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Integrated Football: A New Frontier of Sport for All to Change the Attitudes

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Abstract

Every person has the right to express their full potential in life. Thus, sport too must provide an occasion for personal and social development. Sport is a source of values as well as of counter-values as is the case with lack of respect, abuse of power towards competitors, breaking rules, success at all costs. People with disability often have no access to sport practice which, instead, is very important especially for children, due to its high educational value. Also, in their daily lives, people with disability encounter barriers that limit and influence their possibilities of dealing with and of relating to people without disabilities on an equal basis. In this direction, this paper present a new integrated sport, created by a team of researchers through the European project “Integrated football. A new Frontier of Sport for All” co-funded by the Erasmus+ Sport Program (2016-17), in wich Univerity of Rome Foro Italico is involved. The paper will, still, show the results of a qualitative analysis of a focus group, organized at the end of the project with the referents of Country involved. The aim is check the change in perception of sport and disability. The change of attitude shows trends of validity of the inclusive sport model, especially in countries where there is no long inclusive tradition.

Keywords: Inclusion, Sport, Football, Qualitative Research



Introduction and Aim

This study presents a new integrated sport, created by a team of researchers through the European project “Integrated football. The new Frontier of Sport for All” co-funded by the Erasmus+ Sport Program (2016-17), in which the University of Rome Foro Italico is involved.

Furthermore, the paper will unfold the results of the analysis of a focus group which was held on 29th September 2017 at the end of the project itself and that it was led by myself through a structured grid, in which the referents of the countries involved, have taken part.

The aim is to check at the end of the project the change in perception of sport and disability to shows the positives trends about the validity of the inclusive sports model, above all in countries where there is no long inclusive tradition. The countries involved was: Italy, Germany, Portugal, Lithuania, Slovakia and Bulgaria¹.

The choice of the Focus Group responds to the need to provide a qualitative analysis of the change in the referents involved. Through their voice it is easier to understand the phenomenon investigated, which has a transformational and social improvement effect.

The integrated Football model was studied and conceived by the Italian team thanks to the experience and tradition of the integration that our country has been developing since the 1970s. The special pedagogical research in the field of sport tried to highlight the educational side of the sport itself, which becomes an important way of equality and integration especially when it is designed as integrated (de anna, 2009; Moliterni, 2013; Magnanini, 2016).

Unlike other countries, Italy has developed an innovative model of integrated sport. An emblematic example is Baskin (Integrated Basketball) created in 2003 (Magnanini, 2010). The peculiarity is offered by an inclusive sport transformation, not an adaptation on disability. At international level, apart from the Special Olympics Unified sports program, there are few sports events where everyone can participate and express themselves. Everyone means everyone, no one excluded.

Many international programs declare inclusive, but then investigating better, it turns out they are sports activities for disabled people (Ronald W. Davis, 2011), where inclusion is an external purpose, such as the (Leeds Program for disabled children, young people and adults; <http://active.leeds.gov.uk/communitysport/Documents/Leeds%20Inclusive%20Sport%20Programme%202017.pdf>), or the London program RISE (Disability and inclusive sport – promoting sports and exercise for disabled people of all ages; www.richmond.gov.uk/disabilitysports_and_activites). The United Kingdom experiences are

¹The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003) has divided Countries can into three categories according to their policy on including pupils with special educational needs: The first category (one-track approach) includes countries that develop policy and practices geared towards the inclusion of almost all pupils within mainstream education (Italy, Spain, Portugal). The countries belonging to the second category (multi-track approach) have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion. They offer a variety of services between the two systems, i.e. mainstream and special needs education systems (France, Lithuania, Slovakia). In the third category (two-track approach), there are two distinct education systems. Pupils with SEN are usually placed in special schools or special classes. Generally, a vast majority of pupils officially registered as having special educational needs do not follow the mainstream curriculum among their non-disabled peers. These systems are (or at least were until very recently) under separate legislation, with different laws for mainstream and special needs education (Belgium, Germany). European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, *Special needs education in Europe*, Cor Meijer, Victoria Soriano, Amanda Watkins Editors, Brussels, 2003, p. 7.



