by the European Council Declaration on the specific characteristics of sport and its social function in Europe, which should be taken into account when implementing common policies (“Nice Declaration”) [3]. Therefore, the European Union is a promoter of sport and the values and culture associated with it. “Inclusion in sport” means a combination of “sport for all”, equal access to sport, equal opportunities in sport and different demand-driven sporting opportunities and facilities, while “inclusion through sport” implies inclusive participation in society, community development and strengthened social cohesion.” [4] In this sense, objectives that transcend sport inclusion can be achieved especially through sport facilities and the infrastructure that comes with them, as promoters of urban renewal, job opportunities, limiting degradation and neglect, opportunities and development. The promotion of sport is possible through the presence of facilities and processes that enhance instances of urban renewal.

II. SPORT FACILITIES ANALYSIS

Sport facilities are a strategic asset for the role they play both in favour of the practice of sport and the positive effects in terms of social and economic value. The numbers of sports facilities in the world make it possible to appreciate the quantitative dimension of the diffusion of sport and its economic and social relevance. However, this aspect must be combined with qualitative elements of analysis necessary to assess the actual usefulness, the degree of sustainability and the repercussions in socio-economic terms. Nevertheless, this type of resource is a significant element. When talking about sport facilities and functionality, several criteria must be included:

- economic, environmental, energy sustainability indexes
- existence of infrastructure to relate to
- positive impacts on the community at cultural, perceptual, social and aggregational level
- level of rooting in the territory
- organisational management and technical guidance plan
- general improvements/innovations.

Fig. 1 shows the satisfaction rate of the population with sports facilities in the EU capitals. This is an important indicator as it allows us to measure the degree of presence and

perception of sports facilities by the various communities. In the case of Denmark, the national territory has a large number of sport facilities; it is estimated that there is 1 sport facility for every 49 inhabitants (total population/Nx facility) [5]. This is highly positive for the radicalisation of sport in the country.

In Far East Asia, Japan is one of the most advanced countries in terms of the presence of sports facilities; with a population density per km² three times that of Denmark, and despite being the 11th most populated country in the world, it has one public or private sports facility for every 1.864 people [6].

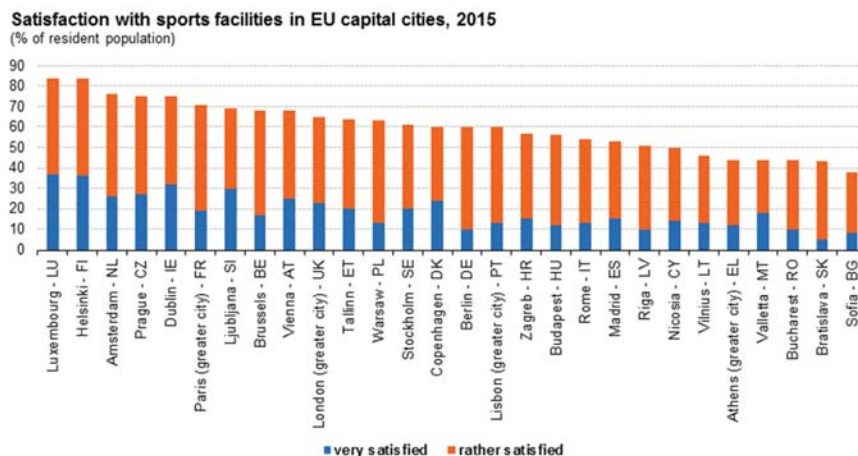


Fig. 1 EU capitals' satisfaction rate with sports facilities, 2015 [5]

If we look at the data from a youth perspective, taking as a reference sample the population of men and young people under 18, in relation to the presence of gymnasiums in schools, we get a very interesting figure of about 1 structure for every 49 people [7].

