

# DOING SUCH A HARD JOB

The Making of Migrant and Refugees Integration Through  
Sport in Six European Countries



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

Erasmus+ Programme, Sport · Collaborative partnerships · n° 612967-EPP-1-2019-1-IT-SPO-SCP

## The project

This publication is one of product of the [SIMCAS project](#) (Social Inclusion Methodology in Critical Areas via Sport) promoted in the field of the Erasmus Plus Sport Project. The project aims at defining and testing a methodological approach that helps the sports operators to define and use efficient measures in critical contexts and allows continuity and replicability

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## 1. Introduction

This report is part of preliminary research activities envisaged by the SIMCAS project and has been preceded by a review of scientific literature concerning the role of sport in social inclusion processes [IREF, 2020]. The paper focuses on the main issues that practitioners and scholars, dealing with sport practices targeted to migrants and refugees, are facing in European societies. In the last decades, it has become increasingly challenging to promote the integration of non-EU citizens in countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Germany, Denmark and Slovenia, where the project and the current analysis has been carried out.

Migrations have come to be a very divisive topic within the European Union in the last years, both within and between member states. The intertwining of economic crises and humanitarian emergencies has made it very problematic to integrate newcomers in Europe, due also to the spread of feelings of hostility in middle and popular classes, caused by the worsening of economic conditions and uncertainty about the future. In such a polarized opinion climate, growing consensus has been registered by neo-populist or sovereigntist parties in several EU countries.

We cannot ignore this context while analyzing the function that sport can play in migrants' integration in host societies. This is what we tried to do through a qualitative survey involving stakeholders in the above-mentioned countries. We basically asked Key informants (scholars, experts, practitioners) to express themselves on some fundamental issues: not only the socio-economic context in which current migratory flows take shape, but also policy measures that are adopted at national and local level, factors that can affect the success of programs aiming to promote the social inclusion of migrants; the significance that sports practices can assume in integration dynamics in host societies; the crucial tasks attributed to coaches; and the effects of sport as a vehicle for social improvement in the life of disadvantaged people, such as refugees or second and third generations present in many cities and internal areas of the EU. In the following pages we will examine the main findings of this social inquiry.

Before going through research results it is necessary to spend some words on the approach that we used in this survey. The present is not a quantitative study, based on a standardized questionnaire with predetermined responses. In collecting empirical evidences, we adopted a qualitative methodology, which is particularly effective when, as in the present case, complex phenomena are analyzed, in order to explore social dynamics not completely understood, rather than verifying pre-established hypotheses. Respondents have been encouraged to express opinions and reconstruct their experience proposing them projective verbal stimuli, using a non-directive interview technique [Rubin and Rubin, 2011]. In practical terms we submitted a range of topics to key informants, leaving them free to develop arguments as they wished, giving the chance to highlight new issues, which we had not taken into account in the interview guide (see appendix).

Due to the spread of Covid-19 we were not able to make in presence interview. This circumstance did not represent a limit in carrying out the research; in fact, recent studies show that the reliability of qualitative survey techniques is not undermined when interviews are carried out remotely [Lobe, Morgan, Hoffman, 2020]. We therefore opted for Skype or Zoom calls, speaking with interviewees in front of a computer screen, recording the conversations.

We then listened to the complete audio files, bringing the most significant interview excerpts into the text.

Interviews were carried out between the months of July and August 2020. The 18 stakeholders who joined the survey (Table 1) have different professional histories behind them, having experienced from various perspectives migrants inclusion processes in the six countries in which the Simcas project is taking place: some of them are scholars who are aware of the potential and restrictions of sport in migrant's social integration, carrying out significant research on these topics, as well as teaching related subjects in universities; others have worked in relevant programs and projects, both in the public and private sectors, acting as coaches, managers, social workers or officials. The different background of respondents enriches the plurality of points of view collected during the interviews. It is also important to point out that some of these key informants are familiar with the situation of disadvantaged neighborhoods, while others have worked in refugee camps or prisons. This gave the opportunity to detect the role that sport can play in these diverse critical areas.

*Tab. 1 – Stakeholder's professional profile*

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nicola Porro, Retired Professor of Sociology at the University of Cassino, Italy.</li> <li>2. Tina Nobis, Professor in Sport, Integration and Migration at the Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany.</li> <li>3. Attilio Lombardozzi, Retired Professor in various university faculties of sports sciences, Italy.</li> <li>4. Will Orben, Head of Education Program on behalf of FC Nordsjælland, Denmark.</li> <li>5. Emily V. Ronek, International partnership manager in GAME Ngo, Denmark.</li> <li>6. Alex Canals, Program Coordinator of Barça Foundation in Greece.</li> <li>7. Thomas Farines, Former Educator and Consultant of Terre des Hommes Hellas</li> <li>8. Vasilis Kalyvas, Head of Educational Programs of Hellenic Paralympic Committee, Greece.</li> <li>9. Mohammed EL Ouahhabi, Sport-Integrations-Coach, Berlin Sport Council, Germany.</li> <li>10. Mariangela Perito, Psychologist and deputy president of Acli in Avellino, Italy</li> <li>11. Marco Critelli, US Acli Sports Trainer in the Ferranti Aporti Juvenile Institute and in the Ivrea Prison, Italy.</li> <li>12. Sabrina Falcone, Responsible for the Juridical Pedagogical Area of the Velletri Prison House, Italy.</li> <li>13. David Ekholm, Senior Lecturer, Department of Culture and Society, University of Norrköping, Sweden.</li> <li>14. Friederike Möller Bhering, Project manager of BENN, municipal program in Berlin, Germany.</li> <li>15. Fredi Radojkovic, Hand Ball Coach and School Teacher in Koper, Capodistria, Slovenia.</li> <li>16. Waare Sander, Deputy Director of the Cruyff Foundation, Spain.</li> <li>17. Raquel Lòpez, Social Education technician in Welfare Department Regional Council PE, Spain.</li> <li>18. Esther Busquets, Welfare and Education Counselor of Banyoles Municipality, Spain.</li> </ol> |
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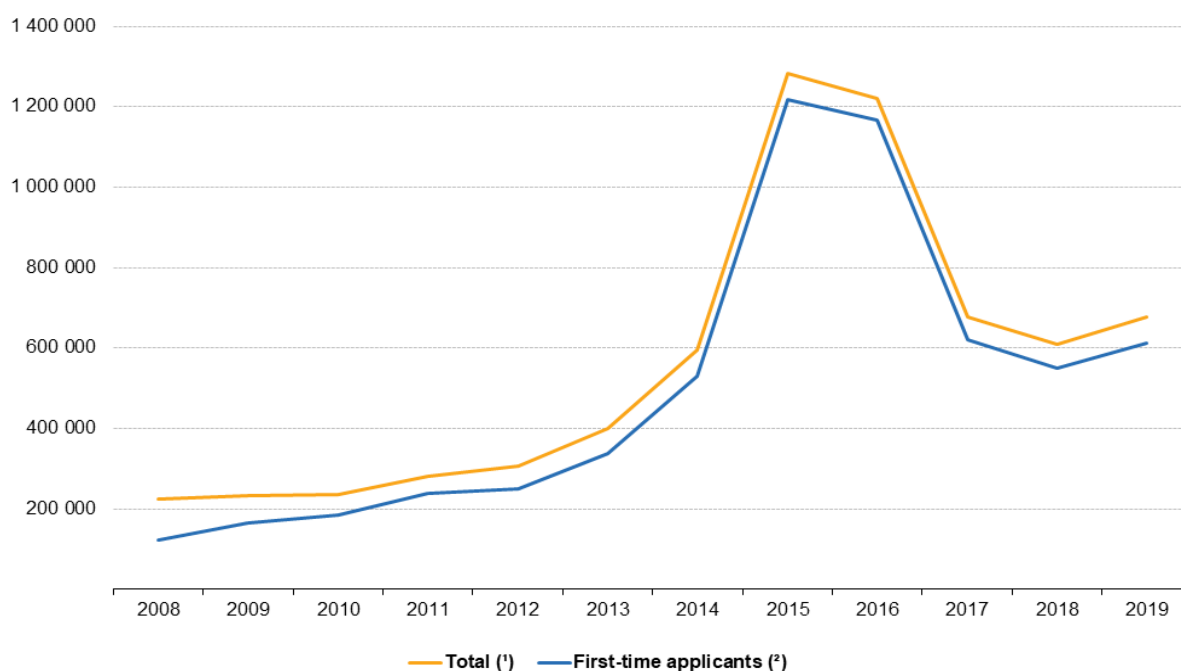
Source: Iref, Simcas project

## 2. Migrants' condition across Europe

### 2.1 The impact of the humanitarian crisis<sup>1</sup>

The issue of migrants and refugees has come back strongly in the public debate due to the humanitarian crisis with which Europe faced recently. We cannot ignore this preliminary observation if we want to explore the potential and the constraints of sport integration practices targeting people that move towards countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain, Germany, Denmark and Slovenia escaping from civil wars, famines and poverty in their homelands.

Fig. 1 – Number of asylum applicants (non-EU-27 citizens), EU-27, 2008-2019



(¹) 2008–2014: Croatia not available.

(²) 2008: Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Finland not available. 2009: Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Finland not available. 2010: Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Romania and Finland not available. 2011: Croatia, Hungary, Austria and Finland not available. 2012: Croatia, Hungary and Austria not available. 2013: Austria not available.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr\_asyappctza)

eurostat 

<sup>1</sup> We must be aware that terms such as ‘humanitarian crisis’ or ‘refugees exodus’ reflect the social construction of a phenomenon which, beyond the undeniable impact that migratory flows have in various European countries, it has been often exploited by political actors that tend to exaggerate adverse effects that the influx of new migrants would have in the areas of first and second arrival. This mechanism is by no means new, in many immigration countries various political actors have been relying on the “moral panic” and on most vulnerable citizens’ uncertainty. In this sense, the figure of the “foreigner” too often becomes the scapegoat guilty of the “ills of society”, first of all the status downgrading suffered by middle class EU citizens affected by the economic recessions that have taken place in recent years [Cohen, 2011]. We are also conscious that paying attention to the condition of refugees the risk is to lose sight of the more stable component of migration processes that date back decades in the history of receiving countries. In this sense, the present paper is more centered on the actuality of migrations in Europe, although not infrequently the stakeholders who gave voice to the research refer to the historical evolution of migratory flows in their countries.



Data in figure 1 show that the increase in asylum seekers was very marked between 2013 and 2015 within the EU-27 area; the input curve has grown sharply in that period: the number of refugees application rose from 400,500 in 2013, to 594,200 in 2014, reaching 1.3 million in 2015. In the short space of three years there was an upsurge of first-time applicants (+224%). After hitting their highest peak, arrivals of extra EU expats gradually dropped; in 2016 the volume levelled to 1.2 million, while descending sensibly in the following years: in 2017 there was a noticeable decrease in asylum seekers compared to 2016 (-44.5%), the trend continued albeit to a lesser extent in 2018. Last figures (2019) record a modest increase (+11.2%) compared to the previous year, in any case 676,300 asylum seekers applied for international protection in the EU, representing about half of the share of migrant entries registered in 2015.

Since 2013 the main refugee flows came from countries affected by dramatic war conflicts (Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq) or from nations like Venezuela, where political cleavages created by the neo-Bolivarian Chavist regime has brought society to the brink of economic collapse. The main destinations where asylum seekers tended to establish themselves have been Germany, France, Scandinavian countries and Spain, for economic and cultural reasons (especially in the latter case<sup>2</sup>). While Italy and Greece are confirmed as initial reception areas, hosting migrants from the Mediterranean and Syria respectively, that generally move later in Northern Europe.

The critical point is that this humanitarian exodus has coincided with the economic crisis experienced in the last decade, particularly by middle and lower classes in the whole “old continent”. Although with different severity in diverse member states, three negative economic cycles deteriorated standard of living in the EU over the past decade: after those of 2008-2009 (subprime mortgage crash in the United States) and 2012-2013 (sovereign debts in Europe), the coming of a business paralysis resulting from the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic concluded a troubled period in which the signs of the Western liberal order twilight are becoming progressively evident [Luce, 2017]. To suffer the most from the social consequences of the persistent downturn in global economy (loss of jobs, lack of growth, relative poverty rate expansion, etc.) it was precisely the middle class and citizens placed at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. That is the major part of the population living in Europe, while considering differences existing in EU member states<sup>3</sup>. The combination

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<sup>2</sup> In troubled times, Spain has been conventionally considered a European gateway by migrants coming from Latin America (i.e. the exodus of Argentines at the beginning of the 2000s). Linguistic affinities (Spanish is the official language in many Latin American countries) and the large presence of citizens of Spanish origin living in South America explain the attractiveness of the Iberian nation for Latin American citizens who leave their nations, as it happened for Venezuelans in recent years.

<sup>3</sup> The shutdown of business activities caused by the pandemic could strengthen (or precipitate) a trend in world economy which has gradually appeared in the last thirty years: India and China and other emerging nations are progressively reducing the gap in wealth with Europe and the United States. This scenario will have two principal consequences, as argued recently by economist Branko Milanovic: “if the economic decline is severest, as it appears now, in the United States and Europe, the gap between large Asian countries and the rich world would be reduced [...] This would have the following two effects. First, geopolitically, the shift of the center of gravity of economic activity will continue to move towards Asia [...] Second, the decline in real incomes of Western populations will come exactly at the time when Western economies were exiting the period of economic



between the humanitarian and economic crisis has somehow changed public opinion attitudes towards migrations and multicultural policies. It is no coincidence that in the last ten years across Europe there has been a growth in support for neo-populist and sovereigntist parties.

According to the Oxford University political scientist Jan Zielonka, the management of the recent migratory flows in Europe was at least controversial and for many aspects disruptive; closing borders policies are both an ineffective and illiberal reaction to complex social dynamics that should necessarily be addressed with a more pragmatic strategy by the EU leaders in the near future.

It looks as though Europe will face refugee flows for many years to come. The prospect that wars and misery in North Africa and the Middle East will end soon are nil. Even the enormous death toll in the Mediterranean Sea failed to deter people fleeing their troubled countries. The deal with Turkey is fragile, and so is the one with Libyan leaders. Hastily erected walls and wire fences at different locations in Europe have few practical consequences. European governments are in vain trying to find some common ground to cope with refugees. Their policies are progressively illiberal and they are not effective. In some countries xenophobic mobs have attacked refugees and burned down the facilities of humanitarian NGOs helping refugees. In most countries electorates have begun to endorse counter-revolutionary parties campaigning with anti-refugee slogans [Zielonka 2018: 91].

Building walls or fences is certainly not the right solution to cope with the multitude of human beings who ask for protection by knocking at the doors of affluent European democracies, which claim to be liberal and socially inclusive, but risk to become inhospitable with boat-people or land expatriates who escape from death and hardship; the problem is that in most EU member states neo-populist and sovereigntist parties are gaining momentum relying on the sense of insecurity of the majority of European citizens, who in the past years have suffered a decline in their social status. As Ronald Inglehart pointed out, analyzing long-term trends of the World Value Survey, an "authoritarian reflex" and identity closure seems to materialize in high-income countries (such as European democracies) due to the anxiety experienced by the voting majorities.

In recent decades, much of the population of high-income countries has experienced declining real income, declining job security and rising income inequality, bringing growing existential insecurity. This has happened in context with a massive influx of immigrants and refugees. [There is – A/N] evidence from many sources indicating that insecurity triggers an authoritarian reflex linked with in-group conformity and xenophobia. Additional recent survey data confirms that xenophobia increases in times of insecurity [Inglehart, 2018: 185-186].

It is noteworthy that the author raising an alarm for this cultural backlash (in-group conformity and xenophobia – i.e. rejection against foreigners or outsiders) is the social theorist who announced in the seventies a *silent revolution* of postmaterialist values in Western societies: pacifism, ecologism, multiculturalism, libertarianism, etc. [Inglehart, 1977]. Nowadays a turning point seems to be taking place in the so-called advanced democracies, boosted by diverse factors operating in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In any case, Inglehart's thesis is not isolated. Yascha Mounk, a brilliant young intellectual, evoked the specter of a reactionary politics, fueled by growing social inequalities and disaffection towards

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austerity and low growth, and one could expect that the lack of middle class growth that characterized these countries since the financial crisis would come to an end" [Milanovic, 2020: 2].



democratic institutions, conquering the scene both in Europe and in the United States of America [Mounk, 2018].

