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EXCHANGE REPORT



**LOCAL IMPACT GENERATED BY THE
OUTDOOR SPORT ACTIVITIES**

**Insights from the exchanges among the SWUP
project community**

WHAT IS THE REPORT ABOUT?

This report is a synthesis of the issues regarding the local impacts of sport that have been exchanged in the framework of Sport for Women in Urban Places (SW-UP) project. SW-UP is a project funded by the Erasmus+ fund of the European Union to enhance women participation in outdoor physical activities. The activities of the project aim to shed light on how to incentivize women to practice outdoor sports in urban environments.

Other five topics, besides the one addressed in this report, have been identified and discussed by the project's partners: the role of municipality, the role of women in executive sport positions, child-friendly approach, the desirability of creating women only provisions (activities or spaces) and infrastructures for disabled women.

Information was collected through an oral exchange that the SW-UP partners had during the project.

1. THE TOPIC: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The report discusses the local impacts of (outdoor) sport/physical activity and the methodologies to be used for measuring it. In analyzing this issue, particular attention will be paid to impacts of sport on women's lives.

The role of physical activity in having a qualitative and health life has been largely acknowledged at international level (EU physical activities guidelines, 2008; Physical activity and health in Europe: evidence for action, 2006, WHO; Physical activity guidelines for Americans, 2008; White Paper on a Strategy for Europe on nutrition, overweight and obesity related health issues, 2007; etc).

According to WHO, annually 35 million people die of diseases associated to physical inactivity. Besides the human costs, this implies also a huge financial cost caused as an increase in the rates of heart diseases, stroke, diabetes puts pressure on the health systems and consequently on health expenditure.

Even though sport and physical activity are key components of a healthy life style, nowadays living conditions have changed and a shift towards a more sedentary lifestyle linked to the use of PCs, smartphones and TVs has emerged. The 2017 Eurobarometer Survey evidences that 46% of Europeans are physically inactive, meaning that they never engage in physical activity. According to the survey, women, and in particular young ones are more probable not to practice any kind of physical activity: 52% of women never practice sport or physical activity compared to 40% of men; 33% of young women never engage in sports or physical activities compared to 15% of men .

Furthermore, the EU Communication "Developing the European Dimension in sport" (2011) recognizes that sport has a positive impact not only on the micro (individual) and macro (system) health, but also on social inclusion, education and training. Indeed, the literature acknowledges that sport/physical activity produce impacts in several areas of human life: individual well-being, education/work attainment, social relations, community cohesion.

According to Taylor et. al (2015), the participation in sports/physical activity has immediate results in terms of improved cognitive skills, increased trust in the others and strengthening of social relations, higher engagement in community life and quest for a higher peer status.

Exchange report

These outcomes impact not only on individuals, but also on their social networks (e.g. families, friends) and wider community networks (community as a whole) and produce intermediate social outcomes at all levels: increase in participation in social life (pro-social behaviour) and consequently increase in community networking and relations and better cognitive functioning.

A strengthening of pro-social behaviour, cognitive and motor functioning of individuals practicing sport/physical activity and community networking lead to wider social benefits in several related areas: health, crime, education and social cohesion. In particular, in the health area the prevention or reduction of physical and mental health problems contribute to reducing costs especially considering the continuous ageing population. By an increase in pro-social behaviour sport/physical activity and strengthening of relations at community level, sport contributes to reducing anti-social behaviour and to preventing increase in crime rates. By improving cognitive functioning sport/physical activity contributes to increasing education or work attainments.

The literature debate on the positive social impacts of sport/physical activity suggests that the possibility of these impacts to occur depends on the type, frequency, duration and intensity of sport/physical activity.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that such effects may occur in tandem. For instance Schwarzenegger et al. (2005) suggests that a recreation programme aimed at fighting youth obesity can produce aggregated social impacts, by increasing self-esteem, reducing the use of alcohol, building family relations, promoting volunteering, etc. According to Sport England (2008), the positive effects of sport on young people's resilience, confidence level, health and education achievement contributes later to their life outcomes.

From a gender perspective...

sport exemplifies a societal and cultural process in which the social construction of femininity and masculinity plays a key role in influencing behaviors and approaches.