very interesting, as inspired by the Australian sport model, which since 2000 works for the creation and diffusion of an inclusive sport culture. In this direction, “Sport Ability” is a national program designed to increase the participation levels in sport and physical activity of people with a disability in a structured, safe, inclusive and fun environment (. Sports Ability consists of inclusive games that can be delivered in a variety of settings including schools, clubs and disability and aged care facilities (Stevenson, 2009). Sports Ability is appropriate for everyone and had two main aims: - to provide teachers, sport and community leaders with more ways of including people with a disability in physical activity and sport; - to create a medium for the integration of people with and without a disability in inclusive games (<https://dte.nt.gov.au/sport-and-recreation/sport-programs/inclusive-sport>). However, Italy has moved further because it has packaged an accessible sport *ab imis*, according to inclusive pedagogical literature (Magnanini, 2015).

From School to Sport-Inclusion: The Italian Specificity

The key of this successful Italian experience has to be found in the school integration and in the changes that the educational system has implemented in order to respond to everyone educational needs: the common school. Since 1971, indeed, different laws have opened the way:

- Law 118/1971: compulsory education had to take place in regular classes, except in the case of mental deficiencies or physical impairments so severe as to prevent learning or integration in common classes. The same Law also places an onus on municipalities to make school buildings accessible for everyone, according to national standards;
- Law 517/1977: legislated to implement procedures to integrate handicapped pupils by providing special teachers, both in primary and middle schools;
- Law 104/1992: is the main framework for all disability issues: it guarantees specific rights for people with disabilities and their families, provides assistance, stipulates full integration and the adoption of measures for prevention and functional recovery, and also ensures social, economic and legal protection. The principle of integration and the right of pupils with disabilities to receive specific support are also included in all the subsequent legislation that regulates general aspects of the educational system, such as enrolment, class size and pupil assessment, as well as curricular teacher training and support teacher training;
- Law 328/2000: states that families, together with municipalities and social services, may agree upon an individualized life project for their children, aimed at full integration ‘within the family and social life’;
- Law 170/2010: recognizes dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia as specific learning disorders (de Anna, 2014).

Special Pedagogy reflects on an inclusive school (school for all, of all) has been able to develop inclusive sports models as sharing models.

The integrated sport has been promoted by a set of convergent paths which have been backed at international level by the:

- a) International Movement for sport for all (European Sports Charter, 1992, for example),



- b) International Movement for inclusion of people with disability (United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, 2006);
- c) The Scientific research: University of Rome of Foro Italico: Document of sport of all, 2006, de Anna; editorial publications, workshops, conference...);
- d) School experiences: Ministerial Notes (2006) about the need to promote sports together such as integrated sports, (Note n. 5049/ A5, 23.10.2007, Education Ministry),
- e) Projects of sports associations and promotion agencies of sport.

Through the lenses of Special Pedagogy, the inclusive sport can be defined as a series of gymnastic, game, exercise or movement activities practised together by able-bodied people and people with disabilities (of various degrees), whether recreationally or professionally, for the purpose of competitive challenge, where each player, through relatively intense physical effort, improves their own potential, based on equal opportunities and active participation, through flexible rules that allow for individual characteristics (Magnanini, 2015).

This definition clearly reflects the three elements of special education that ensure the inclusiveness of sport: accessibility (to places, but especially to activities), active participation and equal opportunities (ensured by the rules).

The Integrated Football: Educational and Sporting Principles

In this direction, the Integrated Football is a new sports discipline which allows a sports competition of disabled and non-disabled athletes jointly, made possible by a set of rules, and on the basis of active participation, accessibility and equal opportunities. Instead, Integrated Football aims for full gender inclusion through mixed teams and by praising the physical capacities and aptitudes of each player. Integrated Football is not at all a form of charity, nor is it a sport inferior to regular football, rather it is a distinct sports discipline in which all players must express their potential and capacities at their best in order to contribute to the final outcome. Once the logic of winning at all costs is abandoned, everyone feels a winner after playing Integrated Football, where, by the way, one competes first with oneself before competing against competitors.