## 2.2 The situation in first arrival countries

While not falling within the scope of our survey, we cannot underestimate the change in social climate occurring in Europe on the crucial issue of migration, mostly because it is one of the main topics that has created political disputes between EU member states in the last years. This is furthermore the framework influencing the work of professionals and scholars who deal with inclusive basic sport programs. Stakeholders interviewed in our research are indeed aware of the “new wind” that blows in the countries in which they carry out projects targeting migrants and refugees.

Vassilis Kalyvas, head of educational programs in the Hellenic Paralympic Committee, has a clear vision of what has happened in the Greek society in the last five years confronting with the influx of refugees coming from Syria and the Middle East, who pass from the Turkish coasts and arrive in the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Cos.

The massive entrance of refugees due to the Middle East war (in 2015 in Greece we had about one million refugees passing through our country and moving forward to Europe) was a big shock for our society and as Paralympic Committee we decided that we could use our know-how with disabled citizens also to help refugees with disabilities coming in Greece [...] Since that time there have been many ups and downs about the situation of refugees in terms of policies, of people’s attitudes and of number of entrances. The first reaction of the Greek society in the face of these massive migrations I would say it was humanitarian; although our nation was experiencing a big economic crisis from 2009, nevertheless Greeks were quite friendly with refugees. At the beginning there were mostly positive reactions, compassionate and helpful; at that time Greece was just a pass towards other European countries for migrants coming from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq: refugees were coming massively in our nation but were also allowed to move rapidly in other EU member states. After that we had a chain reaction that started predominantly from European countries in the North: they began to close the borders and Greece stopped to be a passing path for refugees to go in other countries of the EU. Our nation became a kind of a trap for these migrants; from that moment, it took much more time in order to circulate in the EU. Refugees kept coming in Greece, maybe because in Syria or Turkey they did not know that Northern European countries were closing their borders. So they started to accumulate in our country and this changed the situation. As I said before our society already faced financial problems and refugees started suddenly to increase a lot. This was a turning point, because the closing of the borders in Northern Europe, caused a chain reaction in people’s responses in Greece too. After that we had a lot of help from international agencies, like EU, UNCHR, International Organization for Migration (IOM) but it wasn’t enough because the logistic and organization of structure to absorb the refugees’ population is more complicated. To sum up we have currently a mixed situation concerning refugees: we have some Hellenic communities and people that really welcome refugees and are willing to integrate them in our nation, they support them and things go fine; but unfortunately what goes on the news are certain cases where local population reacts negatively when refugees move in their areas in order to settle down, and so they are not well included in communities. The public image of what is going on in Greece is not fair, but the reality is that we have both attitudes: solidarity and aversion towards refugees. [Vassilis Kalyvas, interview, 20-07-2020].

One million of expatriates passing the borders with Turkey created indeed a big shock but not intolerance in the Hellenic society, at least at the beginning, in the two-year period that

goes from 2015 to 2016. Later however, following the closure of borders adopted by northern Europe countries, Greece, already struggling with considerable economic problems (think of the Troika and the impact of austerity policies [Matsaganis, Leventi, 2014; Kaplanoglou, Rapanos, 2015]), has turned into a “trap” for the mass of migrants who required political asylum or protection. At that point, when the refugees couldn’t move anymore to the wealthier states of the Union, the issue of their stay in Greece began to split a nation that had previously shown itself to be friendly and humanitarian with newcomers from Syria or from other parts of the Middle East. As remarked by Kalyvas, Greeks are currently divided between being in solidarity or rejecting the mass of human beings who cross the borders with Turkey to seek a better future in Europe.

A quite similar point of view is the one expressed by Alex Canals, who have been working for three years in Greece with the Barça Foundation, managing social inclusion programs for refugees and other disadvantaged groups. The interviewee explains that when he evaluates the refugees’ condition in the Hellenic country he is expressing personal opinions and is not speaking on behalf of the organization in which he works.

Things have changed from when I came to work in Greece; there are always been a positive attitude towards migrant in a nation where the local population itself used to emigrate in other countries for economic reasons. Greeks are very humble people who have been traditionally generous with migrants who come from other countries, as it was in the past with the Albanians and partly today with the Syrians or the Afghans. On the other hand, things have changed with the economic crisis, racism and right-wing parties started to increase support from people and so messages of fear were spread around the country. Nowadays, since November 2019, the situation has changed a lot, mainly in the Island, that are suffering because tourism is decreasing, and many business activities were closing. So, it was very easy to claim against refugees who were arriving in those islands from the Turkish coast, remaining for long time in refugee camps. Maybe in the center of Athens you don’t see much intolerance against refugees, there is sometimes a closure but not like in the islands. For instance, last December in Lesbos there were riots against refugees and NGOs working with them. And after the Coronavirus these uprisings stopped for the quarantine, but now that lockdown is ending, we are afraid that is going to happen again [...] Also with the coming of the new center-right government rules have been restricted for refugees, for example refugees with accepted asylum procedures cannot stay anymore in camps, that means that they don’t have a place where to live and be protected. In terms of integration there is a big lack, there is not a social inclusion system for refugees, this is my opinion. Many of the integration procedures are promoted by NGOs [Alex Canals, interview, 29-06-2020].

Certainly, the outbreak of riots against refugee camps in the Islands and the restrictive laws approved by the center-right government led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis since July 2019, are of concern. Once again, migrants are blamed for the economic decline, especially suffered by touristic areas, and policy makers approve draconian measures that make life even more complicated for people, such as refugees, who are already vulnerable. In a social context which is becoming unfavorable for them, newcomers from Syria or other Middle east and Sub-Saharan countries commonly do not have the opportunity to integrate into the local community, encountering almost insurmountable barriers when applying for residence and work permits. Without these legal titles they cannot find a decent job and access to social benefits and health services. Migrants thus remain socially isolated. Persisting this situation, it could be almost by definition precluded a way to integrate them into Greek society,

especially if they are not able to move to Athens, were life chances seem to be better than in the islands or hinterland.

The main problem of refugees (and of their families) here is to get the residence and work permission in order to have access to social benefits and health services. They don't have the documents to get the resident permit, so they live apart. In theory they should have the right to receive help and protection, but in practice they don't have papers to have access to the Hellenic welfare services. The principal issue experienced by refugees is that they don't have documents to obtain a regular work, so they have bad salaries and are exploited by persons that hire them. Maybe here in Greece there isn't a very good system to promote refugees and migrant integration. It is very difficult for them to find information and to frequent Greek language free courses. So they live isolated in refugee camps not having interaction within the local communities. If they arrive to Athens maybe they have more opportunities to find a job and integrate themselves in the Greek society. But many of them do not manage to reach the capital and therefore they live in a hard condition. Many refugees are from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and to a lesser extent people escaping from Sub Saharan countries, who live segregated principally in Greek islands camps [Alex Canals, interview, 29-06-2020].

According to Thomas Farines, former Educator and Consultant of *Terre des Hommes Hellas* and currently Executive Director of *Futbol Mas* in Haiti, the struggle to obtain better economic opportunities is a crucial issue both for migrants and less privileged Greek groups.

After three years I spent in the northern part of Greece, I feel that the efforts to integrate refugees and migrants are quite rare and low. There is a problem for Syrians and Iraqis to learn the Greek language, although the culture is very similar to their homeland, as plenty of refugees told me. There is also a problem of lack of opportunities for people, both national and migrants. For instance, there is some kind of animosity against international NGOs working in refugee camps, because they don't hire locals preferring to involve international workers. But how can locals sustain inclusive projects if they perceive that they are excluded from these activities? In Greece they suffer for a bad economic situation, there have been riots by local populations to claim jobs in inclusive program targeted to refugees [...] Is quite interesting to note that the struggle to better the social conditions is similar for vulnerable Greeks people and migrants, this is quite a unique situation in Europe. Besides this aspect, there is the fact that refugee camps have been settled in isolated places, in already segregated communities, like Salonicco, where other disadvantaged groups were already present (Roma, Bulgarians, Albanians). It is very difficult to include refugees into excluded communities. In the village where I used to live, near Salonicco, a Greek citizen working in a coffee shop used to have a daily salary of 18 euros for 10 hours of work, which is 1.8 euros for an hour. How do you expect that a refugee will have a chance to improve in a similar context? The problem is that politician and the media create fake news saying that huge lot of funding goes to refugees with international aid programs. The average economic assistance received by migrants was around 150 euros per month, who can live decently with that amount of money? [Thomas Farines, interview, 2-07-2020].

It is extremely problematic to think about social inclusion of migrants in a country where there are depressed and poor areas in which Greek workers themselves are underpaid and strive to make it to the end of the month with their scarce wages: the places where generally refugee camps are displaced, in an attempt to keep social exclusion separated from the most developed areas of the nation, such as large cities, as far as possible<sup>4</sup>. In those segregated

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<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the isolation of marginalized groups (like refugees) is linked to a Nimby syndrome (an acronym created by social scientists that stands for the phrase "not in my back yard"), a form of social distancing



communities, like the hinterland of Salonico, newcomers interact (in the best cases) only with other social deprived migrants who arrived before them (Bulgarians, Albanians, Roma) or with nationals who are poor too. In these harsh situations the possibility of undertaking ascending social mobility paths is truly remote, both for Greeks and for people who come from other countries with the dream of improving their existence. Part of the issue is that, after the closure of the Balkan route, in the north, Greek politicians felt abandoned by Europe and maybe this is one of the reasons why «there is no plan in helping refugees by the new national government, although in some cities, like Salonico, some efforts are made to improve the inclusion of migrants, but accommodations programs for refugees are different in each local context» [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

Moving to another European Mediterranean country which hosts large flows of migrants such as Spain, it is interesting to have a look at the picture drawn by Ester Busquets, the Welfare and Education Counselor of Banyoles, a municipality of more or less 20,000 inhabitants located in the autonomous community of Catalonia, in the province of Girona.

In general terms, it is true that we have the immigrant community in the country that is normally living in a more disadvantaged socio-economic situation than the rest. With a certain job insecurity, with difficulties in accessing the employment environment, due to a legal issue in the papers, being unable to have residence or work permits. We're not just talking about adult men; we're talking about women and children. This places them in certain neighborhoods outside the city center and this causes, at the country level, a certain marginality. If we go further into the local area, we must consider that Banyoles has a population of 19,826 inhabitants. With different urban blocks in the city, but three of them marked by a high rate of migrant population, of origin or of second-generation kids. These are characterized by an urban planning that makes its situation even more degrading, with overcrowding in some of the flats and that makes coexistence difficult [Ester Busquets, interview, 16-07-2020].

As this city welfare consultant puts it, both nationally and locally, migrants experience a relative disadvantage compared to the rest of the Spanish populations. Diverse factors create this marginality: principally, job insecurity due to legal issues caused by the absence of residence permits. Coping with difficulties, immigrants are pushed into slums, where housing is overcrowded for large families and life is not easy, as ordinarily happens in three areas of Banyoles. However, it is not just a problem of economic weakness, there is also a matter of cultural coexistence, especially for migrant's sons who encounter many difficulties in their transition to adult life.

There is a problem of coexistence very related to cultural features, they are young people or children who live a lot on the street [...] when they start to get older we do have a serious frustration problem. They are young people who grow up with boys and girls from Banyoles; we have two very different realities in the city - people with a medium-high socio-economic level and then they [the sons of migrants – A/N] , who have a rather lower socio-economic level and, growing together with Spanish peers [...] what this causes is that when they reach adolescence, an already complicated stage in itself, the differences are increasingly evident and especially with material

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that local communities invoke between themselves and stigmatized groups, trying to place them in the most remote suburbs from their place of residence. However strong this form of social repulsion is, the dilemma is that in every society there is always a more remote yard from which to expel unwanted people.



resources. Then, those children who have grown up in a completely different cultural and socio-economic situation do not understand why there are these differences and this translates into an inner discomfort of these young immigrants (or second generation), resulting in some conflicts on the street [Ester Busquets, interview, 16-07-2020].

It can be particularly penalizing to attend the same schools as your Spanish peers knowing that, having been born in a family with a different cultural background, you will have less chance of being fulfilled in life. This very often creates a sense of frustration and psychological distress in the descendants of migrants. It is not easy to accept that there are fewer material resources available just because one's parents come from a different country. These forms of social maladjustment do not emerge only in small provincial towns like Banyoles. Even in large metropolitan areas there are slums and second generations of migrants who encounter big problems to integrate in the local community. Sander Waare, deputy director of Cruyff Foundation, speaks on the basis of the experience he has gained in its organization, through social initiatives within disadvantaged neighborhoods promoted in many Iberian cities.

Spain is one of the countries that receives a lot of refugees and migrants. In the projects of our Foundation we are really focused on the situation of neighborhoods in cities. There are many migrants that need shelter and go to live in disadvantaged areas, living in critical conditions. Through our social program, making football courts and facilities in these underprivileged areas, we try to make lighter the situation of many child and young people with a refugee or migrant background [Sander Waare, interview, 09-07-2020].

As we can see, in every country and local community there are obstacles in the path of social inclusion of migrants and their families. Shifting the focus on Italy, another primary destination of migratory flows, it may be useful to start from the considerations of Nicola Porro, retired professor of Sociology at the University of Cassino. The historical parallel that the scholar establishes between past Italian emigration and contemporary immigration entering in his country is truly instructive.

My approach is that of historical sociology or social history [...] I am referring to the periods in which the socio-demographic situation was reversed, that is, between the beginning of the twentieth century and the period immediately after the second world war, when something like ten millions of Italians left their homeland for abroad in search of better economic opportunities. In our research we have isolated some exemplary cases, especially of Italian migrations to America. To understand migratory flows it may be useful to take up the classic distinction made by the American scholar Robert Putnam: bonding is everything that strengthens the belonging to one's own group, while bridging is what favors communication with what is different from one's own cultural identity, other languages, other uses and customs. If we look at what happened in the past with the Italian emigration to countries such as Canada, US, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, where it has assumed the dimension of a mass phenomenon, we see the contribution of this migratory drive to the construction of the national identity of these countries, from a relevant social and economic position, particularly in Latin America, while this advancement has been more problematic in the US. Regardless of the different features of Italian emigration in diverse countries and areas, we can identify some distinctive elements in this historicized phenomenon that can help us to read the current migratory flows which, in reverse parts, concern national groups arriving in Italy [...] In a society like the North American one, whose core values are individual achievement, Italians have adapted to the cultural mainstream, even in sport. This led to integration through the channels that guaranteed success, Italian migrants assimilated into the American reality, with a bridging dynamics. In the Argentinian case, on the other hand, in large cities such as Buenos Aires in Rosario, the Italian communities gave life to collective forms of group

integration through bonding strategies, with a relevant network of Italian associations. All of them together, as Italian emigrants, wanted to achieve success, to make the climb in Argentine society. In this country, a dense fabric of community association initiatives was created, partly linked to the parishes, with a strong value in terms of social integration of migrants. A sort of welfare network was activated (Italian schools, multi-sports activities, etc.) that supported migrants in their integration into the host society, preserving the identity matrix of their Italian origin. Emigrants created through their own community network tools for social promotion in the context in which they had settled. These were two different dynamics of integration, beyond the concrete cases that did not allow themselves to be reduced to this schematism, [...] The composition of the migratory flows arriving in Italy and in other EU countries today is so varied as to make any generalization reductive of the complexity of a phenomenon which is by its very nature articulated. Given this premise, however, it can be said that today globalization has operated as a sort of iron on the folds of the cultures to which migrants belong, partly smoothing out the differences in host societies. This is true for sport as well as for other traditional social practices related to one's ethnic or national identity. I recently saw a film *The Miserable*, set in a banlieue. At the beginning there is a long scene where you can see what happens in disadvantaged neighborhoods in the day France wins the soccer world cup. It is impressive the mass of boys of African origin (sub-Saharan Africa and Maghreb) taking to the streets wearing the French national team shirt, while flaunting the tricolor and singing the Marseillaise to celebrate the victory. These images are powerful because then the story unfolds instead in a series of events linked to ethnic or cultural prejudice, in which even the police indulge in oppressive behavior. What is striking is how ethnic minorities find not only forms of communication with the majority of the population that hosts them, in a nation where the migratory phenomenon takes on proportions not remotely comparable to what happens in Italy - in some French cities the population of non-French origin reaches one third. In Italy, the incidence of the phenomenon is such [of minor impact – A/N] as to make some anti-immigration campaigns at least quixotic. I don't judge them from an ethical point of view. What I can add is that opposing today the new migrations arriving in Italy or in Europe is extremely provincial, because it is a return phenomenon of an epochal transformation such as globalization. Beyond the ethnic and social frictions that are observed everywhere in Europe and beyond, it can be said that currently there are collective practices such as football that erase cultural differences, as shown by the Senegalese children who in the banlieue wave the French flag after victory at the world cup. This is because football has become a language of global competition, which is not the case for other sports and social practices such as cricket or rugby. If, on the other hand, we shift the discourse on pro-active policies for integration we must answer to following question: how much the bridging dimension must be favored? To stay in the football example: you come to Italy, go play in an important sports club and become a famous footballer, so people will forget the color of your skin. This is a somewhat brutal model of individual social promotion, with which Italians in the US integrated themselves between the two wars of the last century; or vice versa, what is the strategy that reinforces the identity of the minority group and preserves it, this is always a double-edged sword because the identity protection of an ethnic group can operate in an exclusionist sense. I can emphasize my particular cultural identity (bonding) or dissolve into the larger identity of the country I emigrated to and individually elbow out for the resources to improve my social standing (bridging). [Nicola Porro, interview, 09-07-2020].