Sport is traditionally associated with 'masculine' characteristics, such as physical strength and resilience, speed and a highly competitive, sometimes confrontational spirit. In many societies, women who engage in sports are perceived as 'masculine', while men who are not interested in sports are considered 'unmanly'.

Traditionally, sport has been dominated by men, both in terms of participation and governance. Worldwide, women's participation rates in sporting activities are lower than men's. Yet over the last 20 years' significant changes have occurred and the difference in involvement between the genders is becoming narrower. Indeed, a large body of academic and professional literature underlines the relevance of both the physical (safety, accessibility, layout, facilities for specific categories of women as mothers, elderly, disabled, etc) and the social (social norms and culture) environment for women's participation into sports.

However, sport can also be used as a means to achieve gender equality through the establishment of general values such as fair play, non-discrimination and teamwork. It can also be used to increase opportunities for girls, if local contexts and gender relations are taken into account and addressed. Sport can give women and girls access to public spaces where they can gather, develop new skills, gain support from others and enjoy freedom of expression and movement. It can promote education, communication, negotiation skills and leadership, all of which are essential to women's empowerment. Sport can also increase women's and girls' self-esteem and enable them to make choices about their lives. Moreover, sport can provide a channel to inform girls and women about reproductive health and other health issues.

2. KEY ASPECTS FROM THE DEBATE

The debate aimed to provide an answer to the following questions:

i. How local impact generated by outdoor sport activities can be identified and evaluated?

According to participants in the debate, outdoor activities may be considered a vehicle for promoting physical activity and wellbeing. They have a mobilizing role among non-practitioners. Furthermore, sport is also an attractor, contributing to the promotion not only of outdoor sport spaces, but also of the commerce and the city life itself. Thus, the (increasingly) presence of people in open-air values urban sports spaces and works positively to strengthen the social and economic impact of sports in local community.

Participants in the debate underline that the main impacts of outdoor sports at local level consist of: economic impacts, physical and psychological impacts, social impacts. However, as Taylor et. al (2015) points out health and social impacts of sport can occur on condition that beneficiaries practice sport regularly over a long period of time. From this point of view, it is important to measure participants' engagement in sport activities throughout their life.

Impacts of sports can be assessed using the Social Impact Assessment approach. The Social Impact Assessment (SIA) includes the processes of analysing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions (policies, programs, plans, projects) and any social change processes invoked by those interventions. Its primary purpose is to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment.

The important features of this understanding of SIA are that:

1. The goal of impact assessment is to bring about a more ecologically, socio-culturally and economically sustainable and equitable environment. Impact assessment, therefore, promotes community development and empowerment, builds capacity, and develops social capital (social networks and trust).
2. The focus of concern of SIA is a proactive stance to development and better development outcomes, not just the identification or amelioration of negative or unintended outcomes. Assisting communities and other stakeholders to identify development goals, and ensuring that positive outcomes are maximised, can be more important than minimising harm from negative impacts.
3. The methodology of SIA can be applied to a wide range of planned interventions, and can be undertaken on behalf of a wide range of actors, and not just within a regulatory framework.
4. SIA contributes to the process of adaptive management of policies, programs, plans and projects, and therefore needs to inform the design and operation of the planned intervention.
5. SIA builds on local knowledge and utilises participatory processes to analyse the concerns of interested and affected parties.
6. The good practice of SIA accepts that social, economic and biophysical impacts are inherently and inextricably interconnected. Change in any of these domains will lead to changes in the other domains. SIA must, therefore, develop an understanding of the impact pathways that are created when change in one domain triggers impacts across other domains, as well as the iterative or flow-on consequences within each domain.
7. SIA must be reflexive and evaluative of its theoretical bases and of its practice.

This approach includes the following steps:

- Understand the issue: understand proposed project; clarify roles and responsibilities; social area of influence; community profiling; inform communities; inclusive preparatory processes; scope issue; assemble baseline data;
- Predict, analyse and assess the likely impact pathways: social changes and impacts; indirect impacts; cumulative impacts; affected party responses; significance of changes; projects alternatives;
- Develop and implement strategies: address negative impacts; enhance benefit and opportunities; support communities with change; establish a grievance mechanism; negotiate impacts and benefit agreement; develop social impact management plan; establish partnership to implement social impact management plan; implement ongoing social performance plan;
- Design and implement monitoring programs: indicators to monitor change; participatory monitoring plan; implement adaptive management; evaluation and periodic review;
- Carry out the impact assessment;
- Discuss the impact assessment results with all stakeholders, including with the end beneficiaries.