Integrated Football was inspired by regular football, basketball and handball, and because of this, it has innovative and specific characteristics. The Charter of Values and the Laws of the Game govern Integrated Football and make it a dynamic and quicksilver game. This discipline was designed to allow people with and without disabilities to play in the same team, enabling the active participation of players, both male and female, with any kind of ability and disability (physical and/or mental, as well as with psychiatric disorders). The Integrated Football Laws of the Game are built upon four fundamental pillars: 1) The roles: Every player has a role defined by his/her motor skills and consequently he/she faces a sports confrontation with an opponent of the same level. Roles are numbered from 1 to 5 and each one has its own rules; 2) The space: Two side goals in addition to the 2 traditional goals located at the shorter lines of the pitch; protected zones for shooting at the side goals; 3) The material: Under particular conditions, the regular ball can be substituted with a smaller and/or lighter ball; 4) The tasks assigned: Within the team a player might play the role of a tutor who can help the actions of a mate with a disability.



A match is played by two teams with players of both genders and with and without a disability; each team displays 8 players on the field. Each player has a role defined by a number from 5 to 1; two of the players displayed by a team on the pitch play as goalkeepers and one as a penalty kicker (role 2). The match may start provided both teams have at least 6 players on the pitch but if a team has less than 6 players on the pitch the match cannot go on. One of the players of a team is the captain and, as a distinctive sign, he/she must wear a bracelet of a different color from that of the shirt. After the start, a match is stopped if either of the teams does not have: at least two players with role 3, at least one player with role 5, both genders among players with role 4 and 5. If a match has to be stopped for lack of required roles or genders in a team, the referees write a note and attach it to the match report which is given in to the Disciplinary Commission.

The Roles are assigned depending on the abilities of a player in executing aimed motor-coordinated acts, thus depending on his/her balance, walk, running and use of feet. Following a functional assessment based on balance, walk, running as well as the use of feet, each player is assigned a role from 1 to 5. The total of the sum of all roles of players a team deploys in the field must not exceed 20. The two goalkeepers and the penalty kicker are not included in this sum. If the referees or the opposing team realize that a team overcomes the limit of 20, the infringement is sanctioned with a penalty kick.

A Functional Classification System was developed to establish roles. This System and Game Rules can be consulted at www.sfofliami.it/sfofliabili/142/553/libro_inglese_ALTA.pdf.

Definition of the roles:

Role 5: A player with or without disability who can perform all fundamental actions of football and can also have the role of a tutor for a mate player with a disability. When in possession of the ball, a role 5 player can execute all football actions towards anybody in accordance with the Laws of the Game; in each period of the game and in each team, the role 5 players can shoot at the opponents' goal three times maximum. The return kick is considered as a single action. When the ball is in play, in order to gain its possession, he/she can counter and intercept the ball from an opposing player having the same role only. A role 5 player can be countered and his/her ball intercepted by any other players.

Role 4: A player with or without disability who can correctly execute aimed motor coordinated acts (he/she has full or partial use of feet, thus can kick, walk, run agilely and has regular ball control); he/she can perform all fundamental actions of football at medium speed. When in possession of the ball, a role 4 player can execute all football actions towards anybody; he/she can shoot only at the shorter line goal. When the ball is in play and in order to gain possession of the ball, he/she can counter and intercept the ball from an opponent player having the same role (4) or a higher one (5) only. He/she can be countered by players having the same or a lower role (4 and 3 respectively); when he/she passes the ball, this can be intercepted by all other players, regardless of their roles.

Role 3: A player with a disability who has the total or partial use of his/her feet, thus he/she can kick also at the shorter line goal, can walk, can run although his/her control of the ball is not regular. He/she can run, but he/she is slow, clumsy, he/she lacks coordination and/or balance. Every role 3 player in a team list must play at least one period as a side goalkeeper and at least one period on the pitch as a player. If a team has more than four players with role 3 in its list, each of them must play as a goalkeeper for at least 4 minutes in whatever period and for not more than 8 minutes in total in the match. Role 3 player as a goalkeeper When



