

## PROMOTING A POSITIVE APPROACH TO DIVERSITY IN SPORT: A PROPOSAL FOR A THEORETICAL MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

*If managed inefficiently and ineffectively, diversity represents a barrier to the sustainable development in any context, especially in sport, which is full of sporting, social and economic relationships between subjects considered different from each other.*

*Sport is one of the main areas in which the relationships between individuals are developed, and in a "globalized" socio-economic context like the current one, in order to ensure sustainable development over time, it becomes necessary to better manage "diversity".*

*In this regard, the paper assumes the adoption of the Diversity Management approach also for the sports context, in order to generate the many benefits that, nowadays, already characterize the companies whose management is based on the principles of this model.*

**Keywords:** : Sport, Diversity Management, Socio-Educational Benefit, Inclusion.

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### Introduction

Over the past few decades the participation of women, minorities, older people and people of different nationalities in the sports world, as well as in business in general, has increased<sup>(1)</sup>. In fact, the increasing diversity of today's society, both in social and cultural terms and in skills, makes it increasingly important to focus on the aspects of interculturalism, transfer and management of diversity in all those contexts that have educational tasks, such as school and sport<sup>(2)</sup>. A constructive management of diversity, whether it is social or cultural, does not involve only the comparison with others and their differences, but also the recognition of the shared common goals and interests. Precisely sport, in fact, is one of the main sectors characterized by a plurality of relationships between individuals of different races, cultures, social statuses, physical and mental characteristics, economic conditions, etc.

As a consequence, if such diversities (of whatever kind they may be) were a critical issue on a management level, as unfortunately often happens during sport events and TV programs, there is the risk of undermining the sustainable development of sport over time, also from a socio-educational and

economic point of view. A possible solution may be the adoption of the approach, called Diversity Management in the sports sector.

### Sport and Diversity: A literature analysis

The research methodology used is based on a study of the literature regarding the relationship between sport and diversity in order to locate a management model efficient.

In the current social environment there is the presence of a plurality of subjects that the individual considers different from himself for a variety of characteristics (racial, ethnic, cultural, social, physical, etc.) with whom he establishes a series of relationships of different kind, including those economic, social, , working, recreational, etc. In this sense, for its nature, sport is a primary context where what has been described above increasingly occurs, with the aim of pursuing not only an athletic performance outcome, but also socio-educational and economic objectives<sup>(3-8)</sup>.

Sport shows how the conflict can be disciplined and streamlined through rules that ousted violence, define roles, and determine diversities. It is the accomplished allegory of a restricted democracy, which

strives to build a set of rules and principles that can regulate the social conflict in an unbloody manner. The sport game becomes an exemplar configuration, through which the reasons for cooperation and those for the conflict are acknowledged and implemented regardless of the diversities between individuals<sup>(9-15)</sup>.

Sport should always make emerge the need to excel, cooperate, respect the rules and laws of the community, its role as a support for a policy of health and hygiene and, above all, the cohesive function with respect to the ethnic, religious and social diversities, which would allow it to provide a major contribution to the set up of modern nations<sup>(13-17)</sup>.

Sport understood as an institutionalized game reproduces more or less the norms, values and mechanisms of reward and sanction of the social structure. Its rules and rituals generate identification and integration processes which strengthen the dominant hierarchies and values. The culture of competition makes social distances explicit, producing sub-cultural membership circuits. It often provides the symbolic apparatuses useful to generate the illusion of the vertical mobility like the myth of the non-white champion in the USA that, in the public imagination, feeds the rhetoric of the unlimited opportunities, namely the ideological foundation of the American Dream<sup>(12-15)</sup>.

Moreover, through sport, it's possible to get a cross communication among all the nations, religions, ethnicities, even in the cases of physical and mental disabilities with the awareness that the comparison, knowledge and exchange are the foundations of all the projects and actions that aim at fighting against the problem of discrimination. The meeting and interweaving of relationship generates chance to get to know each other and overcome fears and prejudices which, in most cases, give rise to the phenomena of social exclusion<sup>(3-6, 18-20)</sup>. As pointed out before, it is clear that sport should facilitate the process of global integration, able to consider every diversity as a resource to be exploited in order to achieve positive outcomes effectively and efficiently both in economical and social terms, as well as in terms of physical performances; yet it often happens that in the stands, in the comments of the media, in the same rules governing federations up to the small amateur leagues, there are episodes of exclusion.