There has also been an exponential increase in the number of sports facilities in the United States over the last 30 years, and today there are more than 100, of which about 30% are private and the rest public [8]. In this case, the study conducted by the United States Sports Academy, found that: "The construction of a new facility, or the improvement of an existing facility, serves to cater to a greater number of participants, improves the condition of the surrounding environment, provides local opportunities for those who currently travel to see sporting events, and helps improve the local economy. Proponents of subsidies claim that the construction of sports facilities has a significant economic impact. Economic impact studies have been conducted by consultancies to support the argument that new spending is injected into the local economy." [9] It can be said, therefore, that the construction of these facilities has served to convey positive impact factors for the surrounding communities from the point of view of economic growth and social aggregation. The creation of jobs, the general increase in prices of surrounding housing, community loyalty through ticket sales, marketing and merchandising, created a sustainable economy. In this context, there is the sport industry, which plays an important key role in relation to the construction of sports facilities. [10] Sport can be described as an industry where people, businesses and organizations engage in production, facilitation, promotion or organization focused on sporting activities. The sector market can be described as a set of activities and products which can be goods, services, people,

places or ideas. The promotion of this activity is a fundamental pillar that passes through the sports facility, which becomes a business driver for the management. In the American case, it was noted that the existence of a given sports facility is a source of attraction for the area, capable of improving the local economy, generating wealth and jobs. In this sense, the business plan, the marketing plan, the operational plan, and the branding plan are all part of the process. Think of an American football stadium: first of all, we need to consider the fact that it is used by a sports team, with its own personal brand. Secondly, suppose that we have an audience, consisting of fans, supporters and various stakeholders, and these are the main target of the marketing plan drawn up by the club's owning company. We also consider the level of engagement between the team and the audience, and all the benefits this can bring. Finally, let us also assume that the stadium generates jobs and sports tourism from the success of the home team. The result is the generation of a business that unites the company behind the team, the workers and the local community. Another good example of the relationship between the sport industry and sports facilities is dictated by the brands and labels that produce sports equipment; it is a fact that certain types of sport require equipment and accessories that only dedicated companies can provide. To enter an American football facility, you will need a pair of footwear suitable for the terrain, appropriate protection, a mouth guard and a football, not to mention other background elements present in the game.

In Italy in 2015, the government launched a census of sports facilities at national level, in order to obtain a general picture of the facilities situation in all regions of the peninsula.

Total number of sports facilities in Japan in 2018, by type of sports facility



Fig. 2 Example of sport facilities diffusion, Japan 2018 [7]

In addition to a quantitative survey, qualitative or semi-qualitative studies are needed. Many sports facilities are in fact obsolete and unsustainable, requiring urgent intervention. In this regard, not only in Italy but also in the countries analysed, a process of redevelopment of built structures is underway; this redevelopment has not only a functional value but also an urban regeneration value. If a quantitative analysis of sport facilities has been carried out, proceeding towards a qualitative analysis is more complex due to the lack of available data and the restricted accessibility to these.

III. HOW TO FINANCE THE CONSTITUTION OF SPORT FACILITIES LINKED TO URBAN REGENERATION

Although the number of sport facilities requiring intervention is still unknown, it is clear that a review and quantification of these is a priority. Among the funding available in this regard are funds from the European Union at EU level, and at the local level in Italy, we find the Sport e Periferie (SeP) project. Although sport is a very important keyword, it does not appear directly in the funds of the Union's 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework: being a transversal theme, sport can easily be linked and implemented in addition to other subjects of greater impact and relevance.

The multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 refers to the EU's long-term budget, which determines the limit of how much money the Union can invest, over a period of at least five years, in the different policy objectives [10].