playing as a goalkeeper, the role 3 player is at the side goal on the left of his/her team's half of the pitch. Inside the penalty area he/she is allowed to touch the ball with his/her hands. He can intercept a free ball and also parry when the ball is kicked at his/her goal. However, he/she is not allowed countering an opponent who enters the penalty area to give the ball to the penalty kicker. When the penalty kicker shoots, the role 3 player must stand on the side goal line and may not be replaced by another player as long as the ball is in play. Role 3 player on the pitch as a player He/she is allowed to do all actions towards anyone: he/she is also allowed to kick at the side goal but from outside the penalty area. A goal made by role 3 player in the side goal counts as one goal, a goal made by role 3 player in the shorter line goal is worth double. When the ball is in play, he/she can counter and intercept each role in order to get the ball. Only players with the same role can mark him/her and intercept the ball from him/her.

Role 2: A player with a disability who has the total or partial use of his/her feet or hands for shooting/throwing at the side goal; he/she might be a wheelchair user. He or she cannot run or cannot use running in the game. A role 2 player is called "penalty kicker". He/she is positioned in the right side of his/her team attacking direction, on the touch line and next to the side goal (he/she avoids positions in which he/she hinders others or which might endanger himself/herself or others) till a mate delivers the ball. When he/she receives the ball, he/she must move outside of the side goal area and shoot the penalty kick (he/she might move either autonomously or with the help of the mate who has brought the ball). A wheelchair user takes the penalty kick by throwing the ball with one or both hands. In this case the ball must suit his/her characteristics and capabilities. The Commission which assigns the roles also establishes for each role 2 player the distance of the ball from the goal, depending on the player's strength in kicking/throwing. The ball used in the game can also be replaced by the own one of the role 2 player, as he/she wishes. This ball might be lighter and/or smaller, and must have been authorized by the Commission in advance. When it is not used, the ball of the role 2 player will be outside the pitch, next to the side goal. Role 2 players may not be marked; they must look in direction of the ball and for safety reasons they must be on the touch line till the player who is bringing them the ball enters the penalty area. Role 2 players can only get the ball inside the side goal area. The pass to the role 2 player is considered as accomplished only when the ball is stopped inside the penalty area of the side goal by a mate player with whatever role. When the role 2 player is taking the penalty kick, he/she must have 5 free meters on his/her sides. When the goalkeeper fists the ball away, the action is considered as concluded and the referees stop the play so that the role 2 player can exit the pitch. The play is resumed by a goal clearance taken by the goal keeper. If the penalty kicker kicks the ball out of the pitch or if the goal keeper deviates it and the ball exits the pitch, the play is restarted with the goalkeeper taking goal clearance.

Role 1: A player with or without disability who plays as a goalkeeper at the shorter line goal (traditional goal). He/she has number 1 on the shirt. Role 1 player shall not exit the penalty area, since this would actually result in an increased number of players for his/her team. If the goalkeeper exits the penalty area, the infringement is sanctioned with an indirect free kick to the opponent team. The free kick is taken on the penalty area line, where the goalkeeper has crossed it. The goalkeeper shall not act against a role 3 player. Players lined up on the pitch. Each team must line up a role 1 goalkeeper, a role 3 goalkeeper, a penalty kicker (role 2), a role 5 player as well as two players having role 3. Among role 4 and 5 players lined up on the field there must be players of both genders.



Qualitative Analysis of Changes Attitudes in Sport and Disability

This model has been reviewed by the partners and, after a training course, it has been applied in their respective countries. Each country has its own story regarding the integration. Italy, Portugal and Bulgaria (since 2005) have opted for inclusive education, Slovakia and Lithuania have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion, and Germany has historically chosen the path of separation. Germany was recently positioned within the two-track system but are now moving towards the multi-track system, but the experience in the inclusion field must be developed (de Anna, 2007).

The complexity of the game takes into account the complexity of the human being. The impact in countries where inclusion has a recent history is crucial.

However, the most important thing to us, anyways, is to show how the application of this new way of living and conceiving the sport has brought important changes in the behaviours of the involved operators.