This denotes a diversity management that is not able to exploit the enormous potential of the sports sector and that raises real barriers to the development of this sector from all the previously described standpoints. In this regard, the adoption of Diversity

Management is assumed as a means to solve such management problem with educative and social consequences.

### Benefit of Diversity Management in Sport Dimension

It is important to emphasize that the model of diversity management has the ability to develop a series of potential benefits in the sports sector.

In the literature, it has been proven that the analyzed management model can generate a number of socio-educational benefits that are perfectly contextualized in the sports sector too and, therefore, can act positively on diversity understood as a critical issue in sport. The following table shows in detail its benefits which can be potentially transferred to a sport level<sup>(3-8, 12, 15, 21-23)</sup> (table 1).

SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of the interaction between different ethnic groups;</li> <li>• Incentive to cultural change;</li> <li>• Fight against prejudices;</li> <li>• Increased commitment of employees;</li> <li>• Set up of a more harmonious working environment.</li> </ul>

**Table 1:** The socio-educational benefits of Diversity Management.

Source: *Our Elaboration*

First of all it is important to specify that the adoption of the Diversity Management principles provides the ability to identify, and therefore satisfy, a greater number of consumers' preferences; just think of the new sports goods and services for people with disabilities<sup>(4-7, 20-23)</sup>.

However, for what concerns the social benefits, their direct contribution refers to the possibility to reach efficiently the social and educational goal that represents one of the pillars of the sports system.

The items listed in the table, in fact, represent a greater possibility of guaranteeing the acceptance and inclusion of diversity in sports, no longer conceived as an obstacle or a limitation, but as a resource on which to bet for a cultural progress. The set up of a more harmonious sporting environment, able to foster collaboration between individuals different from each other for various reasons, is an incentive to behave correctly towards others without any form of prejudice.

The social benefits are also the basis for the achievement of the economic ones, and the potential pursuit of a sporting goal plays an important role

too. A sports reality managed through the respect for others, the social inclusion and the enhancement of the diversity of its human resources fully embodies the key principles able to go over the natural limit of the physical performances of any athlete<sup>(9-14)</sup>.

The team spirit is enhanced, because every single unit maximizes its productivity, that is, provides a valuable contribution to the final outcome; this also happens in individual sports as the concept of "team" is understood in an expression that is very close to that of "company team" and takes into consideration, in fact, the entire group made up of the management, the coaches/instructors, the athletes and all those who contribute to the functioning of the sporting activity.

In addition, Diversity Management also contributes to a financial equilibrium in the long term that guarantees a structural solidity in the planning and investment over time, on which the athletes and the managers can rely for the preparation and planning of their sports and company activities.

## Conclusions

To date, the achievement of an athletic, individual or team performance, superior to that of an opponent, is no longer the main objective of the sport activity. In fact, it goes hand in hand with socio-educational goals that become particularly important in the organization and management of sport.

Starting from this assumption, it was analyzed that a non-performing management of a diversity (be it racial, sexual, physical, cultural, social, economic, etc.) in the sports sector, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, leads to a difficulty in pursuing these objectives.

Consequently, manage diversity in the sport system, like in other entrepreneurial contexts, has proved to be an action of fundamental importance for the achievement and improvement of a cultural, educational and social condition.

In this regard, the paper has pointed out that through the adoption of the Diversity Management model in the sports context it is possible to value diversities, which become resources able not only to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, but also to stimulate a socio-educative benefit and make it sustainable in the long run.

In fact, the management approach of this model allows to develop many advantages both educative and socially, useful to promote a cultural development of sport which is enriched by diversity and

enhances the individual characteristics of every resource in order to satisfy the general wellbeing.

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