In Porro's long reflection we can identify many interesting interpretations for our analysis, which may be valid for Italy, as well as for other EU countries. The sociologist urges us to think about the multiple dimensions involved in past and present migratory phenomena. In assessing the social condition of migrants, it is necessary to focus not only on their economic status, but also on socio-cultural dynamics that come into play when they enter the host society. From this point of view, the conceptual distinction between bridging and bonding processes, formulated at the time by political scientist Robert Putnam [2000], remains valid,



for past Italian emigrations and nowadays fluxes proceeding in the opposite direction towards Italy. People's social capital is formed in different ways: on the one hand, newcomers can bridge themselves in the cultural mainstream of the nation in which they move, focusing on individual achievement in order to improve their social standing; on the other hand, they can bond to their peculiar group identity, trying to find collective resources in communitarian informal networks activated by their compatriots in the country of arrival. It is important to underline that the two logics of social inclusion are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as is evident in the examples cited by Porro: Senegalese children who wave the French flag in the day of victory of the World Cup and spend the rest of their time in the banlieue, where their cultural heritage has absolutely not disappeared. Both in the daily experience of refugees and migrants and in social and political interventions aimed at their integration, bonding and bridging strategies can coexist, passing from the micro to the macro social level. The point is that, as noted above looking at the situation in Greece and Spain, today's socio-political climate is not particularly constructive regarding the controversial issues of migration. When alarmism and self-preservative reflexes dominate the public debate, it is difficult to go into the merits of the problems, grasping the complexity and nuances of social and cultural processes. In a time where sovereign propaganda is widespread, rigid reasoning of cause and effect tend to prevail, and migrants are transformed into scapegoats, being identified as the origin of entire nations' decline. In any case, we live in complex societies, where large social strata of the population are not at all persuaded by the neo-populist propaganda and are more open to pragmatic arguments who make necessary distinctions on what works and what doesn't work in integration policies. Another element must be added to complete the analysis so far developed. In any society, individuals and groups are not completely hetero-directed by social structures, but neither are they completely free to pursue their personal goals. Social scientists use the concept of agency to express the fact that all human conduct is partly constrained and partly autonomous with respect to the social context in which subjects act [Giddens, 1984]. This notion is very relevant when talking about refugees' and migrants' daily life, swinging between the possibility of self-determination and impediments determined by numerous social factors that preclude freedom of action (institutional constraint, inequality, discrimination, etc.).

Bearing in mind this historical and conceptual framework, it may now be useful to look at the current evolution of migration issues in Italy. Marco Critelli, trainer in a sport center, working in inclusion projects for migrant minors and adults in disadvantaged neighborhoods and prisons in the city of Turin, knows well the difficulties experienced by these people. He is quite direct in identifying the elements that make the integration of migrants tricky.

At this moment I cannot understand the true political line that Italy wants to adopt towards migratory phenomena, in the sense that on the one hand we welcome refugees and on the other it seems that we no longer want to welcome them. This creates a short circuit between a mechanism fueled by politicians willing to amplify the hate against migrants in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to their country in Italian citizens. On the other hand, due to the history of our peninsula, we are inevitably an attractive pole of many other nationalities. If we look at the situation of other European countries (and not only) there is no longer a monolithic national identity, there is always a country and a heterogeneity of cultures and ethnic components, perhaps in different percentages, but not only the Italians in Italy or the French in France. So it makes sense that a system of rules is structured that draws a path through which a person moving from his/her

home country can build the conditions for a decent life in the host country. Support for migrants and refugees is not to give them an economic subsidy, but to identify a clear path of integration into our society. It is not a question of giving migrants the means to survive but the tools to include themselves in Italy, finding a job or training for a new profession. I know people who came here in Italy twenty years ago and now run restaurants or businesses on their own. They had the education and dedication to work to create a better future for themselves, but the conditions in the context also helped them. No one is born a delinquent, the problem is that in recent years in Italy the message passes that the offender is a foreigner. There is a need to create a transversal system of labor and tax policies that helps everyone, migrants and Italians, to improve their living conditions [Marco Critelli, interview, 02-07-2020].

On the one hand, there are some social and political actors that are getting the message across Italian society that refugees are a threat for internal security, fueling feelings of fear and ostracism towards migrants to reinvigorate a misunderstood sense of national identity [Armillei, 2017]; on the other hand, there is the reality of a country that by location and history is a crossroads attracting different nationalities and cultures. Failure to recognize the fact that Italy is the "crux of the Mediterranean", barricading itself behind sovereign discourses, creates a contradiction in terms: migrants are refused while we continue to host them in our society. This increases confusion, there is not at the moment a clear political line on how to handle the migratory phenomena. To overcome this critical situation, an integrated system of policies should be arranged to facilitate the social integration of people coming in our country to improve their life chances: not a welfare system based on economic subsidies, which help to survive but not to build the conditions for individual emancipation; rather, proactive policies focused on vocational training and fiscal incentives for business start-up.

Critelli's arguments are not new, for years we have been hearing repeated that facing with immigration Italy should move from emergency to a more defined reception model, defining an integration path (rules and opportunities) that a foreign citizen could follow if he wants to settle in our nation. This means that, beyond political proclamations, still many steps are to be made to manage migratory dynamics with pragmatism and rationality, even though for forty years now refugees and migrants move towards Italian coasts and borders.

In a similar vein Mariangela Perito, psychologist and deputy president of Acli in Avellino, a medium size city in Campania, a region in Southern Italy, portrays a gloomy picture regarding migration.

The situation is not so easy. Until 2019 there were many special reception centers, refugees and migrants were allocated in these temporary reception facilities awaiting residence permits and then transferred to the Sprar<sup>5</sup>. With the various laws passed since that time by the national government, these former centers were closed, many migrants were thus moved to the Sprar, but many others who did not yet have permits remained in the Italian territory without documents. Currently, even here in the Irpinia area, there are many "invisible migrants", who do occasional jobs, pay for a rented house [often *in black* with cash money – A/N], immediately facing further difficulties due to the spread of Coronavirus. These migrants and refugees have organized themselves in the absence of immigration services that are lacking where they live. Even with regard to the recognition of residence permits, the regulations are not very clear, for example in many cases the residence permit is not issued by the police headquarters to obtain a benefit such as a housing and this creates even more confusion. The situation is therefore not positive, despite

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<sup>5</sup> Sprar stands for Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees).



the fact that there are fewer migrants in Italy than in other European countries, especially in the southern regions [...] The situation has also worsened in terms of the perception of the migratory phenomenon by Italian citizens; even before the Coronavirus crisis, foreigners were seen as those who took away work from Italians, now their image has further deteriorated in the eyes of public opinion. However, as is also the case here in the internal areas of Irpinia, if opportunities for acquaintance are created between Italians and immigrants, processes can be triggered that break down these prejudices. I am not saying that here there is no intolerance or discrimination, perhaps there is in a veiled form, but there are also realities and initiatives that help overcome this mistrust [Mariangela Perito, interview, 06-07-020].

The closure of special reception centers (Cas - Centri di accoglienza straordinaria) has considerably complicated the management of incoming flows, increasing the number of "invisible migrants" who stay illegally in the Italian territory, also due to bureaucratic problems linked to the issue of the residence permit. Although in the less developed southern regions there are fewer migrants and refugees (because there are scarcer opportunities to find regular jobs compared to northern industrialized regions), not rarely the presence of illegal immigrants has exacerbated the local population, severely tested by the economic crisis, fomenting xenophobia and negative prejudices (first of all the belief that foreigners take work away from nationals). Intolerance can nonetheless be surmounted by promoting acquaintanceship between Italians and migrants, as Perito states, thinking about initiatives implemented by her association and by other third sector bodies operating within Avellino.

### 2.3 Developments in final destination areas

So far we have concentrated on European Mediterranean countries, considered by migrants and refugees as areas of first arrival (especially Greece and Italy) waiting to move towards northern European countries, where displaced people believe they can find better economic and social opportunities. In this sense, it is appropriate to analyze what is taking place in nations that in the intentions of those who have a migratory project represent definitive destinations where to settle. When the refugee question is mentioned, it is almost spontaneous to refer to the German case. In fact, Angela Merkel's choice to open the doors in 2015 to Syrian expatriates, in the midst of the civil war that shook this Middle Eastern country, has remained engraved in the European collective conscience, in a juncture torn by bitter divisions between EU member states as to who should welcome the exodus of desperate people who crowded on the Turkish border. Estimates of asylum seekers entries in Germany are around 890,000 for 2015, while in 2016 the figure was just under 750,000. At the end of the latter period, the expenditure for the reception of these flows was about twenty billion euros, as claimed by the then vice-president of the European parliament Johannes Singhammer, in an interview with *Die Welt* newspaper<sup>6</sup>. It is not part of the objectives of this research to quantify the economic impact of that humanitarian act; rather, we are interested in understanding its social effects, in particular assessing the situation of migrants in Deutschland today, five years after the German chancellor decision to accept the multitude of Syrian exiles. Tina Nobis, teaching *Sport, Integration and Migration* at the Humboldt University

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<sup>6</sup> Reported in Shady Hamadi, *Così la Germania trasforma i rifugiati in risorsa*, article in «Il Fatto Quotidiano», 21th September 2017.



of Berlin tends to debunk the quantitative impact of arrivals from Syria in 2015, remembering that the numbers of this migration wave are really limited when compared with the refugees arriving in Germany immediately after the Second World War. Despite this, everyone rushed to talk about the humanitarian crisis, as if Germany was about to be invaded by a mass of exiles. Which indicates that a part of the society was worried about receiving this flow of expatriates from the Middle East.

After the summer of 2015 a lot of people were talking about refugees coming to Germany. They were talking about enormous numbers and they were talking about a crisis. But if you compare the number of refugees coming to Germany at that time to numbers of refugees that moved to our country immediately after war world II it is like a really small influx [Tina Nobis, interview, 04-08-2020].

For the scholar, with a profound knowledge of inclusive processes activated through sport, deconstructing the idea of a Syrian mass exodus obviously does not mean denying what occurred five years ago, but simply bearing in mind that Germany itself is a multi-ethnic country, with 25 percent of the population having a “migration background”: i.e. either they don’t have German citizenship or they weren’t born in Germany or their parents are from another country. The definition is complicated but allows to grasp the manifold components of migratory processes, which are articulated and socially stratified, in a country where the flows of migrants and refugees has its roots in the post-war reconstruction of democracy. For Nobis, we must also be careful not to reify cultural differences, as she remarked in another passage of the interview: even the second and third generations of Kurds who arrived in Germany in the 1970s or 1980s are now fully integrated in the German society. Without forgetting the entry of young people with citizenship from other EU countries (Denmark, Italy, France, etc.) who go to live in Berlin, having a high level of education and considerable career prospects. The fact remains that when it comes to refugees from the Middle East, who have recently arrived in Berlin or in other German cities, the lack of opportunities and social discomfort are two factors to be taken seriously.

Some refugees of course are struggling with the labour market, despite that studies show that some of them are highly educated. Finding a job can be difficult. Housing can also be a concern for refugees. We should also consider that refugees who are living in our country might have suffered traumatic experiences [Tina Nobis, interview, 04-08-2020].

Hence, it is not so comfortable for a refugee to solve most pressing issues (work, training, housing, health) in order to get included in the German society. The difficulties experienced by these migrants push us to examine how integration policies work in Deutschland, looking above all at what is happening at the local level. Friederike Möller Bhering, project manager of Benn<sup>7</sup>, a program in Berlin addressing this particular group of the migrant population, dissects the subject with a wealth of details, drawing on her work experience. The municipal official describes how policies and services targeted to refugees are organized in the city.

In Berlin (as well as in other areas of Germany) we don’t have ghettos or refugees camps as it happens in Greece or in other EU landing countries, we have refugees shelters: when people come

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<sup>7</sup> Benn stands for “Berlin develops new neighborhoods”, in English.



finally to Germany they get a home inside big houses where refugees live together. There is a program called Benn, financed by the Senate of Berlin, in which I am working; we are involved in areas in which there is at least one refugee shelter, we from the administration, together with social workers, focus on the Shelter and the neighborhood around and create programs by which people can meet and do stuff together, carrying out sport and other activities like training. Sport is an important tool to foster social inclusion, but very often it is not a priority for refugees, because they suffer to find a job, an own flat and to gain a good German language level. All leisure activities are very low in the interest scale of these migrants. The whole system of welfare policies aimed at migrants and refugees works quite well here in Germany. Of course, administration procedures are often slow in giving money to private or nonprofit organizations that apply to manage refugees' shelters, and even expense reporting procedures can be overwhelming for small organizations that don't have dedicated staff to carry out these activities. There is also a problem due to the fact that different integration program funding are bounded to different government departments, adopting slightly different rules, hence applying organization must always have a look at the requirements they are asked to fulfill when signing contracts for different programs. This can create work overload for organizations that are already busy in giving support and training refugees. And then if you think about refugees, who in most cases don't know perfectly the German language, these complex procedures (that are difficult to understand for Germans too) can become really unachievable, making the access process really tough for program beneficiaries [Friederike Möller Bhering, interview, 27-07-2020].

The strength of the German refugee reception system therefore seems to be based on shelters: tenements assigned to migrants (not huge and segregating camps as in Greece or Italy) located throughout the territory, where efforts are made by social workers and municipal officers to promote the inclusion of migrants in cities, through training and other socializing activities as sport, in order to foster their integration in neighborhoods. This system seems to work quite well, entrusting the management of inclusion activities to private or nonprofit organizations. However, delays and bureaucratic inconsistencies can make life difficult for those who work to carry out these inclusive programs and for the beneficiaries themselves, who, not knowing German well, feel confused by often abstruse and disjointed rules.

A different kind of perspective is the one brought by Mohammed El Ouahhabi, sport-integration-coach, working for the Local Sport Council of Berlin, involved in the project *Colorful Sport*. Mohammed is originally from Morocco, he has been living in Germany for the past three and a half years, initially he was making an internship in the Bundestag, then he decided he no longer wanted to be involved in politics and switched to the sport sector. He has previously working with refugees in sport, especially with people coming from Sub-Saharan countries, who see Morocco as a gateway to move towards Europe. He acknowledges that the German refugee integration system is progressive compared to that of other Northern European countries (such as Belgium, where the respondent lived before arriving in Germany), mainly because an adequate level of economic resources is assigned to this policy. Despite this, the refugees find several barriers in the German society.

I have been around Europe before coming to Germany, staying for some time in Belgium. In my own experience in Deutschland there is a progressive context as far as the integration of refugees, because there are better economic resources here. In Berlin I am also contact person for refugee minors who are not accompanied by parents. There are lot of barriers for these migrants, and these barriers can be personal, legal, structural and cultural. For example, many refugees experience anxiety being deported from their country, they lived traumatic experience and they might be

depressed. Also, there is an issue of lack of participation and demotivation in sport, also because they are not involved in the decisions making process of these activities. From a legal perspective there is an issue that a lot of refugees don't have the chance to remain permanently in Germany: they are allowed to stay in Deutschland just because their country is not considered safe, as soon as the situation will return secure they could be sent back to their homeland. They could always receive a negative review of their asylum process. Therefore, they have a very unstable perspective to remain in this country, but they are still in Germany. There is a lot of pressure from German political parties to integrate refugees through language courses and job centers to improve with capacities and skills. So, refugees don't have much time for leisure, and this is a problem for sport participation, and sometimes refugees don't know how sports club operate and about their structure (rules for training, summer break, etc.). One of the major barriers is the language: German is not easy, refugees get sometimes discouraged in learning it, also because they feel that their experience in Germany could end soon. And there is also in some cases a problem of racism and discrimination [Mohammed El Ouahhabi, interview, 07-08-2020].