To this regard the Focus Group, thanks to which we have conducted our research, is an important way to operationalize inter-subjectivity. Thanks to that it is possible to empirically study the ordinary description of the realities shared by several actors. According to Albanesi (2004), the focus groups allow to collect the involved actors speeches and perceptions in order to highlight some trend lines that an intervention has produced into a certain reality and into the people beliefs. After having designed the context, all sat around in a circle and with a structured grid, everyone had a chance to express himself based on the questions submitted. We decided to conduct a qualitative analysis by reporting the key elements of the speeches and by grouping them based on the questions submitted. We will reply the aggregate answers according to the questions. Reflections of the Focus group are not generalizable, but photograph a given situation and show very interesting perspectives.

At the focus group, two referents for each institution have participated (Bulgaria, Portugal, Slovakia, Germany, Lithuania) and 5 for Italy (1 person for Foro Italico University, 2 for CSEN- Centro Educativo Sportivo Nazionale, and 2 for an Italian Sports Association).

Five questions have been addressed: 4 of which have tried to follow up the effects of the application of football in different Countries while the last one concerned the potential steps to carry out in order to ease/facilitate the processes of inclusion in several countries.

To the first question (Has the application of this model contributed to change the disabled people behaviours. All the actors responded positively.

One of the most important changes has occurred in the sphere of relations, and so not only in the phase of play. This is a crucial passage because in the educational process that the project would reserve to every country's coaches, the educational dimension has played an important role.

The integrated football does not only take into account the game but as well the relations between the people and it becomes itself an essential locations where to build lasting relationships. This raises the concept of education as a relationship that is the foundation of the inclusive sport itself.

To the second question (it did change something with people with no disabilities), everyone responded positively. Germany highlights the increase of motivation, while both Portugal and



Slovakia highlight that the usage of a new instrument in the field of sport has led people to be better aware of their behaviour/actions/conduct.

Bulgaria brings up an important point: interests towards an unknown area.

To the third question (did your idea of sport change?) only Lithuania says that they change their ideas of sport, widening their perspectives. However according to the other countries, sport is simply sport. The only point which is highlighted and which finds an answer in the Moliterni words is the one to consider this model in its sense of game, emphasizing the purpose: integration.

The fourth question tried to understand the partners' ideas regarding the equal opportunities offered by the game, given that in the field we can find different abilities.

All the partners highlight the hardships in finding a solutions for some pathologies, however the most important aspect is that - for these activities – people who would have never had a single chance to play sports in their lives, can actually participate. This is extremely important because it ensure that- through specific roles and rules- everyone can have the same chance of success.

The assessment test- in this specific context- cannot be a diagnostic and categorisation tool but it works as an initial tool of orientation. This test has this educational function and only in that way we can think that the education be the cornerstone of the integrated sport. This must lead to an education, which is the guarantor/guarantee of the integrated sport in a context of mutual respect. This element can be built only if we do not label and homologate, if not for mere aims functional to the game.

Regarding to that, Italians speak in favour of not organising tournaments but simply some games in the spirit of the fair play which has to be at the base of any sport, regardless of who (the person) is practising the sport.

In the wake of these answers, to the last question “ What can be done to implement the processes of inclusion through the sport?” everyone agrees that events and training (and information) days must be organized – even at international level- in order to make as many people as possible know about this Italian way of playing sport.

Short Conclusion

The focus group stresses the success of the model, emphasizing a change in the trend towards a new way of conceiving the sport and so to promote the inclusion. If this is a multidirectional process and a mutual change, the answers show that this process has begun and even those countries whose “background” is not inclusive have pointed out the additional benefit) of the sport. For this reason, we do always need to go back to the Charter and Code of Sports Ethics, which must guide our actions.

Integrated Football provides an opportunity to challenge oneself, where a limit becomes a possibility, a lack becomes a potential, and the body becomes a resource. Integration of abilities, communication, openness to others, socialization, trust, recognition of others and self-assertion, as well as a more stable emotional balance are favored. All of them contribute to the well-being of the individual. Thus, the sports result in Integrated Football is the natural output of this process: sport is a way and not an aim. This is possible only when sport is



underpinned by an educational intentionality and planning where individuals are considered in their entirety and as bearers of worth and resources for all.



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