Social impact assessment can be embedded in the theoretical approach of the realist evaluation, which aims to understand what works, for whom and under which circumstances. Following the realist approach, assessment move from the question “did an intervention work, namely did it brought about changes in the problematic situation?” to the questions “for whom did it work, how and why did it work?”.

Adopting this approach implies focusing on the learning dimension, namely providing learning on what worked/did not work and for whom in achieving the expected changes. The emphasis on learning underlines a key feature of evaluation that is consistent with the needs of deriving positive lessons for the future from problems or even failures as well as from success.

Applying the Social Impact assessment to a sport intervention implies implementing the following steps:

- Defining the scope of the assessment – practicing sport has a wide variety of impacts. Therefore, the first step of the assessment consists in reconstructing the theory of change of the intervention. This means identifying the explicit and implicit links between the foreseen impacts, the design features of the intervention and the context elements. This reconstruction will guide the researchers in the process of analysis of the impacts produced by the intervention. The reconstruction can be done through literature review and a workshop with the selected group of sport practitioners. The workshop aims to explore the impacts of practising outdoor sport activities and in which of the impacts they are interested in knowing more.
- Defining the impact indicators– this step can be taken in the same workshop organized to identify the scope. Once the scope has been identified, participants are invited to express which aspects of the reality bear witness of the selected impacts, and the value that they expect this aspect to be. For example, if they chose as an indicator the number of social connections that an individual has gained because of playing sport, it is important that they also express how many connections they expect the individual to gain from practicing sport.
- Identifying the assessment tools to gather the desired information – will it be a survey? Or qualitative interviews? Or focus group? This should be decided according to the scope of the assessment, the characteristics of the target population and the time resources allocated to the assessment.

- Collecting data - if among the participants to the workshop there are particularly interested individuals, the organization can set up beneficiaries' groups to collect the data. This will allow increasing participants' research skills.
- Analysing data - collected data are aggregated in easy-to-understand numbers and layout and discussed with the participants. In order to understand for who and under which condition there is a certain impact (realistic approach), it is important to verify the causal chain of effects (i.e. which combination of context and design features causes what kind of effects?). For instance, is the reduction of crime always present in individuals playing sport or only when sport leads to higher social relations? Or is it related only with individual of a certain age range?
- Writing the report – in this phase a narrative of the data analysed previously and a revision of the initial theory of change has to be produced.
- Discussing the report with actors involved in the intervention – this phase consists of verifying the plausibility of the theory of change produced in the previous phase with the actors involved in the intervention. Afterwards the final version of the report has to be produced.
- Disseminating the report to interested stakeholders.

If there are some very interested participants, the research can encourage them in building up a group for furtherly exploring the topic or for taking actions to amplify or maximize the identified impacts (according to the research action principles).

ii. To which main questions an analysis of the local impact of outdoor sport activities can provide an answer?

Participants in the debate identify the following questions:

- Is sport increasing physical and psychological wellbeing of those who practice it?
- Are cities with a high level of sport practitioners reporting lower healthcare expenditure?
- Do people playing sport experience an increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy? How does this increase affect their social and professional performance?
- Are people playing sport benefiting of higher social capital?
- Are people playing sport more engaged in community life?
- Do people playing sport register an improvement in their cognitive skills? Does this improvement result in a higher education/job performance?
- Are people playing a sport less likely to commit crime?
- Do the neighbourhood with a higher rate of individuals practising sport report less crime rates?

iii. Which are the areas of social life you believe social impacts or potential changes are much more deployed?

Two are the main areas where sport triggers more benefits: health and social relations.

The literature provides widely evidence on health benefits. Sport plays a critical role in the prevention and management of many diseases that account for a large proportion of health care costs. In addition, sport offers mental health benefits. In the area of mental health, sport offers opportunities for social interaction, which contribute particularly to emotional health and overall well-being. Indeed, according to the literature review conducted by Taylor et al. (2015), this impacts positively and simultaneously on the personal well-being of the person involved in sport and on community social cohesion.