The obstacles that refugees encounter into the German society are various: first of all, the fact of perceiving themselves as transitory guests in the country, given that political asylum could be denied if the conditions in the country of origin would change during they stay; but also psychological distress has a negative impact on socialization and inclusion activities in the new context: having suffered trauma in one's own nation and during the move towards Germany can lead to demotivation and depression. Another issue is that it is not easy to learn a difficult language like German and, consequently, to find a good job. Political parties put pressure for refugees to acquire the capabilities and skills to integrate. However, these legal, psychological and, in many cases, cultural barriers (Mohammed points out that there is also a problem of intolerance and racism) make the integration of migrants more complex than one would expect from a system of integration that is in many ways advanced, as the Moroccan sport-integration-coach reiterated in other parts of the interview, making comparisons with what happens in Belgium and France, where refugees face worse adaptation conditions in the host society. Certainly, in Germany these migrants find accommodation, health care and facilities due to the fact that the economic investment in social inclusion programs is high. But this does not guarantee that the result will be achieved, beyond the will of the political actors. There are subtle and diversified barriers that can hinder refugees' integration.

Another significant area where to look at migrants' conditions is Denmark. David Ekholm, senior lecturer at Norrköping University in Sweden, is a careful analyst of dynamics emerging in the Scandinavian context. In his words we can read the concern for a situation that has been worsening in the last years, in countries conventionally considered at the forefront of welfare and multicultural policies development<sup>8</sup>.

Even though from the Scandinavian point of view there have been a lot of migrants, specifically in Sweden last five years, if we make an international comparison we see that many migrants from the Middle East and Africa are still in that areas or in Southern Europe; so we discover that migration rates are not so high in Scandinavian countries in relative terms. The situation for

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<sup>8</sup> As Esping-Andersen argued in his seminal study on welfare regimes in western democracies, the social democratic model, rooted in Scandinavian countries, is the one that traditionally enhances person's ability to be independent, with the public provision of a wide range of social services, widespread equally in society. This model has closely been linked to a full employment strategy to cover through taxes the cost of tendentially universalistic social benefits. Welfare, hence, does not support only particular categories, but all citizens [Esping-Andersen, 1990]. Multiculturalism has also been very diffused in these nations, especially in Sweden.



migrants coming here, in particular in Sweden, has been changing the last few years, we had some more intense restrictions about migration, this is particularly the case for Denmark, but it has also been true for Sweden, nevertheless not as hard as in the Danish context. Of course, there is not a good economic situation for migrants in Scandinavia: there are housing facilities in some cities but there isn't a generous welfare for migrants. There is an increase of informal labor market occupation, it is difficult to attain a good job for newcomers, the diffusion of informal (illegal) work rises the extent of exploitation in informal executive and non-skilled activities reserved to migrants. Migration experts in Scandinavia highlight two main pressing issue for migrants: the first one is the difficult economic and financial situation, that includes limited participation to the labor market and scarce opportunities to make a career; the other is the temporality of the presence in the host country. The new and more restrictive regimes have placed a lot of conditions about permanent residencies here in Sweden, even harder in Denmark, so people are here only temporarily, they don't know if they can remain in Scandinavia two, three or five years. These creates a bad situation for migrants and refugees making it hard to integrate in our society. In general, we can still say that the attitudes towards migration and towards a pluralistic society model are positive and high in the Scandinavian countries, probably more in Sweden than Denmark. But in the last 25 years, particularly the last five, this social climate has been changing: the combination of increased migration and of decreasing welfare ambitions, together with the growth of social inequalities, are factors that influence public opinion. There has being, like in the rest of Europe, a rise in support for far-right wing parties, in Sweden for example there is a reformed Nazis' currently labelled nationalist and conservative party who raised votes and also some acceptance from other conservative right parties. This new social climate mirrors some transformations in attitudes towards cultural plurality and the so called "Swedishness": act and behave as a Sweden. That also influences how people view migrants that come in our country. There is a growing consensus for ideas such as migrants must "reform themselves" to become Swedish, they need to talk Swedish, act like Swedes. They shouldn't be Muslims anymore and stop wearing their traditional clothes. From my point of view this is a problematic situation because being Swedish or Scandinavian is not a feature historically fixed. In any case positive public attitudes towards a pluralistic society and migration are still predominant in Sweden and Norway, perhaps not as much in Denmark. For what concerns the political agenda, if at the national level there is agreement between social democrats and conservatives to limit the number of migrants entering in Scandinavia, the responsibility to promote migrant's and refugees' social integration has been shifted to local governments, who tried to address the issue in terms of education and labour market participation. These situations put pressure on local authorities, it becomes stressful for municipalities to deal with migrant employability, particularly in Sweden [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

Since the mid-nineties, with an acceleration in the last five years in Sweden, but even more in Denmark, there has been the introduction of restrictive measures that limit the stay of migrants and refugees in these Scandinavian countries. This political change took place even though migration flows are on average lower than in some Mediterranean or other Northern-central-European countries, as Ekholm points out. This has made newcomers, mostly those from the Middle East and Africa, more vulnerable. On the one hand, refugees and migrants face economic troubles due to difficulty to find good jobs, being normally hired in informal work position in which they are exploited and without social protection. On the other hand, they feel precarious in the host country, being aware that they will be allowed to remain only for relatively short periods of time. On top of this instability, the welfare system is not so generous with them (i.e. housing services).

The burden to include migrants has been progressively transferred to local governments, leaving municipalities with the uneasy task to solve education and employability problems. But it is very complex to carry out inclusive policies at this level, as the respondent stated in



another part of the interview. This "restrictive turn" took shape in a period characterized by two concomitant factors<sup>9</sup>; on the one hand, the increase in migratory flows (albeit relative compared to Southern Europe<sup>10</sup>) and, on the other, the decline in welfare ambitions, accompanied by the spread of inequality: an unprecedented situation for the Scandinavian milieu that undermines a model based on universalism and social cohesion. In the new opinion climate, support for neo-populist claims seems to have increased, together with citizens' preferences for far-right political parties who interpret it; the latter emphasize the need to assimilate migrants into the Swedish reality, weakening their cultural identity, so that they conform to an unspecified "Scandinavian way of life". All this calls into question the cultural pluralism that has long been a mainstay in countries like Sweden, Norway and, to a lesser extent, Denmark. It should be added that, despite these regressive trends, multiculturalism continues to be a principle supported by the majority of Swedish and Danish citizens.

Will Orben, head of education program on behalf of FC Nordsjælland, a Danish Superliga elite football club, seems to be quite convinced of this overall and persistent openness to immigration in the country in which has been working from two years, coming from the USA. It is precisely the comparison with the North American context, that makes him see a substratum of inclusiveness in Danish migration policies.

From my perspective Denmark is providing a lot of support for immigration, compared to the political situation in the USA, were at the moment there is a very aggressive stance against immigration. For the athletes involved in our sport program [football academy, A/N] that are prevalently native from Ghana aged 10-18 years old, not yet professionals, we offer a lot of support: housing, immigration facilities, education. If I look at their migration experience I think is robust, but of course we are speaking about a particular segment of migration, linked to a professional career, with the ambition to become football players in a major club in Europe. In

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<sup>9</sup> Several studies underline that the orientation towards migrants and refugees has changed considerably in Scandinavian countries in recent years. Anniken Hagelund notes that after the refugee crisis Denmark, Norway and Sweden followed a similar institutional pattern in adopting restrictive policies toward migrants. Notwithstanding this common political path, there are important differences between these nations in the way in which political measures were communicated to the public opinion: in Sweden, homeland of election of the "political correctness" [Friedman, 2017], the need to argument and legitimize the shift towards a migrant limitation policy was clearly a distinctive element; while in Denmark, where limitation of inbound migratory flows started well before the outbreak of the war in Syria, the political discourse has been more focused on the search for consensus in relation to specific policy interventions. Norway expressed a mixed position between the Swedish and Danish migratory narratives [Hagelund, 2020]. On diverse approaches in migration policies within the Scandinavian area see also the contribution of Kristina Bækker Simonsen [2019].

<sup>10</sup> A closer look at the most updated statistics collected by Eurostat on asylum seekers reveals that, by the end of 2019, Germany (142,500 non-EU citizens applicants), France (119,900), Spain (115,200), Greece (74,900) and Italy (35,000) were the five main destinations of the last wave of refugees. Sweden (23,100) and Denmark (2,600) were respectively in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> position of the ranking. Source Eurostat (online data code: migr\_asyappctza). Obviously, these data are expressed in absolute terms and not as a percentage of the total resident population, therefore they are not related to the demographic width of host countries. Furthermore, they don't take into account past migratory fluxes, which date back decades, particularly relevant in traditionally immigration nations, where second and third generations don't appear anymore as foreigners in the registry services, having often obtained citizenship in the country where they were born. Even with these limitations, the figures on refugees indicate that the influx in Scandinavian countries is not particularly high, especially when compared with the ones recorded in other northern European countries (France and Germany) or in Mediterranean countries (Spain, Greece and Italy).



Denmark in general I think that the support for migrants is quite good. My personal experience is that Danish are very open to immigrants [Will Orben, interview, 03-07-2020].

Even Emily Ronek, international partnership manager in the danish Ngo Game, is quite resolute in considering Denmark as a country where migrants have concrete opportunities to integrate in the local community, but she also sees some lines of cultural separation in which people with a non-white (and more generally non-European) background could get trapped. In any case, non danish people<sup>11</sup> will not suffer from hardship, receiving some kind of education and support from effective social services. The “burning question” is how to find a shared meaning of integration, one for which strangers feel to be respected and danish people are allowed to maintain their way of life.

Are there equal opportunities for migrants in Denmark? Yes, the country is a great example of integration and migrant succeed in living in the danish mainstream. Are there still clear lines (of separation – A/N) for some immigrant groups and for non-white, non-European ethnic background? Even in this case it is an affirmative answer and is something with the country still struggles with [...] non danish people live well here, having access to food, shelter, education, support of social services [...] The pressing issue is to get migrants meaningfully integrated and deciding what that means: does this mean that you don't speak Urdu anymore and express yourself only in danish, to what extent you will have a Pakistani neighborhood and everybody will be fine with that, does this neighborhood have national average levels of crime, education and socio- economic indicators. The burning question is how to do the integration properly in a way in which migrants feel respected, while Danes are allowed to hold on to their traditional way of life and ideas [...] Like the rest of the world there is a small and strong part of the population that supports right wing ideas, being against migrant integration, but it is not the majority. In general Danes see themselves as a country that is strong on human right and wishes to give everybody equal opportunities. It is little bit harder whether that mean to change how they live in their own backyard and I think it is there were the struggle is. They believe in integration but they may not define it the same way [Emily Ronek, interview, 17-09-2020].

Regardless of the minority part of the right-wing population that is against the presence of migrants, the majority of Danes see themselves as leaving in a place where human rights and equal opportunities are a cornerstone of the society. But it seems there isn't a shared vision on where to put the boundaries of cultural diversity, especially if the latter challenges national habits.

Our exploration ends in Slovenia, a state where the migration issue does not seem to have taken on the agitated tones as in other EU member states, although this nation too was affected by the refugee crises in 2015-2016. At that time, according to evidences collected by IOM, more than 450,000 expats from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan crossed the country as part of the Eastern Mediterranean migration route<sup>12</sup>. These migrants did not stop on the Slovenian soil; it was mainly an exodus towards the countries of northern Europe. Recent figures on migrants seeking asylum are in fact much lower than that massive flow of refugees: in 2018 2,800 non-EU citizens made an application in order to obtain protection in Slovenia, while in 2019 numbers were slightly bigger (3,600), but always in the order of unity of

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<sup>11</sup> The interviewee is keen to point out that she does not speak about the refugee situation, which she does not know well enough.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.iom.int/countries/slovenia>.

thousands (not tens or hundreds) of people who asked to be hosted in the country<sup>13</sup>. The extent of this migratory flow is not such as to put the Slovenian society under pressure, as stated by Fredi Radojkovic, hand ball coach and school teacher in Koper, Capodistria.

In my opinion, in Slovenia there is not yet the problem that can be seen in other European countries. Mostly they are transit migrants who go to Italy, France, Austria, Germany, Sweden. It's not like Slovenia is really a destination for recent refugee flows. If, on the other hand, we are talking about the families of migrants who have chosen to remain here, mainly from Eastern Europe, these are families in not so bad economic conditions who want to change their lives and for this reason they settle in Slovenia. They come from the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia), but also from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan. Their children attend schools and participate in community life (including sports activities). It is therefore a different group of migrants who do not escape from war or poverty. I think that since the number of migrants is not as high as in other European countries, Slovenia is well prepared to welcome them, whether they are people who want to stay here or remain just for a short time, waiting to expatriate in another country. The numbers are still under control and there are no particular logistical problems, refugees have reception centers and medical assistance. If our neighboring countries were to close their borders, then the situation could change and the risks would increase. Since the number is not high, Slovenes have so far accepted migrants, who also have good careers here. In the gymnasium where I teach almost half of the youngsters come from other countries, there are no integration problems, parents work and in their families there are no particular issues. At the political level, there is now a center-right government that is stricter on migration policies, but no tangible effects are seen of this change of strategy in society. Until the numbers of migrants doesn't increase, even a government that tends to be sovereigntist has no interest in showing its claws. [Fredi Radojkovic, interview, 07-07-2020].

In Radojkovic's reflections, several intertwined factors explain why immigration in Slovenia does not yet raise social alarm: on the one hand, the relative small numbers of new arrivals make it easy for migrants to adapt to Slovenian society, especially refugees from the Middle East or the Maghreb who they will not stay long in the Balkan nation, subsequently moving to other countries where they intend to settle permanently (Germany, Sweden, France, Italy, etc.). As long as the countries bordering Slovenia do not close their frontiers, this component of the migratory flow will continue to be temporary; hence, the quantitative threshold that creates imbalances is not reached and there are no troubles in giving support to refugees in reception centers. On the other hand, there is a more stable migration in the country, made up of families from the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe, which does not raise social issues, as it is people with a not particularly disadvantaged economic status who are integrating well in the local community. Therefore, whether they are refugees or long-term stayers, there is no social friction with Slovenes, who are so far willing to accept foreigners. Also the current center-right government, which has a more restrictive approach to migration policies, has no interest in "showing its claws", as the interviewee says, at least as long as the situation will not get worse.

Various findings emerged in this overview on the condition of migrants in the countries where the SIMCAS project is implemented. This is not the place to summarize research

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<sup>13</sup> Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr\_asyappctza). If we also look at the indicator on resident foreigners on the total population, the percentage is not particularly high: in 2018 there were 5.9 migrants per 100 inhabitants, two points below the EU average (7.8). Source: Eurostat, download from <http://noi-italia.istat.it> (25/08/2020).





evidence, going through a comparison between nations where different factors make the social integration of refugees and migrants quite peculiar. Moreover, we did not intend to make an international benchmark, ranking countries in terms of their ability to include people coming from other cultures and societies. Rather the idea was to analyze the context in which the inclusion sport based practices of non-EU citizens are developed. In this respect, there are various insights that arise from opinions expressed by stakeholders (partly in the excerpts commented in the preceding pages, partly in other parts of the interviews). Without wishing to examine them systematically, it can be concluded that there are essentially two implications for integrating people with a non-national background within critical areas, deriving from the changed migration scenario discussed previously.

A first way in which the humanitarian crisis impacts on the work on the ground with migrants and refugees concerns the socio-psychological dimension of integration<sup>14</sup>. Those who work in this sector are well aware that people fleeing war or other dramatic events undergo slow periods of readjustment before they can get comfortable with the host society, coping with post-traumatic distress. Overcoming disorientation (and sometimes demotivation) is an integral part of inclusion programs, even of those that are based on sport. We must stress that the re-adaptation phase can lengthen dramatically if refugees feel precarious in the host society, both because their stay is being challenged by increasingly restrictive measures, and because the opinion climate that surrounds them is becoming harsher, making ordinary barriers to integration (economic, social, cultural) insurmountable walls, or when pressure to assimilate becomes so strong that other socializing activities are inevitably sidelined by migrants, who strive hard to find a job, to learn the language of the host country, and to conform to the mainstream culture, maybe feeling that they are losing their identity. Faced with a tough and challenging reality, the risk is to being trapped in a dead end. We must also add that the latest migratory wave that swept into Europe in the aftermath of the conflicts in Syria and Libya (or driven by ethnic conflicts and starvation in other Sub Saharan and Middle East countries) is profoundly different from previous migratory flows. It is a mass escape from contexts where people's lives are constantly threatened. Hundreds of thousands of refugees marched towards the Old Continent without being able to rely on the traditional migratory chain on which expatriates normally rely. In the current exodus to European economic capitals the spontaneous migratory networks that usually favor the integration of newcomers into the host society do not work (if not partially): the support of relatives, friends and acquaintances who arrived earlier in the immigration country, the birth of groups and associations of compatriots who offer support, spaces for aggregation and the possibility of maintaining their own cultural background, etc.<sup>15</sup>. Refugees arriving in Europe today, too often transported as deported people by shady traffickers who profit from their desperation and then confined to refugee camps, do not have access to this bonding social capital, at least at the beginning of their migratory experience, as was the case with Italian

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<sup>14</sup> This issue has been highlighted in Germany and Greece, and in part in Italy and Spain.

