



THE MAKING OF INCLUSION

Sports best practices that promote migrants' and refugees' social integration in critical areas. A cross national analysis in Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Spain and Greece

The collection of success stories of refugees and migrants, not only as a means to document successes obtained and communicate them to external subjects, but as a tool to increase internal awareness of the factors that can promote social inclusion through sport. It is also through these positive case narratives that best practices make progress.

The third research report developed within the Simcas project examines the main findings of an analysis of National Best Practices (NBP) conducted in Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Italy, Spain and Greece. The main purpose of the study is to gather first-hand information on how social inclusion processes work within sports programs addressing migrants and refugees in critical areas (disadvantaged neighborhoods, prisons and refugee camps). Empirical evidence on these NPBs is crucial for the definition of a methodological approach that will guide the subsequent implementation phase envisaged by the project. In this report we consider NPBs as consolidated sport programs that engage migrants and ethnic minorities through playfield, training, and other physical activities.

Following specific criteria a considerable number of NBPs has been identified in each of the countries where the project takes place. Overall, 28 practices have been detected by the Simcas partners in their own countries.

These are very different experiences, making it possible to compare a variety of contextual and organizational factors that can favor or hinder the inclusion of migrants through sport. A semistructured questionnaire has been elaborated in order to collect data on each of the selected NBP. Partners handled the survey, after receiving a briefing from Iref researchers. Fieldwork has been carried out from the beginning of September 2020 to the end of February 2021. It was a very complicated and lengthy research task in order to ensure that the information gathered was complete and accurate. In every country, project coordinators used two techniques to fill the questionnaires: desk data collection (by consulting NBPs websites, social media, press releases, official documents, etc.); face-to-face or online interviews with key informants. Only in a few cases it was possible to send the questionnaire and have it filled in autonomously by the heads of the NBP .

Several results emerged from the analysis conducted in report on best practice analysis-study. This is not the place to summarize them, we will try rather to focus on some factors of these best practices which, with the appropriate adaptations, could be replicated in other organizational settings, increasing the inclusiveness and sustainability of sports programs addressed to marginal groups, such as migrants and refugees.

A first element to bear in mind is that although the activities promoted by grassroots sport organizations are usually characterized by informality and a participatory style, it is necessary that in the medium-long term they acquire a certain degree of structuration in order to consolidate, becoming stable and recognized experiences in the social context in which they are developed. It is no coincidence that in the different types of NBP examined in the research (training activities, both for players and coaches, professional and non-professional tournaments/competitions, other practices related to sport), there is common tendency to plan diverse activities in order to give continuity to teamwork and ensure that participants can increase their psychophysical wellbeing and feel more integrated in local communities.

At the same time, this effort must be supported by a working group where professionals (coaches, trainers, educators, social workers, etc.) and volunteers can coexist. Even if in most cases these are horizontal (non-hierarchical) groups, the presence of coordinators and managers it is crucial to facilitate cooperation and make sports programs more efficient.

There are two further aspects that cannot be underestimated: fundraising and networking, being interrelated dimensions in organizational life in order to pursue sustainability in the long run. An obvious starting point is that there are no universal models that can guarantee a continuous flow of money to support activities and services developed by grassroots associations.

The research shows that NPBs have been often implemented with two different forms of support: through the effort (and resources) provided by private bodies, such as foundations or associations; and by specific funds and calls for programs introduced by public institutions to enlarge marginal groups access to sport; we must add that grassroots investments are more evident in the starting phases, while public and private funding intervene later. In any case financial frailty is a diffused problem in NPBs: discontinuity of human and material resources are a serious issue which arises during the evolution of projects that are in themselves innovative, inclusive and effective. To avoid interruptions in ongoing programs which are vital to recipients, grassroots organizations adopt various tactics to diversify supporters, basing on the assumption that a greater number of partners is a protection to sudden withdrawals of funds. In this perspective, one effect of these precautionary strategies is that the networking capacity of sport grassroots organizations is not infrequently strengthened. Their ability to communicate and interact with public authorities, private actors and social partners within local communities becomes a sort of shield to safeguard activities and services of capital importance, which could abruptly end due to the lack of economic resources. It should be noted that networking is different depending on whether it is deployed in a large city (where partners' heterogeneity can be a potential advantage, and the fragmentation/weakness of relationships a pitfall) or in a small town (where cohesion may be an opportunity while close-knit networks a strong limitation). Last but not least there it is the question of assessing the impact of what is achieved in these sports programs.

Organizations try to monitor the changes that are generated in the lives of the recipients of their interventions. While not being able to adopt sophisticated systems of self-control (counterfactual surveys, systematic collection of indicators, users' satisfaction surveys, etc.) in the NPBs one can often glimpse the will to critically review projects' results. From this point of view, an interesting option is the collection of success stories of refugees and migrants, not only as a means to document successes obtained and communicate them to external subjects, but as a tool to increase internal awareness of the factors that can promote social inclusion through sport. It is also through these positive case narratives that best practices make progresses.



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