Another sphere that is remarkably affected by practicing sport is the social implications of the selected sport/physical activity. Differently from watching television or reading the newspaper, playing an outdoor activity pushes the individual out of his/her home and of his comfort area; it usually gets him/her in contact with other people and it makes him/her face new challenges in a less predictable environment. This contributes to building individuals' social skills. Furthermore, sport increases the number of connections and acquaintance, giving access to a social network to which one can refer to in case of need.

Lastly, playing outdoor activities increases the rootedness and connection of the individual with his/her territory, with its morphological, historical and cultural features. This contributes to reinforcing individuals' bond with a specific territory, increasing his/her community identity.

iv. Which are the main impacts of outdoor sport activities at individual and community level?

As mentioned previously sport can produce both individual impacts (better health conditions, higher cognitive skills, higher social capital) and community impacts (economic gains at local level, reduction in health expenditure, improvement in social cohesion at community level).

When it comes to health impacts, the contribution of sport/physical activity to physical and mental well-being is widely recognized. Sport contributes in particular to reduction in stress, improvement of sleep as well as to increasing enthusiasm, emotional skills and reciprocity. It also benefits cognitive functions and reduces the risk of depression and dementia. From a gender perspective, the improvement in women's physical and psychological health is particularly relevant as women live longer than men, but in worse conditions. Furthermore, women's healthy ageing may also contribute to reducing the health expenditure.

From a social point of view, several authors (Taylor et al., 2015; Temple et al., 2011; Reide et al., 2000) point out that participation in sport has positive effects on the development of social relationship skills, including self-esteem, self-efficacy, cooperation and reciprocity. According to the authors, in the long run this triggers positive outcomes on the education/job attainment level. Increase in self-esteem and self-efficacy is particularly important from a gender perspective, as generally women have lower confidence in their skills, capacities and competences, which impacts negatively on their education/job performance (Ehrlinger J., Dunning D., 2003). At community level, increased self-confidence and self-esteem may contribute to increasing women's participation on the labour market.

Several authors (Bloom et al., 2005; Taylor et al. 2015; Holt et al., 2009; Cunningham and Beneforti, 2005) pinpoint that sport acts as a 'social glue' creating social capital.

Numerous studies (Bloom et al., 2005; Taylor et al. 2015; Holt et al., 2009; Cunningham and Beneforti, 2005) also pinpoint that sport can contribute to the creation of various types of social capital:

- Bonding capital: greater social connectedness, networking, social interaction – largely among a fairly homogeneous population;
- Bridging capital: greater awareness of others, better understanding of others, greater social inclusion/connectedness and mixing across heterogeneous population groups;
- Linking capital: ties between people in dissimilar social situations, enabling individuals and groups to access formal institutions.

From a gender perspective, the contribution of sport to creating bridging capital increases women's opportunities of participating in community life and having access to better jobs. According to Lutter (2015)

and Addis and Joxhe (2016), women suffer a 'closure penalty', especially when they have children, which impacts negatively on their possibilities of performance in community life and professional life.

Higher levels of bonding, bridging and linking capital contribute to increasing community social cohesion in the long run through: increased formation and maintenance of networks; increased integration into social settings; improvement in peer relations; increased motivation for personal and social development and cross-cultural exchanges. The positive impact of outdoor activities on social networks usually leads to positive effects on: the level of mutual aid among citizens; business partnerships; exchange and diffusion of opinions, ideas and innovative concepts; the number of activities or events organised; the reactivity and community mobilization in case of natural catastrophes. In addition, empowered and self-confident citizens are usually better equipped to face challenges, whether in private life, at work or in public life. They are also more likely to mobilize and have more spirit of initiatives.

In the long period, the above-mentioned effects result into reduced social tensions and increased collective action and community involvement.

Outdoor sport activities also make public space livelier, increasing their social control. In turn this contributes to making citizens feel more safe in the respective areas. They can also contribute to increasing citizens' appreciation of the urban space.

At community level, sport can also contribute to boosting the local economy. For instance, Tempo Livre, the SW-UP partner in Portugal, has recently published a book on the economic contribution of sport in Guimaraes. In Guimaraes sport contributes to the local economy with 67M euro per year.

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Exchange report

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