<sup>15</sup> We are not arguing that informal migrant networks no longer play any role in integration into settlement countries; rather we are sustaining that refugees are displaced people and that their migration chains are necessarily weaker than those of other migrant groups who arrived earlier in Europe. Factors such as spatial segregation and uncertainty about one's legal status do not help to reinforce these refugees migratory chains and informal networks.

emigrants in Latin America or other national groups who expatriated to European countries after second world war. This aspect should be taken into due account when designing inclusive programs for current migrants: without these social networks there is a risk of isolation or, worse, segregation.

The second effect of the present migratory system it is an element that inevitably calls into question sport grass organizations. Briefly speaking, in a frightened and insecure society, where migrations tends to cause forms of closure and intolerance fueled by neo-populist and sovereign parties, it is important to choose carefully with whom one cooperates to ensure that integration really goes ahead, in a historical period that is anything but favorable to multiculturalism. The concept is clearly outlined by Vassilis Kalyvas, when he focuses on the need to be strategic in creating networking alliances in order to carry out inclusive projects.

In our projects we tried to communicate with many international agencies, municipalities, NGOs, city majors, politicians, individuals and groups in all level of society, we have seen very supportive reactions, people and organizations who are really inspired to help in including refugees in our society, and people that have different attitudes [negative towards migrants – A/N] Deliberately we choose to cooperate with people who have positive thinking about refugees inclusion, we don't spend much energy trying to convert people having negative attitudes towards migrants. My conclusion is that grassroot sport activist should not spend time with people that disagree with refugee's inclusion, it is necessary to select a group of changemakers that have a constructive approach on this issue and work with them [...] it is crucial to get in contact with persons working in the field in migrant's inclusion activities, really engaged in the topic, and start a cooperation with them [Vassilis Kalyvas, interview, 20-07-2020].

Kalyvas goes directly to the point: it is useless to waste time trying to persuade those who believe that migrations are a misfortune for our society; it is better to invest energy in getting in contact with changemakers truly engaged in supporting refugees and migrant, in order to promote their integration in society. Only with such a selective kind of networking one can expect of having a chance to affect the complex dynamics that Europe is facing nowadays with migrations.

### 3. The socio-spatial dimension of inclusion

Social inclusion has different meanings and implications depending on the actual context in which it takes (or should take) place. The socio-spatial context determines constraints and opportunities for social action and social interventions. These conditions intertwine with migrants' background to create specific situations that must be taken into account when designing a sport-based program. In fact, the same project activities may not be relevant, and may even be detrimental, in different contexts and for different kinds of participants.

Sport programs in disadvantaged areas like prisons, refugee camps and disadvantaged neighborhoods, should always consider both the general characteristics of the kind of context in which takes place and the specificity of the actual situation. In the socio-spatial dimension time also has a part to play. Indeed, in most of the 'critical areas' – prisons, camps, shelters – people live temporary or transitional periods. Projects for social inclusion should then look beyond those situations, to individuals' life courses and expectations. In this sense, as we will

see, adapting a project to the context also means making it open to participants' needs and preferences.

In critical areas, inclusion can be twofold: in terms of strengthening opportunities to participate in wider social life, and in terms of integration within a community or group. The latter meaning tends to prevail in contexts where freedom is limited, like in refugee camps .

Inclusion has two parts here: one is the part of refugees and national community, and the other is inclusion among them, because they're not coming from one country. There are people from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia [...] Even between them there are differences. Sports have dual positive impact, both in inclusion among refugee population and also inclusion within refugee population and national population [Vassilis Kalyvas, interview, 20-07-2020].

Social inclusion activities have different implications in a particular environment such as the prison. Sabrina Falcone, responsible for the juridical-pedagogical area of the Velletri Prison House, has been doing this job for thirty years. Based on her experience she touches the most critical points of the condition of migrant inmates in Italy.

The percentage of foreigners in prison has unfortunately increased exponentially in the last four years. As a professional role I take care of welcoming inmates in prison and providing them with information on the rules they must respect in the detention period, but also listening to their needs [...] The migrants I meet every day tell me about their travels made on makeshift boats. Arriving in Italy they have no great hope of finding a possibility of work or real integration [...] Most of them live in a situation of degradation that leads them to prison, leaving their families and everything else behind, they are alone and abandoned. I don't want to say that they are victims, but in a situation where they live in marginal conditions and are underpaid it is easy to fall into the hands of the underworld or try their luck by committing crimes. It's a story that could only end like this, since we are unable to provide suitable tools [to integrate - A / N] to these people [Sabrina Falcone, interview, 25-08-2020].

The road that leads to prison is almost marked for people who have little chance of finding a decent job and hence of creating the conditions to be included in the Italian society. To complicate matters, there is also the fact that the composition of the prison population of foreign origin has changed in the last decade. It is often difficult for prison workers to interpret the experiences and needs of people who have a very different cultural background from the Italian one, such as that of inmates who come from North Africa, especially if they face mental or psychiatric problems.

Until 2000 the foreign inmates were predominantly from South America. For ten years now the situation has changed: on the one hand there is a high percentage of Romanians and Albanians and on the other a large part of the inmates comes from North Africa. They are people who come from completely different cultural backgrounds, so they have difficulty integrating within the prison. It is no coincidence that sometimes real clans are created and that there is a caution on the part of the prison authorities not to put together too many prisoners of the same nationality. There is a great difficulty in prisons in managing people of African nationality, due to a lack of cultural mediators. We are largely unprepared to conceive cultures that are completely different from ours [the Italian culture, A / N] this creates difficulties for those who work in prisons, even in particular areas such as that of the treatment of psychiatric pathologies which have been increasing in recent years, also because psychiatric-judicial hospitals have been closed and the Residences for the Execution of Security Measures (REMS) are unable to contain the number of inmates with mental

problems. There are obvious difficulties in understanding psychological or psychiatric distress in cultures that are truly different from ours [Sabrina Falcone, interview, 25-08-2020].

In more general terms, it is the same activity of detainees' social reintegration that is practically precluded where migrants, as it often happens, undergo an expulsion order from the country, which will be carried out at the end of sentence's execution. Talking about social rehabilitation is almost impossible for people who will necessarily have to be repatriated immediately after paying their debt to justice or do not have a residence permission to stay in Italy.

In my opinion, there is a problem with the prison system. Social reintegration is based on a project hypothesis outside the prison: a work project, a life project, a decent logistic situation. When we talk about migrants these preconditions disappear, most of them are illegal immigrants, so they don't have valid residence documents, they don't have a domicile, so they are prevented from building a life project that allows them to re-integrate into society. Many of them undergo expulsion from the country, as a security measure, so they can stay in Italy until the execution of the sentence. They could eventually find a job to reintegrate, but many magistrates do not positively evaluate a career path outside the prison when there is it is an expulsion order at the end of the sentence, because there is a risk of escape [Sabrina Falcone, interview, 25-08-2020].

Due to institutional and social constraints, interventions in prisons focus more on producing positive social dynamics within that context than promoting opportunities in a wider sense. This approach is well exemplified by sport and leisure programs described by Mariangela Perito, which take place in the prison of Bellizzi, in southern Italy. This prison has 680 inmates, of which 80 are of foreign nationality (11.7%) – an unusual situation for Italian prisons, where the share of foreign detainees it is significantly higher: 32.7% at the end of 2019 [Antigone, 2020: 19]. They generally face marginalization from other detainees and are treated with suspicion, even when 'cultural barriers' such as language proficiency are not present. The project which Perito tells about also tried to address this situation.

We do jazzercise and singing courses, which also implies physical activities. From my point of view, these activities were really useful, since here there are no differences – or, if there are any, they are intended as valuable and not as a reason for discriminating. Besides these, before Covid-19 we should have started volleyball courses and games for mothers and their children. Unlike other activities, as the non-compulsory Italian language classes, I noticed that foreigners (especially women) are more likely to participate in these courses. Many women were from Nigeria, and I noticed that while doing sport or dancing there was not that kind of suspicion towards them that occurred in other contexts [Mariangela Perito, interview, 06-07-2020].

Voluntary participation to the activities was noted to be an important factor in attracting migrant detainees. Indeed, physical activities would easily turn out to be another constraint if mandatory, while any bodily expression (sport of course, but also music, theatre, dancing) can have great impact on individual well-being and mental health. Young detainees in particular have a hard time coping with detention and can significantly benefit from sport and physical activities.

Being restricted and enclosed is something that kills you psychologically. So you can understand why they end up repeating always the same discourses and not knowing what to do inside. They eventually smoke all the time, talk about the same things, make bets on anything (...). In a sense,



they do not know how to use their time. So, when they realized that passing one or two hours at the gym was a different way to spend time, instead of just going outside to stare at the sky, probably they also understood that time should not be entirely spent in the same routine [Marco Critelli, interview, 02-07-2020].

Relational implications are also relevant: sport and leisure can easily define situations of (relative) freedom, in which people feel more comfortable in interacting and getting to know others, feeling less pressure from institutional and social norms. Also, such projects held by civil society organizations are not so often available in Italian prisons. So, detainees' positive attitude towards these opportunities may influence them towards pro-social behaviors – also considering that penitentiary administration can suspend the activities at any time, if deemed necessary. Psycho-social dynamics vary also according to the composition of prison population. This is relevant in terms of managing psycho-social dynamics that are inherent to the situation of detention. As Marco Critelli recalls, during many sport programs held in Turin's jails.

I noticed great differences between minors and adults. In juvenile jails there's a great turnover [in sport programs participation], there are much less rules compared to adults (...) and their way of interacting is completely different. Adults tend to establish a much more structured hierarchy, while minors tend to follow the smartest, strongest one between them [Marco Critelli, interview, 02-07-2020].

These hierarchies are also related to that particular kind of ethics and moral codes which strictly define relationships between detainees, and migrants often happen to be at the low end of this stratification. A general argument about sport in prisons is that it generates positive social interactions and relationships within detainees. Nevertheless, the extent to which sport can change existing social dynamics is something that should more carefully analyzed. The risk is to overestimate the impact of sport and, above all, to un-critically use it as an easy solution to complex issues. Besides, it must be considered that sport activities can also lead to dangerous outcomes, since physical contact, competition and aggressiveness are normally involved.

As has been noted, among young people 'charismatic' interpersonal dynamics prevail, if compared to adults' hierarchical sociality. This is quite interesting, because it can occur that a marginalized individual may achieve a better status within the group, thanks to his sporting performance and skills. Still, obtaining recognition by peers in this way is limited to a few individuals and in every case reproduces asymmetric relationships. It could be worth, though, to try to use this dynamic for the inclusion of marginalized youth: for example, promoting activities in which they are more skilled than others, so that everyone gets appreciated for his qualities.

Refugee camps face similar conditions. In these situations, it might be easier to involve the population living in the surroundings. In these cases, the organizations leading the project have a prominent role in mediating between participants 'outside' and 'inside' the camp. As we will see in § 4, networking with local community, organizations and public administrations is important to assure that the project contributes to social inclusion processes. In the following quote Alex Canals tells about a sports program for young refugees aged 8 to 18.



We have a program in Lesbos, 'Out of the Camp', and we are also implementing the program there in one Greek school, near the camp, separately. But then what we do is to also mix trainings every month between them, so they can meet, they can play together, we invite the parents, this way [Alex Canals, interview, 29-06-2020].

These opportunities of interaction between refugees and the local population can also contribute in changing public opinion and attitudes towards migrants. Getting in contact with refugees' experiences help deconstruct social representations and stereotypes around them and provide the local population with first-hand knowledge about them. Also, considering that refugees would eventually move on to other destinations, social programs should focus on the local population's needs as well. Indeed, while the permanence in the camp is temporary for refugees, the permanence of the camp in the area is often much longer, so that people living in the surroundings have to get used to it, in a way or another. Sports programs designed for both refugees and locals can thus positively contribute to the local community. Talking more generally about community development, Thomas Farines expresses a very clear idea.

This is the important bit: how can we make it a more holistic approach, where everyone is included at the local level? If I'm doing a project in a village, are the people in the village aware, happy about it? I know this might seem very utopic, but if you are doing something at the local level, which is what we all do, we cannot pretend that we're changing the world at global level. We don't have the power to do so and neither the funds to do so. I always believed that my organization, for example, when they work in neighborhoods in Chile, they get the parents, the community leaders and everyone involved. So that there's a real sense of ownership of the project by the community, for the community, and it really works well. In Chile, in some of the places where we work the football pitches are self-managed (...). This is basically what we should aim to: my goal is that my job is not needed anymore [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

In urban settings, the migration phenomenon takes on more stable forms. Cities are usually the final destination of long migration processes, where people settle and try to pursue their own design in life. Social inclusion programs and policies often meet people with various migrant backgrounds, from newly arrived refugees to second and third generations. This variety in the migrant population goes along with complex urban environments, and, often, segregated areas and neighborhoods. Migrants happen to concentrate in such disadvantaged areas, characterized by lack of services, transports, social infrastructures and so on, mostly for economic reasons. In this context, it has been noted a shift in policy implementation from the governments towards local administrations.

The responsibility of the State has been shifted towards municipalities, in general in the welfare sector for the last 25-30 years or so. But increasingly, with the migration situation in the last 5 years, many municipalities have been noted to transform their political agenda towards integration and inclusion policies, but mainly towards education and labor market participation. Traditionally, that's a State responsibility in Swedish migration policies, but since the State has shifted the responsibility down towards municipalities, it becomes more and more stressful for the municipalities to deal with [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

Ekholm's argument is about Sweden, but this is also relevant thinking about the European situation in general. While migration is one of the major issues on the national public agendas, the actual management of its outcomes is more and more up to local administrations. And given the variety of size of municipalities in all European countries, it is easy to imagine how



difficult would be to develop such policies for a small town of 3,000 inhabitants, if compared to larger cities like Berlin or Stockholm.

Sport based interventions aimed at social inclusion occurring in sub-urban areas often have strong participation of migrant population, even though these projects may not be explicitly designed to be addressed to migrants. David Ekholm also highlights structural inequalities in sporting opportunities within urban environments. Most of the migrant population often lives in sub-urban areas where there is a lack of opportunities for civic participation.

When I speak about Swedish society, we have a segregated society, so with lot of primarily suburban areas, with a lot of migrants and marginalized, excluded people. There is a bad situation when it comes to sporting opportunities. The Swedish sports model is based on civic participation from parents and volunteers. Evidently, the sport clubs and associations in these disadvantaged areas have weaker conditions for creating opportunities to play football, for instance. This is a trend that has really increased the last 15-20 years, so today we face a really bad situation. Clubs are going out; they are not active anymore. This effects of course the opportunities for young people with migrant backgrounds, in particular, to participate in the traditional sport associations [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

To sum up, the socio-spatial dimension in sports based programs is relevant for two main reasons: 1) because social dynamics are linked to and influenced by the physical structure of the environment, that determines the conditions for any kind of social activities; 2) because inclusion is produced within the existing environment, in relation to the local population and organizations, who also benefit from social interventions if included. As we will also see in the next section, establishing relationships with local actors is crucial in determining the success of a project.

#### 4. Setting up a sport program for social inclusion

As we have seen in the previous section, sports-based interventions vary significantly according to the context. Still, three strategic elements can be identified in this variety of experiences, without which it would be difficult that a project is successful: networking, funding and sustainability.

In general, networking should be the first step in setting up any kind of sports based program. Strong project partnerships and relationships with local actors can assure major opportunities in terms of accountability, context-related knowledge, and human resources. Given that grassroots sport activities are very often based on voluntary work and civic participation, even when professionals are involved, the relational aspect is crucial in widening the potential of the projects. Throughout our research it has been noted that even big organizations as Cruyff Foundation and Barça Foundation did value the importance of networking with civil society organizations and public institutions. Sander Waare, working for the former organization, catches this point very clearly.