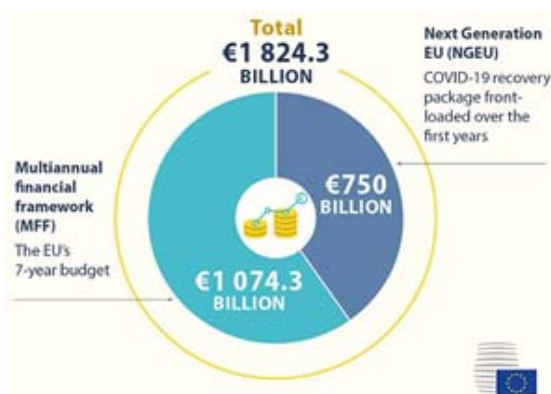


Fig. 3 EU budget 2021-27 and recovery plan [12]

As explained on the EU portal: “The budget supports research and innovation, investment in trans-European networks and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which aim to boost growth and create jobs in the EU. The EU’s common agricultural policy (CAP) together with the common fisheries policy and environment receives the most funding under the current long-term budget. This is followed by "cohesion" programmes that aim to support poorer regions. The long-term budget also funds international humanitarian aid and development projects”. [11] In these contexts, sport can be used as a tool for urban regeneration, in symbiosis and in collaboration with funds aimed at social and territorial cohesion; creating an infrastructure, allowing more efficient mobility, equipping

parks with elements for motor practice, means combining sport with sustainability, implementing the level of well-being of the community involved.

In the European long-term budget, sport features as one of the core elements in the Erasmus Plus programme; the overall objective of the programme is to develop the European dimension in sport, calling for an increase in the levels of participation in sport and the promotion of physical activity. As part of the SHARE initiative, a position paper also signed by EPSI, the European Platform for Sport Innovation, highlighted the important role that sport and physical activity can play in building a resilient and sustainable society, advocating the inclusion of sport in recovery support mechanisms (post COVID-19) not only as an affected sector in need of reconstruction, but also as a strategic sector in the broader economic and social recovery process. Furthermore, the project examples highlighted in the same document support the contribution of sport to broader regional development objectives, considering how local sport-related initiatives help not only to promote healthy lifestyles, but also to attract inward investment, develop sustainable solutions and businesses, other examples are the acquisition of skills and the improvement of employment, in order to promote gender equality and improve social inclusion. Projects developed on these issues can be found in the SHARE database [13]. With this in mind, in the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the main programme of the Next Generation EU, a package for the recovery of grants and loans joining the European budget 2021-2027, many EU countries have included several investment lines in favour of sport.



Fig. 4 EU budget 2021-27 – Financial Frameworks [14]

As far as the Italian local plan is concerned, in 2015 the government launched the Sport e Periferie (SeP) project, with the aim of preparing a strategic intervention plan for the sport facilities surveyed throughout the country, which are in a state of neglect and degradation. [15]

Renovating a degraded sports facility means first of all rethinking in terms of c/o (c = cost; o = opportunity). Working on an existing facility often means better management and optimisation of available resources, limiting waste, and more tangible sustainability, since a structure that is already there is being restored. Moreover, it means giving back to the area of intervention a usable and functional structure, revitalising the territory from degradation and neglect. However, these actions must be in synergy with other social and economic measures,

so that the intervention does not become a “drop in the ocean”. In fact, it is important to know how to make the sports facility an added value for the community, mitigating social vulnerabilities and focusing on environmental issues. All these aspects promote and determine a service which generates money flows, social inclusion and environmentally sustainable business model at the same time.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, if sport is a fundamental motive for the well-being of the citizen, sport facilities are its beating heart, but as far as the latter are concerned, the types of interventions must be carried out seeking to align with lasting and sustainable effects. Sport can be a stimulus for economic growth but it requires strong institutional support. Sport facilities therefore contribute to urban regeneration, as they are the bearers of numerous demands, such as the strengthening of the local economy, collective social wellbeing, and the redevelopment of the area where the intervention is concentrated. Sport also plays a role in terms of promoting social aggregation and mitigating social differences, especially for the most deprived and rural communities. Secondly, it stimulates the economy through new and innovative mechanisms, often acting as a driver. Finally, it constitutes a replicable sustainable eco-friendly model, helping the environment and supporting green policies.

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