Part of my work is that you have to be able to speak with majors and decision makers about this, on a very professional level, and you also have to be able to speak, on a lower level, with people executing the projects. [...] So, my role it's very much being able to speak all languages, not only



real languages, but the languages of the street and the languages of politics [Sander Waare, interview, 9-07-2020].

In this case, the setting is that of an international foundation which aims at implementing its projects in disadvantaged urban areas. Here, the top-down dynamic inevitably leads to the fact that the international organization would first get in contact with institutional actors, such as the municipality. Not having roots in the area, the relational dimension also acquires political implications. Particularly, projects such as that of Cruyff Courts<sup>16</sup> also hold a 'value' which might be used by political actors to obtain consent on their behalf, regardless of the social aims of the project. For this reason:

it's very important that the neighborhood is involved and that there are no decisions taken without consent of the neighborhood – because that happens a lot – and also it is important to make people feel part of the project. You have to involve them from the very start [Sander Waare, interview, 09-07-2020].

Especially when projects have a tangible impact on the urban environment - for example, when building sport facilities or organizing big events - the population has to be involved. That means to create partnerships with civil society organizations and institutions operating at the local level, but also to get in contact with the general population through dissemination activities, for instance. This also holds true of course for grassroots, bottom-up projects, in which the leading organization is already rooted in the context where the activities will take place. Moreover, building a strong network can also compensate for the limitations every project has. Especially when implementing flexible projects, open to participants' preferences and needs, it is not possible to plan activities that would perfectly fit the actual situation. In that case, it can be useful to be able to direct participants towards other projects or organizations that would meet their wishes, thus reinforcing both the relationships between organizations and with participants. Thomas Farines well explain this opportunity:

The idea was that the project would be a vector. I cannot coach basketball, but I can put you in contact with someone that does basketball. And this is what we should be doing, because we cannot force football on to everyone even though football is the best sport in the world [laughs] [...] I know a guy in Turin, Italy that is doing water polo, which is a very high-class sport. He was trying to do a project to get migrants to be able to do water polo. So, why not? [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

Communication is a key feature in networking activities. On the one hand, it can be considered as a means to establish and maintain relationships between people and organizations; on the other it may also become a resource in managing particular kinds of relationships – those with financial partners, for example. Indeed, they tend to favor projects which can assure that their interests are met.

Financers of the projects also have their wishes, that the project is communicated in a strong way. So it's important to have these ambassadors [famous football players, A/N] on board, because then all media would be there [...] Communication is very important to make your project success. The intrinsic values of the project have to be strong [...], but the communication part of it is very

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cruyff-foundation.org/en/activities/cruyff-courts/>





important to make partners connect with you and also be able to give something back to the partners [Sander Waare, interview, 09-07-2020].

Another important characteristic of networking is that it promotes organizational learning between partners, as Emily Ronek states: a mutual exchange of practices seem to take place between organization that share the same aims. That could be a truly suggestive way to define the positive effects of networking.

Networking is hugely important for a variety of reasons. One of those is that we get inspired and learn from other partner organization and what they do, we copy them and they copy us. It is great, because we are all on the same goal [Emily Ronek, interview, 17-09-2020].

Managing relationships with public institutions requires specific skills and expertise and should be considered crucial when working in urban settings. Indeed, in many countries public institutions are financers or partners in social inclusion projects, and in every case hold a position of authority which is particularly influent on sport and physical activities. Just think of their role in the current global situation with the Covid-19 pandemic. Limitations to the very possibility of implementing sport programs often vary from city to city within the same country, according not only to the general health situation, but also to local circumstances and political choices. It is thus more than ever necessary to establish a relationship of trust with them, in order to be able to negotiate the conditions at which sport programs could take place.

Talking about a comparative study of a sport-based program that took place in different cities in Sweden, David Ekholm highlights the importance of interaction between sport clubs and municipal administrations. In the following quote, the role of institutional relations clearly emerges.

In the one that we called 'East City' everything worked quite fine, though in 'West City' nothing worked. So, what was the difference between the two cities? It is a matter of doing sports, really, and of course that's the main focus [...]. But that main focus diverted perhaps a bit from maintaining contacts with the municipal administration. They perhaps didn't have the kind of skills to do cooperation with the municipal administration. You need to know a lot of things about administration and policy making, really. In East City, one of the managers is a professional in Human Resources and Management, so he knows about how to cooperate with the sport federations in order to secure financing and to secure robust organization for the programs. This was all about business management: they developed a very professional organizational situation. Then the sport practices sort of moved on by themselves. They had of course their coaches, but they could secure the arena, they could secure coaches and could maintain these practices year after year. With good connections with the policy makers and with the administration. So they needed the business and administration skills: they had that in East City, but they didn't have that in West City [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

This leads to another relevant issue in project design: the composition of the project team. Or, as is well expressed in David Ekholm's words: «Identifying the general ideas about how to use the variety of competences of people that want to be involved». Sport projects for social inclusion require a wide set of skills, ranging from institutional relations to psycho-pedagogical expertise, from inter-cultural understanding to management. The best combination of these competences obviously depends on the context and the specific objectives of the project. In that regard, Ekholm recalls a sport-based intervention he has been studying, which involved



primarily girls with Somali background. They have been noted to not participate in sport at all, so instead of having them participate in competitions or tournaments, the project shifted towards game-based activities which generated positive social dynamics and opportunities. The ability to adapt the project's activities to the characteristics and needs of the participants depended on the team's professional competences and knowledge.

Professional social workers, teachers or educational workers of course are specialized in meeting youth and to develop educational programs. If you have a professional in finances or administration in the program, then they can help develop the design of how an organization that would produce these kinds of interventions would look like. And that would be just as an important insight of course. The program I described previously has one of the managers being a political scientist. She has an idea about how to understand the segregation patterns in these local contexts and how you can use this to develop a political framework or a critical political pedagogy. That's a great asset for that program. I'm not sure if that would be just as well for another program [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

Having a team of professionals becomes even more relevant in more severe situations. In refugee camps, for instance, people often suffer traumas and generally are not able to communicate through language. This, together with the general condition of limitation of freedom, makes it a particular delicate matter to interact and to promote sport activities among them. In the following quote, Alex Canals talks about a sport program for children aged 8-18, living in refugee camps in Greece.

We are not working with volunteers, we hire professionals who have two kind of backgrounds: sports background, like physical education, but also social workers or psychologists' profiles. In many cases, if it's possible we like to have both profiles in the same program, because they can benefit from each other. (...) People with social background are more prepared to deal with conflicts, to solve problems that happens among kids or parents, and also will be more sensible to the situation of those kids [Alex Canals, interview, 29-06-2020].

Turning to the matter of financing, most of the projects get funds from two main sources: local administrations and international organizations. In the first case, usually municipalities manage funds from the government to finance organizations and projects promoting social inclusion at the local level. This is normally part of a policy strategy to address migration related issues, which recently acquired a major role in the EU countries' political agendas (see § 1). As already noted in the quote by David Ekholm in § 3, although migration is a leading theme in the public debate at the national level, the actual management of its implications is up to local administrations, which are often not prepared to address such issues. In Germany, and particularly in Berlin, the State provides the major sources of financing for sport-based activities for refugees. Private financing is quite rare, also given the welfare state model described by Friederike Möller Bhering.

I would say mainly also through the government. There are a lot of financial support programs for sport clubs, for example, to apply. There is also the roof organization of all the sports clubs that can give out money, but it also gets money through the government – it's like in a sandwich position and then it can pass the money further on to smaller clubs. There are a lot of departments to finance different approaches, and with a lot of refugees coming from 2015 to Germany we had a special money pot, created in 2016, for refugee aids. So a lot of programs started in 2016 and were then further on financed until last year and next year there will be a new decision for how

long they will go on. [...] These governmental financial support is really split into different projects, so there's the money that goes directly to the clubs, there's the money that goes to the districts of Berlin [...], there's money that goes directly to organizations [Friederike Möller Bhering, interview, 27-07-2020].

Public administrations at different levels also contribute to ongoing sport programs. This approach often involves granting free access to sport facilities or activities to refugees. In these cases, public institutions cover the expenses for the activities held by civil society organizations. Marco Critelli describes an example of this practice that took place in Turin, in northern Italy:

They [12 refugees from African countries, A/N] had free access to the sports center. The funding necessary to cover the center's costs (tutors, coaches, etc.) was guaranteed thanks to a project financed by the Region, the municipality and other institutions alike [Marco Critelli, interview, 02-07-2020].

Base level organizations themselves try to include disadvantaged people in their activities, even in an informal way. This kind of solidarity towards migrants shows a positive attitude and commitment towards social inclusion, but it's also a more volatile feature based on individual behavior. As in the case of refugees in Berlin:

If you don't have money from the government, you can go to the clubs and ask: a lot of clubs open their doors for refugees. They even offer training for free, they say that you don't have to pay, or you don't have to pay as long as you don't earn enough money [Friederike Möller Bhering, interview, 27-07-2020].

It must be noticed that most of the interviewees worked in well consolidated organizations, which have already assured financial incomes or at least have developed effective strategies for obtaining them. Thus, funding may be taken for granted in most of the cases, although we should consider that starting new projects and financial partnerships could be a major obstacle for newcomers in the field.

Beside the matter of financial sustainability, some other aspects have emerged from the interviews. Sport-based interventions are often limited in terms of duration, while they would need a longer period to fully express their potential. The positive effects sport-based interventions can generate rely on persistence and reinforcement of the social dynamics which are activated throughout the activities. So, even when designing short-period sport programs, it should be considered that the relationships established with and among participants are not just a positive side effect, but maybe the core that could further on the processes of social change to which the project contributed.

Talking about more structured and stable activities, one important issue is that of the turnover. As we have already said, and as we will see more in depth in § 6, professionals have a crucial role in social programs. This is relevant also in terms of sustainability, not only because high skilled and experienced professionals are more appreciated by participants and financiers, but also because over time they can become reference points and leaders. It would then be desirable that they have the possibility to work in the same context continuously. As Attilio Lombardo states:



If a coach is doing well, he gets promotion and goes elsewhere. In this way, young people end up dealing with low skilled people. There is no way that this works. It is necessary that qualified coaches continue doing the work in which they are skilled. Just like in the famous *Peter principle*<sup>17</sup>, which central remark is the tendency towards incompetence: a person who is competent at a job gets promotion, then if he's competent in the new position too gets promotion again and so on, until he reaches a post in which he's not competent and stops there. Instead, when someone become competent at a job, he should be continue doing what he is good at [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 19-07-2020].

Another interesting way to guarantee continuity in sport programs is to train participants as instructors themselves. As Marco Critelli tells, during a one-year project in Turin's prisons, some participants were trained in order to continue the activities in the following year. Moreover, this training could have also turn to a professional opportunity in the future. A similar approach was developed by Cruyff Foundation, which also organizes educational activities with the aim of giving young people, often school dropouts, an opportunity for professional training.

The educational program has also a quite simple approach. It is meant that a group of 10 to 12 youngsters, aged from 14 to 20, organize a sport event for their neighborhoods. That's the main goal. We do this first by inviting two professionals from the municipalities and give them a course of four days about the methodology that we use, which is very inclusive, dynamic, nothing school-like [...] Then they go back to their municipalities and during the year they organize the same course for those 10 or 12 youngsters of their neighborhood [Sander Waare, interview, 9-07-2020].

Combining sport, sociality and education is a common approach to sport programs for social inclusion. This theme is further discussed in the next section.

## 5. Sport between wellbeing, education, and culture

### 5.1 A short digression on the links between sport and integration

It is not easy to grasp the overall meaning of sport in programs that aim to promote social inclusion of migrants and refugees. A very demanding role is often attributed to sport practices, being considered as powerful vehicles through which the life of newcomers can improve in host societies. Part of the problem is that, as far as the proactive function of sport is concerned, it is impossible to avoid considering the concept of integration<sup>18</sup>, a very cumbersome notion, both in terms of policy and of social inquiry. This is not the place to discuss an ongoing debate in which it is extremely difficult to find shared evidences, especially when one passes from sociological (or anthropological) theory to the practical (and very

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<sup>17</sup> The *Peter principle* mentioned by Lombardozi is a concept developed by Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull in a satirical essay published in 1969 and refers to career dynamics in hierarchical organizations.

<sup>18</sup> IOM defines migrant integration as «the process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups [...] [Integration, A/N] refers to a two-way process of adaptation by migrants and host societies [...] [and implies, A/N] consideration of the rights and obligations of migrants and host societies, of access to different kinds of services and the labour market, and of identification and respect for a core set of values that bind migrants and host communities in a common purpose» [IOM 2011].



insidious) terrain of policy formulation. Scholars who deal with the topic find at least four models of integration developed in modern democracies [Rossi, 2011]:

- 1) assimilationism (prevailing in France), being based on egalitarianism (equal treatment of individuals in front of the state), delineates a process of progressive acquisition of rights and obligations by newcomers, leaving aside from the public space their cultural heritage;
- 2) melting pot (typical of the US context), which postulates the fusion of different cultures into a single society, considered as a “pot” where various groups (each equipped with its own culture) blend together and coexist in the national community;
- 3) functionalism, the relation between migrant and host society is essentially utilitarian being subject to the principle of differential exclusion: newcomers are included in some social spheres, while they are discouraged to settle definitely in the immigration country. The most obvious example of this integration model is the Gastarbeiter (guest worker) in Germany;
- 4) multiculturalism, deeply rooted in the UK but also evident in countries like Sweden, combines the principle of equal treatment with the recognition of cultural diversity in the incorporation of migrants into the national mainstream.

For the purposes of this analysis we can say that ambiguities related to different political and social connotations attributed to integration risk to generate a lot of confusion in basic and professional sport inclusive programs. As Gasparini [2010] pointed out, the concept of integration implies on the one side a normative dimension, for which a policy is introduced in order to achieve certain objectives (in the case an expected outcome in migrants' incorporation in reception countries). On the other, it refers to the concrete social transition experienced by foreigners in the host society. Often there is an overlap between these two levels of analysis, and this does not help to clarify which part sport plays in local community insertion practices. Beside this, Agergaard [2018] identifies three shortcomings in current discourses about sport inclusiveness: first, integration is seen as a one-way development by which the migrant adapts to the host community, unrecognized that newcomers keep having a sense of belonging towards their country of origin (transnationalism); second, minority groups are uniformed under the same category in the public debate, disregarding differences within and between these groups; third, sport is depicted as an homogeneous and indistinct social device, capable of creating *per se* integrative results to the benefit of migrants. In this way, environmental constraints, actions and actors involved in local practices remain widely unexplored.

But maybe the most important factor that is too frequently neglected (or forgotten) when thinking about the place that sport can occupy in the existence of migrants is that integration is multidimensional. From this point of view we can identify three basic elements in the contrasted adaptation pathway undergone by expats settling in a new country: structural integration linked to the socio-economic placement in the host society; social integration, i.e. the extent of interaction and sociability within the local community; cultural integration, namely acculturation (acquisition of relevant social norms to be respected in the immigration nation) and identification with the culture of origin [Bosswick and Heckmann, 2006]. Sport is



a part of these dynamics occurring in migrants' experience; its social value must necessarily be traced back to these coordinates within which the migratory project of people develops.

## 5.2 Decoding the meaning of sports practices

Stakeholders interviewed in the research are quite conscious of the multiple implications that emerge when trying to detect the overall scope of sport practices, starting from the most immediate which is psycho-physical wellbeing, which assumes a relative importance due to difficulties faced by migrants. For Tina Nobis it must be recognized that often sport is not among the most pressing issues for refugees struggling with problems of job placement, recognition of qualifications, poor health conditions (post-traumatic syndromes), housing, the need to learn language quickly, etc. These severe priorities make sport become secondary, especially at the beginning of the stay in Germany.

Refugees are confronted with several pressing issues: finding a job, learning the German language, housing. [In these hard conditions, A/N], free time and sport might not be the most important issues in the lives of refugees who just came here [Tina Nobis, interview, 04-08-2020].

Migrants, especially if displaced people coming from war conflicts, ethnic cleansing, and starvation, are surrounded by too many worries to think about sports and leisure, therefore they might fail to appreciate the healthy side of these activities. In the hierarchical scale of their needs, sport practice comes after acquiring a stable legal status, a decent job, good language skills, an acceptable housing situation, as well as resolving post-traumatic stress deriving from the oppression suffered at home and during the transfer to the final destination of their migration. It is no coincidence that those who work in the field with refugees must necessarily face their demotivation towards sporting initiatives of a social nature, as Vassilis Kalyvas noted in the initial stages of sport activities involving disabled exiles in Greece.

These people are quite vulnerable, emotionally and psychologically, most of them have gone through certain period of depression, in their country they lost properties, family members, they came here in Greece and they are somehow lost in space, their life is disorganized, you need to be very supportive, take them in a sport manner but at the same time in a pedagogical manner in order to make them participate in the program, they lose transportation, they lose schedules. Many refugees do not know if they will remain here or go to Germany, France, or Finland so it is difficult for them to stay concentrated, to have a plan [Vassilis Kalyvas, interview, 20-07-2020].

Refugees get commonly "lost in space", it is difficult for them to have plan in their life, also because they don't know if (and for how long) they will stay in Greece or move in other countries were they made an asylum application (France, Germany, Finland). For trainers it is not only a question of transmitting sport skills but to bring these people to adopt a "pedagogical manner" in a personal situation characterized by a general sense of disorientation, which is a very complex task. This job is hard to finalize also because, as Attilio Lombardozi puts it, the educational function of sport cannot be taken for granted.

First of all, we must clear up what 'sport' means. Everyone think that sport is educational, but education is not always something positive, because there are errors which are often not properly addressed and understood. Above all, this is evident for example when parents demand that their children perform better than the others. In this sense, they push towards behaviors which cannot





be considered positive values. Sport, in this case, may even damage young people [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 19-07-2020].

Sometimes, not only with migrants, sport can fail to communicate positive values to young people, making damages in their transition towards adult life. In this sense, sport practices are not a panacea to solve hardship and encourage people to improve in life chance, particularly if people experience vulnerability or deprivation. Under certain conditions, however, it is possible to create the opportunities for those who are worse to make a progress, instilling in them a fair conception of competition or fostering cooperation through teamwork.

Competition shouldn't be considered necessary negative [...] There are many arguments against the so-called 'exacerbated competition'. But young people naturally tend to compete, they just should learn how to confront each other while playing. Competition is a value that should be taken care of. [...] Group sports are the most useful means to favor socialization. The team is a context of elements that are bound to cooperate. The team itself is a system, that is, individuals are inter-dependent, they help each other. In this context, leadership and cooperation are both necessary in order to success in competition [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 16-07-2020].

Reciprocity and healthy competition are certainly desirable outcome of inclusive programs, not only the ones based on sport. Among factors that influence individual of group physical activities we cannot forget the cultural dimension of social inclusion processes, which substantially affects the work of coaches, especially when they operate in settings where there are people with different migratory backgrounds. Fredi Radojkovic, in his experience as handball trainer in Slovenia, had to learn to manage cultural and religious frictions in his team where various national diversity coexists.

Here [in Slovenia, A/N] maybe the major issue is religion, since in the same place there could be Muslims, Orthodox, Jewish, Catholic players (...), each one with their celebrations etc. This is the most delicate matter, especially for young people, which may not have a fully developed personality, or an education open to other religions [...] During a match, some Egyptian players started praying during the break. We waited in silence that they would end praying and then the match went on, without any questions or comments. You should just accept that and go on as nothing exceptional happened. While some may not see it as normal, one should just accept it according to the globalized world in which we live [...] I was coaching a team in which there were Orthodox, Muslims and Catholics. We had Christmas holidays until the 4th of January, but I gave two more free days to a small group of Serbian Orthodox players, so that they too could celebrate their holidays (Christmas is 25th December to Catholics, 6th January to Orthodox). Some guys did not accept this. They argued that it was unfair that they came back training, while the Orthodox did not. This was a professional team, so they also argued that, according to their professional activity, they all should have the same schedule, regardless of religion. It was not easy to convince them. While Christmas is the most important holiday to Catholics, it is the same to Orthodox. So I gave them two more days anyway [...] In the end, I told them that if they felt disadvantaged because the others were Orthodox, they too could stay home two more days. They didn't. [...] This refusal was the first reaction. Then they understood and changed their opinion. The first reaction is "why they can and we don't?" One must explain the reasons why, and in the end they would accept it [Fredi Radojkovic, interview, 07-07-2020].

The differences in habits and customs, linked to religious beliefs, can create strong misunderstandings, which can sometimes lead to open conflicts, even in a professional team, where it is expected that players are used to get in contacts with athletes coming from



different areas of the world. Having authorized some Serbian players to benefit of an additional permit to celebrate Orthodox Christmas (6<sup>th</sup> of January) has caused tensions in the group with the Catholic performers, who celebrate it the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. The interviewee had to show firmness and argue his decision well before the conflict subsided. Intercultural dialogue almost never starts automatically. It takes commitment and sensitivity on the part of those who exercise responsibility in sports programs. To some extent it is a question of combining the work of cultural mediation with sports practice. In this sense, the outcome of sports activities is hardly ever detached from the difficult interactions between groups carrying ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. Thomas Farines is persuaded that these differences can become an asset, especially if migrants and refugees are brought to play together with nationals in Greek local sports clubs.

I want more a team that is mixed, than a team that is like 'all the excluded' [...] For example, I prefer the idea of training refugees, making them get back into fitness, learn the language and then make them play in a local club [with nationals, A/N] [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

The question of adapting to different cultural practices may also be seen from another point of view. Talking about the most relevant issues in organizing a sport project for inclusion, Farines highlights the importance of staff members' cultural awareness:

Also, we need to educate people, and I just don't mean like giving them a diploma. I mean like really educate people on how it is to work with people from different religions. There are things you simply must not do. I've made a mistake myself, even though I'm quite aware of culture. I went to shake someone's hand even though in their culture they don't shake hands, you know, it has happened to me. Imagine how many times must that happen until we learn that there is a basic that we need to be aware, and I'm not saying that social workers or psychologists do it better than others. I'm just saying that we always talk about common sense, but common sense is not common at all. (...) Now, specifically speaking as an European, our role when receiving people in Europe - and this is what really inclusion is about - is that before you get to introduce them to your culture you have to get to know their culture too." This is all about respecting identity and cultural diversity [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

Indeed, it is of striking relevance for a coach, a volunteer or a leader of an NGO working with refugees to get familiar with their cultural diversity, because it is unfeasible to deal with people with a different background without knowing the significance of their social conducts, like in the example mentioned by the stakeholders that has been working in Greece. As Westerners we are led to consider the handshake a universal sign of friendship, both in the public and private spheres. Not in all cultures, however, this act takes on the same meaning, as in the case of some Orthodox, Islamic and Jewish groups, for which it is inconvenient for a woman to shake hands with men [Licastro, 2018]. As the interviewee argues, it is necessary to respect cultural identity when welcoming someone into one's society; but intercultural communication is often not simple, having to find a point of contact between people individuals expressing different worldviews. From this perspective, the dilemmas faced by those who use sport to encourage the inclusion of migrants can be tricky. In this regard, the episode to which Nicola Porro refers is emblematic. In the late nineties, when he was president of Uisp (Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti – a large umbrella organization for grassroots



sport active in Italy), he received a request from a community of Bengalis living in Rome asking for support to build a cricket court in the city.

On the dilemmas of integration policies I like to mention an episode, which dates back to the time (1998) when I was president of UISP. [...] At the time we were contacted by the Bengali community of Rome, which asked us to have support from our association to build a cricket ground. This request struck us a lot because those who do not have a thorough knowledge of the post-colonial world imagine cricket as a very boring game reserved for the British. These migrants, on the other hand, had formed themselves into a small association to carry out a work of promotion in the municipality of Rome and obtain a space to be used for the practice of cricket. I remember that this request split both the Uisp and the Bengali association. So I trivialize the complicated question we asked ourselves then: which do we choose bonding or bridging? Some Bangladeshis said it was absurd that having integration problems in Italy, when it came to get in touch with relatively open structures such as parishes or aggregation centers belonging to the left, such as the ones held by CGIL trade union, which do not close the doors in our face for cultural or ethnic prejudice, however, we cannot expect to make them play cricket, the best thing is that we are the ones who approach European sports such as football, which, moreover, fascinates a large part of our compatriots. So a part of the Bengalis, despite not having read Putnam, advocated for a bridging integration strategy. We must have our experiences but we must be a bridge to get in touch with the Italian community. While there was a component that emphasized the bonding strategy, which, by supporting the practice of cricket, tended to defend its identity and traditions so as not to be confused with other national groups (like as Indians). This story tells us how integration policies cannot be just reactive, a response to a change that is in many ways dramatic, because moving to another country almost consumes an explant from the culture of origin. Especially today, in a period in which we are witnessing social alarmism towards migration, propagated by forces that say they are sovereigntist, it is important to emphasize that integration policies must have a complex vision, acting on the entire keyboard of social interventions, of which sport is just a part. We must use all the keys on the keyboard to harmonize social behavior and integrate migrants into our society. [Nicola Porro, interview, 09-07-2020].

Bengalis (and also by Uisp managers) faced an impasse, being unsure whether it was more profitable for them to keep cricket or to play football, the national sport in Italy, which was also appreciated by many of their fellow countrymen. The alternative between bonding (defense of the cultural identity of one's group) and bridging strategies (merging into the mainstream of the host nation) is a highly topical issue when promoting the inclusion of migrants through sport (and other social activities). As the Italian sociologist states, it is important to use all the notes in the keyboard of the integration policies, especially nowadays, in a historical period dominated by social alarmism and sovereigntist instances. We should focus on all the dimensions of integration (structural, social and cultural) in order to include migrants in European societies. It should be a methodological option in order to enhance social interventions. But we know that this is not the case because on the issues of social inclusion of people with a migratory legacy sharp divisions have been rising in (and between) the receiving countries. Sports initiatives take shape in this context, they cannot be understood as activities separated from the complex framework that encompasses migration dynamics. The main lesson we have learned from listening to the opinions of experts is that insports practices not everything works in a linear way, as emphasized in some sport narratives, that are not willing to take into account the limits of sporting activities. Evidences suggest that before being able to take care of migrant's socio-psychological well-being, it is necessary to repair the most traumatic injuries that emerge from their experiences, as well as to solve the



problems that make their position in society rather fragile: from the instability of their legal status to the difficulty of finding a decent work, passing through the need to have access to adequate housing. At the same time, the cultural barriers that stand in the way of intergroup communication cannot be ignored, if we act in environments where differences between social representations of reality are evident. As stressed in the literature review proposed in the previous phase of the SIMCAS project [Iref, 2020], it is necessary to problematize sport in order to take it seriously (evaluating its function) in the difficult journey that migrants accomplish trying to adapt to contemporary European societies. From this point of view, it is for instance widely acknowledged that one of the main roles that sports plays in migrants' inclusion in the host society is that it helps them to build social capital. But not any kind of social capital it is useful for integration. Raquel López, drawing on the experience as technician in a community development plan carried on in the town of Banyoles, suggests that the access to differentiated social networks is the most important benefit for second generation (or young people that recently moved in Spain) that participate to sport clubs.

These young people [sons of recent migrants or second generations born in Spain, A/N], who have participated and continued to be linked to a sports club, keep to maintain relationships and groups of friends that are diverse. One of the most important benefits of these diversity meeting spaces, such as a sports project, is the increase in people's social capital [Raquel López, interview, 28/07/2020].

Bridging social capital is indeed one of the most valuable resources for persons that strive to get included in a new community. But sports practices are not always adequately equipped to provide this sort of positive contribution in the life of refugees or of individuals who expatriate for economic reasons.

## 6. Being a coach. Insights and suggestions from the field

The coach is called to play a fundamental and very demanding role when working in local communities, trying to include disadvantaged groups through sport activities. This observation, which in some ways may seem obvious, is much less self-evident than one might expect, being even more appropriate for migrants' integration in critical areas such as prisons, refugee camps or slums. Coping with various kind of barriers (economic, social, and cultural) within these borderline contexts coaching becomes a very challenging task. It is therefore not surprising that in social sciences there is sometimes animated discussion about what are the best way to address these issues in sport training. For some time, social psychologists have started to reflect on how coaches can be reflective, making a constant scrutiny on their own way of operating, in order to constantly improve relationship with athletes [Anderson, Knowles, and Gilbourne, 2004; Huntley et al. 2014]. Some analysts, on the other hand, argue that this cognitive approach underestimates power relations that influence sports practices and coaching itself in diverse operative settings [Cushion, 2016]. Moreover, there are scholars who try to develop a line of culturalist research within the psychology of sport, using ethnographic methods and cultural studies to explore coaches' and participants' experiences [McGannon & Johnson, 2009]. We won't go through this debate, being far more interested in



examining the perimeter within which coaching is developed in sport practices involving migrants.

Stakeholders have a lot to say on the topic drawing evidences from their personal experience. Thomas Farines returns to the moment when he decided to pursue a career in the sports field.

When I became a coach I didn't become *only* a coach. I started to be an educator, a psychologist too [...] All these things that actually one should be trained in, I had to become for a lot of people [...] You have to open the mind of people, not close them. Always listen to what they want, you will open your mind to other sports that maybe you didn't imagine. I played cricket. I didn't know I was going to play cricket ever in my life [...] It's about putting your mind at work and wanting to learn, more than anything. If you're working trying to make changes in your society, whatever level it is, you have to be open to learn. (...) Try to get to know the people you're working with or the people you want to work with, and try to learn from them, because they are going to teach you more about what they need. Because you're coming from your place, most of the times a place of privilege, and you won't get to the roots of it [marginality, A/N], because probably you haven't experienced it. Empathy and open mind, that's the two skills basically we need in this field [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

From the beginning he understood that he had chosen not only to be a coach, but also to make a virtue of necessity acting as an educator and psychologist, to respond to the urgent demands expressed by refugees. He was not trained to perform these ancillary functions, however he had to adapt to circumstances, because there were many people who asked him to do something more than the usual duties of a coach. Empathy and an open mind are two basic skills to work, as he did, with underprivileged persons. By listening to the needs of refugees you will get to know about cultural diversity, getting familiar for instance to such a distant discipline as cricket, if this can help make feel more comfortable people who have lost their freedom and most of their material possessions. In any case, a coach must be able to set some limits to the overwhelming chain of needs manifested by migrants. As the interviewee explains, it is necessary to protect others, but also oneself, knowing how to declare to these people one's inadequacy in the face of painful problems such as mental health.

Also, and this is very important, the first person that has to take care of their mental health is the person that is working in this field. You have to put your boundaries, your limits. I've had cases of people coming to tell me stories of their trauma, and I said sorry, I'm really sorry that this has happened to you, but I am not trained to do this. This is the level of sincerity that you have to have so that you also protect yourself. You have to protect others, but before protect yourself [Thomas Farines, interview, 02-07-2020].

Mohammed EL Ouahhabi is native from Morocco, a country that has become a must for African and Asian migrants headed mainly to Spain; hence he did not have to work on himself, as his colleague Farines, to get in touch with human frailty from the privileged position of a westerner citizen. Nevertheless, he likewise assumes that empathy, together with intercultural and social competences, is a prerequisite to work in this sector. From his point of view sport skills are important for a coach, but non as the capacity to comprehend others, build trust, be sensitive to social issues, as well as speaking in Arabic or French in order to make conversation with people involved in inclusion projects.

Something that needs to be considered is empathy. Because when you have a conversation in Arabic or French with people in their native language, this builds trust, and they start talking about what they are feeling and are open up to them. Especially the social aspect is the most important one [...] Talking about a project which trained people who wanted to become coaches for refugees (there were also refugees themselves among participants): we teach about them how to work with somebody who comes from a different culture. We are looking especially at intercultural competences and social competences. Sport is important but it's not as important as the social component [Mohammed EL Ouahhabi, interview, 07-08-2020].

Tina Nobis, while not outlining the ideal profile of a coach, stresses some fundamental abilities to carry out this activity in complex situations of discomfort. A starting point is to understand that this function is performed very often with children and young people. And this can make a difference.

The coach can be really important, particularly when talking about young people or children. Some studies show that if you ask children about persons who are important to them, many of them who are in a sport club actually say 'my coach'. So, often the coach is an adult person which is really important in children's life. The coach can be a role model. I think it's really important how the coach is acting, or how he or she is not acting. Imagine he or she recognizes discrimination: will he say something or will just ignore it? [Tina Nobis, interview, 04-08-2020].

The coach certainly becomes an essential point of reference in contributing to children's and young peoples' personality development, embodying to some extent exemplary model of conduct. For this reason, he must know when to intervene in group dynamics (or in one-to-one relationship with the participants) and when, instead, it is more appropriate to refrain from doing so (when it is better to postpone and wait to clarify an individual or interpersonal difficulty). It must also be considered that, not infrequently, coaching is not a paid job, and this makes the burden of this activity excessive, perhaps not having an adequate pedagogical background. However, as the University of Humboldt scholar suggests, it is not just a question of conducting group activities or knowing how to deal with childhood or youth distress. Some issues related to social inclusion of refugees and migrants go beyond the sphere of action of a coach. Nobis refers to the necessity to empower the weakest subjects in sports practices: women, queers, migrants (especially the ones with a different skin color). Without solving the problem of their under-representation in sport clubs or project boards, these vulnerable people will not feel to be part of the game, perceiving that their interests are not sufficiently taken into account and that they do not have the chance to influence the decision-making process. Indeed, as the interviewee reminds us, inclusion is also a matter of sharing power in governance bodies, both in grassroot organizations and public agencies.

However, I would also say that is not just the coach, but of course the other teammates in the group. I think that we shouldn't forget the representatives of a club either. (...) I think it's really time to get a new perspective of the under-representation of women, immigrants, people of color, queer people on the boards of sport clubs or projects. It doesn't have to be a lack of integration; I would rather say that if you don't feel as if you could be a member, because there are no role models, and if you don't feel as if your interests are being represented, then you are not really motivated [...] It's also about power politics and sharing power on the boards, and sending a message of inclusion [Tina Nobis, interview, 04-08-2020].

Attilio Lombardozzi, having had a long experience in training coaches in various university faculties of sports sciences, underscores similarly to Nobis the educational role of this



professional figure. However, he also emphasizes how this role sometimes gets in conflict with parents, who transmit opposite values to the ones associated with a healthy and fruitful sport practice, which is not necessarily to become a professional or a champion.

Parents sometimes educate children to values opposite to those of sport. This creates evident problems that are difficult to overcome. One of the greatest tennis coaches in the world once said that his dream was to coach orphans. This was because often parents set against coaches and other educators [...] specialized people are needed, who are capable to understand, support, and set up a suitable environment. You can't say children 'if you work hard, you will be champion of the world', because they need to see concrete objectives and progresses, within a short time. (...) To coach professional athletes one does not need specific pedagogical competences (...), but this is unconceivable when coaching children. In that case an in-depth expertise is needed. Children need to be respected, supported and understood [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 16-07-2020].

Working with children implies having specific pedagogical competences: coaches need to understand, support and create a suitable environment in order to encourage child growth in sport activities. Going into depth in the argument he clarifies the difference between a coach and an educator dealing with kids.

At an early age, one cannot properly talk about a *coach*. The *educator*, rather, should be a figure that above all understands young people. Incidentally, the founder of the Genevan School of pedagogy used to say that 'to teach Latin to little John, you have to know first little John, then Latin'. Similarly, those who coach children must understand first children's personality, needs and characteristics, and only after they may come up with sport and game. Also, it should be considered that children need to have successful experiences: they should always win. I mean that they should be able to strive to win, trying to overcome any difficulty. When they don't manage to overcome difficulties, coaches often put aside those children who, in their opinion, 'cannot play' because they are not able to. There should not be anything like a not-able-to-play child: if anything, there could be a game which is incapable of letting the child play [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 16-07-2020].

Before teaching sport you need to comprehend the personality of kids and youngsters. This is what an educator ought to do. Sometimes coaches do not use this pedagogical style, forgetting that children must be reinforced psychologically prior to acquire technical abilities in sport disciplines. The consequence of this educational deficit is that coaches often find themselves putting aside those very young athletes who are unable to participate in the game. And this is a defeat for everyone, because if there are children who do not participate during training or competitions, the very idea of promoting sport for everyone, from the earliest stages of life, fails. Lombardozi also provides valuable advices for field work with migrant children and youngsters.

The game must be adapted to the children who play it [...] Game rules need to be designed to facilitate playing, so that they can learn [...] Rules need to be simplified in order to facilitate the task. Flexibility is necessary to create a particular atmosphere, especially when dealing with young immigrants, in which nobody feels like his personality is under threat. The environment has to be serene and joyful. I like to say that one must "organize disorganization": a bit of confusion is needed in these contexts. (...) Everyone should feel safe to express himself as he wants [Attilio Lombardozi, interview, 16-07-2020].

Flexibility in the application of rules and a pleasant climate are two musts that help involve young migrants in individual and group sports. They should not feel to be under treat for their

diverse background. For this reason, it could be preferable to work in a disorganized setting, if this helps the self-expression of each of the participants in sport activities. A final relevant remark in this overview of opinions on the salient characteristics of coaching is that of Mariangela Perito. The Italian psychologist and activist captures a fundamental aspect for those who work with migrants inside the prison, one of the critical areas addressed by the SIMCAS project.

They should be charismatic, otherwise they would lose appeal on the detainees; they also should show authority when needed, and be outgoing. Once the other understands that he can trust them everything gets easier and they even become friends sometimes [Mariangela Perito, interview, 06-07-2020].

In a closed environment such as a penitentiary, the coach should be authoritative and charismatic, otherwise he risks losing appeal to the inmates. Once reciprocal trust has been built between trainers and prisoners, even the harshest barriers existing in this coercive institution can be overcome, developing friendship and successful sport practices within a surveilled courtyard.

The opinions collected in this section of the report are suggestive and articulated. Experts have identified several features that can make sports coaching with migrants effective: empathy, social sensitivity, listening, the ability to set boundaries to protect participants and coaches themselves, the capacity to intervene at the right time in group dynamics and interpersonal relationship, knowing how to initiate and develop an intercultural dialogue, manage group dynamics and so forth. In this sense, before being a trainer capable of transferring technical notions on sport, this professional figure (not always paid adequately, sometimes performed on a voluntary basis) must be able to interpret the social and educational needs of people involved in inclusive programs. Often, children and adolescents are involved, those who have been growing up experiencing the harsh reality of material deprivation and discrimination. Marginality and intolerance make this work variable and complex since it is needed to constantly pay attention to break down distances with the participants. In this sense, it is certainly to be welcomed the invitation of those authors (mainly sports psychologists) to adopt reflexive practices in coaching: revisiting one's experience is a way to face an evolving and complicated activity like the one described in these pages. However, it is also important to keep in mind the context in which we operate, as some sociologists of sport underline. Sports practice cannot be isolated from the surrounding social reality: there are too many asymmetries of power that prevent disadvantaged people from taking part in social inclusion activities (women, queer people, groups of migrants who are stigmatized for their cultural and physical traits, etc.). If the grassroots sport movement really wants to contribute to the integration of migrants into society, it cannot fail to try to encourage the participation of those among them who are mostly discriminated and underprivileged.

## 7. The limited effects of sport

Several evidences and insights have been discussed in previous pages. Called to think about the mission of sport in migrant social inclusion, stakeholders identified a wide range of crucial





issues which are to be surely taken into account if we want to make advancements in this field. Obviously in this report it is not possible to find models or guidelines valid for every situation, after all this was not the purpose for which the analysis was conducted, being based on an exploratory research design. In this perspective, rather than summarizing the main results of the qualitative survey, we prefer to focus on one aspect which is particularly relevant for the future development of “sport for all” programs - i.e. the impact that these ambitious efforts can have in local communities. Respondents have thoroughly argued about this essential issue.

Sport effects in terms of social inclusion is dependent on the context, as we have stressed repeatedly in prior sections. Even the way in which sport is represented, as a more or less powerful means for social inclusion, varies according to the point of observation. Sport activities in prisons, especially juvenile ones, are seen as very influential, due to the fact that in individual and group disciplines the only thing that matters is the skill in the sporting challenge, reducing the influence of other factors (such as more or less acute family discomfort, school dropout, economic vulnerability, uncomfortable housing conditions, etc.) that normally penalize young people with a migratory background.

Like at school, there's the top and the bottom of the class, and you have different levels of homogeneity inside a group – the class in this case. If that same group start practicing sport the situation may completely reverse. It may happen that the bottom becomes the top, because he [a detained foreign minor, A/N] may be more physically gifted [Marco Critelli, interview, 02-07-2020].

Mariangela Perito looks at the question from another perspective. She compares sport to other activities which take place in prisons. Generally speaking, foreign people tend to be far much isolated in the prison for various reasons: first of all, they are looked at with suspicion and marginalized, so they tend to not expose themselves much and to have little interactions with Italian detainees.

I don't see particular limitations to sport in prisons. It is an activity to which even foreigners participate and so there are no great differences [with other detainees, A/N]. Moreover, during activities like for example football tournaments, some particularly skilled foreigners may contribute to better migrants' image inside the prison. I mean that they are disadvantaged twice, as detainees and as immigrants: I've seen people without clothes and money, without nobody that takes care of them [inmates in Italian prisons actually need the support of their families or friends for living – see Antigone's report above cited, A/N]. So, they are considered even more subordinate among detainees. There actually are classes and ghettos inside the prison. Through sport, instead, this distinction can be overcome. So I don't see great limitations to sport in prisons, I just see it as an opportunity for everyone [Mariangela Perito, interview, 06-07-2020].

In this climate of (multiple) segregations, the contribution of sport to inclusive dynamics can be easily overestimated. Instead, if it is true that physical and leisure activities may “suspend” everyday life routines and schemes of interaction, which are also made of conflict and discrimination, it should be also noted that besides those delimited circumstances people in prisons are living in a very strict hierarchical structure of relationships. In total institutions such as prisons [Goffman, 1961] every individual is restricted to a specific role, which has a precise function in the system of relationships. It would be then very difficult that sport



produces changes at the level of structured relationships, while it may make a difference at the individual level.

Similarly, sport programs in refugee camps can have an important role for the wellbeing of people who experienced trauma.

They arrive in many cases with depression, because the trip they had and their life experiences. They come with no friends at all, speaking only their own language [...] By participating in a sport program they can easily meet new friends, they can very fast change their attitudes, from being to close at the beginning and after few trainings they can again smile and be active again. In this way it beats depression, it also promotes healthy habits, as well as many other things: it boosts their self-esteem, it also makes them sleep better. So there are many benefits it brings to them [Alex Canals, interview, 29-06-2020].

Hence, in sports, refugees can find a diversion that distracts them from the harsh living conditions they face in restricted locations such as camps. In this way, self-esteem is strengthened as they are involved in beneficial activities that help improve their mental and physical health. Understandably, for people who are often weakened by traumas, the recognition of the importance of playing sports happens gradually, as Vassilis Kalyvas points out.

When we started developing networking for running the National Paralympic Committee project, at the beginning we had a very hesitant approach by NGOs that were hosting refugees. We were trying to convince them that it's good for them to do sports and so on, but at the same time they were very very busy with other priorities for their beneficiaries. They had to take care about their health, food, accommodations and many other problems. So supporting them in a sports program was like a luxury for them, it was like 'nice to have, but not that much'. Then, when we started step by step including them in our project and they saw what a big impact it had for the beneficiaries, but also for the organizations, they told us 'it's amazing, we have never thought that sport could have such a big impact in their lives' [ Vassilis Kalyvas, interview, 20-07-2020].

In contexts such as refugee camps leisure activities like sport can have a relevant impact on people's quality of life and mental health, especially if compared to other contexts such as urban settings. Thus, it is understandable that, in these conditions, sport shows immediate and tangible effects and that therefore people working in this field have an enthusiastic opinion about sport's impact. Nevertheless, this is completely different from creating opportunities to participate more widely in social life. Sport programs in critical areas can work as immediate and effective "emergency measures" but making them work as vehicles for social inclusion is another story. The positive outcomes of sport observed in some contexts should not be hastily generalized, as David Ekholm states.

I think that you need to perhaps downplay the integration ambitions with sport practices. Sport practices, from my point of view, should be based on the primacies of those participating in the practices. So, if they want to play football or basketball in a variety of ways, like for fun or for professional development, I think they should be provided those opportunities. I think that, according to the Swedish welfare model and sport associations model, that's more or less a responsibility for the municipalities and for the civil society together, to provide these opportunities [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

Most importantly, sport has a potential for social inclusion if integrated with other policies and interventions which address relevant aspects of migrants' lives, such as work, education, and civic participation. In this sense, sport may and should be considered as one of the pillars of a wider welfare system, designed for both citizens and migrants.

I think that sport has a part to play, but primarily sport practices should be developed *for* the youth participating in the practices, based on equal rights and social justice, in a sense. We think that sport has a part to play in Western modern societies, for the poor as for the rich, for citizens as for migrants. (...) In that sense it could promote integration or social inclusion. Yes, it could be done, but a lot of other things could also do that, and it's probably better to forward that. We need to have a welfare system, first of all, and now I speak basically on Sweden and Scandinavia (...), where we do have the material opportunities to have these kind of policies for equality and social justice and policies for social and economic security. We don't live in poor societies, so we should promote a welfare for migrants as well as for citizens. That is the core idea for producing integration and social inclusion. Sport has a part to play but is not the solution to these problems. The solution is material, social and economic welfare [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].

The fact that not even in high-income countries like Sweden such welfare system has not been set up, shows general absence of political will towards this kind of policy design. European states seem to have let go their responsibility in managing migration and integration processes, leaving local administrations and civil society organizations to deal with it.

As we showed throughout this work, sport programs do play their part in social inclusion of migrants when they work as "social platforms". By that we mean when they promote sport activities as opportunities to establish new relationships, and reinforce existing ones, among migrants, local communities, social organizations and public administrations. In this sense sports act as «sites for socialization experiences» [Coakley, 2017], intercultural exchange and community and personal development. But again, we stress that this does not mean sport itself produces social effects, regardless of the context and related conditions. Sport is a context (or a medium) in which (or through which) these effects may occur.

From these interviews, we noted that through sport programs participants (not only migrants) have the possibility to widen their social networks. This is an enabling condition for social inclusion in a wider sense, and only occurs if within the project participants are able to make their choices and express their needs. In the second place, in European societies sport is intended as a field where individuals express their freedom and find a meaning to their existence. This principle should always be underlined when developing sport programs for social inclusion. The risk, instead, is to create a double standard of sport "for migrants" and sport "for citizens", which is exactly the opposite of how inclusion should look like.

In conclusion, we think that this last quote synthesizes most of what we tried to argue until now; and even if it refers to young people, we think it's still relevant for everyone.

Sport is important, but it is important because young people want to do sport. It's not important because policy makers think that sport would create a better man, a better human or a fairer society, or whatever. It's not like the policy makers think to decide this: they can support, of course they should support. But we need to start from the point of view of the participant youth, on their dreams and ideas about what they want to do and how to produce a meaningful life, leisure time and education [David Ekholm, interview, 07-08-2020].



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## Appendix

### Interview guide

Introducing SIMCAS and IREF/your organization, as well as the research module (the role of theory in a social program) and the project's outline (in a few lines)

#### 1. The situation: migrants in your country and local area

The socio-economic conditions of migrants and refugees in your country/area

What are the most pressing issues regarding migrants' and refugees' conditions?

How integration can be interpreted in light of society's climate and reception of diversity?

#### 2. Policies for the integration of migrants and relative issues

What are the most central arguments in the current government's agenda regarding integration? For instance, what are the general framework and specific policy initiatives.

How is integration addressed at the local level? Are there any relevant urban/regional or province-level policies?

#### 3. The potential of sport in contributing to social inclusion

Are there any examples you know of regarding sport and leisure activities programs addressed at migrants and ethnic minorities?

Do they take place in critical areas: disadvantaged neighborhoods, refugee camps or prisons? In your opinion what are the differences in working with migrants and refugees in these different contexts?

Can you describe a few of the most relevant experiences?

Could any of these be described as "best practice"? If yes – why?

What are the elements that made them work? And what could instead be improved in future similar attempts?

Where from the initiatives originated? Voluntary groups, spontaneous, national funds, private funds, European funds, ecc...

How can sport contribute to bridge communities and to bond together a group? Are there any examples regarding this aspect?

How can sport contribute to the psycho-social development of the individual? Are there any examples regarding this aspect?

Ludodiversity and what sport/physical activity is preferred in regards to the engagement of different cultures in a common meaningful activity

The role of organizers, volunteers, trainers, coaching; what are the main challenges for grassroots sport operators?

#### 4. Your experience in grassroots sport organizations and initiatives

How did you get in contact with the grassroots sport?

In your experience, who are the most relevant professional figures for the success of local integration projects that try to include migrants through sport? Do you find gaps in the skills of operators currently operating in this sector in your country? What kind?

In your opinion, what are the possible scenarios for sport for all programs, also in light of the recent Covid-19 crisis?

