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Working towards evidence based policies for grass-root sport in Europe

With the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, Sport has become a competence area of the European Union. On the basis of the White Paper on Sport, the European Union can take new supporting initiatives, coordinating and complementing the work of and in the Member States regarding the provision of sport facilities and opportunities.

ISCA Europe strongly supports that both EU and national policies on Sport are increasingly being **evidence based**, taking into account the actual situation and challenges regarding e.g. financing, facilities and volunteering. At the same time, we strongly encourage the European institutions to give the grass-root sport and physical activity sector a prominent role in the coming EU Sports initiatives.

Grass-root sport (Sport for All, participation sport), is engaging 40 % of all Europeans in physical activity on a regular basis. If we add to this the number of Europeans who are physically active in other ways than sport, 65 % identify themselves as active on regular basis (Eurobarometer, 2010).

However, there is a considerable gap between European countries in regard of the degree of involvement of the citizen in public life in general, and in sport in particular.

Close the physical activity gap by giving all Europeans the opportunity to practice sport

If all European societies reached the participation level of the countries with the highest grass-root sport participation, **150 million Europeans more would be regularly active in sport**.

The European Union clearly has the potential to increase the number of citizens being regularly active in sport and physical activity with another 100 million individuals – and we believe that should be our common goal.

VISION: 100 MILLION MORE EU CITIZENS ACTIVE IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BY 2020

The benefits of such a vision are clear. From previous research we can derive that consequences would include an increase in the quality of life and a decrease in illnesses and deaths (WHO, 2006); physical inactivity alone is causing 10% of deaths in Europe. Further, such an increase in citizens' physical activity level would expand the economy related to the sport sector with approximately 50 bn € alone in household spending (Amnyos & Eurostrategies, 2010).

To reach the aforementioned goal, we have to innovate, develop and invest in the sport and physical activity sector. The most efficient way would be to invest in the three core pillars of grass-root sport:

- Public funding and investment in grass-root sport
- Development and access to engaging facilities and equipment
- Recruitment and training of volunteers

If these aspects are fostered, the societal benefits of physically active citizens will materialize in an improvement of health, active societies and social cohesion.



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Grass-root sport should thus be viewed as an instrument of intercultural dialogue, inclusion of disadvantaged citizens and promoting good practices in environmental education.

We therefore encourage the above mentioned three areas to be the priority of the future initiative of the European Union in Sport, as described below.

Finance

Public funding and investment in grass-root sport and physical activity

By providing financial support to sport for all, public authorities are advancing the apparent societal benefits of the sector and backing the civil society actors that sustain it. An investment in the grass-root sport sector has an extremely positive cost-benefit ratio, as it will contribute to a reduction in national welfare costs due to a substantial decrease in collateral costs arising from health problems and social disengagement.

Policies of social inclusion and integration can thus reduce costs in several other sectors (sport as an instrument of multicultural integration, as antidote against conflicts and difficult situations in disadvantaged areas, as an instrument of dialogue between different groups of citizens, as a means of sustainable tourism and as promoter of actions at low environmental impact)

The challenge

- Reduction in public funding for grass-root sport at national and municipal level
- Higher proportion of public funding for sport is directed towards the increasingly costly elite sport
- Private sponsorship concentrates around media - exposing elite and entertainment/professional sport

The solution

- Ensure public funding by creating legal provisions and sustainable funding systems, motivating the public sector to support physical activity (health, outdoor /urban planning, education, transport)
- View and value public funding as an investment, which is multiplied by the volunteer work and pays off in higher life quality, social cohesion and reduced health care costs.
- Establish fiscal incitements animating the private sector to establish sponsorship and corporate social responsibility based funding to grass-root sport
- Establish fiscal incitement stimulating increased household spending on sport and physical activity

Examples

- Firm regulation of the betting market that ensures financial support for grass-root sport.
- Tax incentives for companies investing in or sponsoring grass-root sport.
- Establishment of a public fund for sport and physical activity promotion, financed via reduced health care costs.
- Regulation of the Sport TV right market, guaranteeing a percentage of revenues to grass-root sport.
- Tax exemptions on household spending in sport and physical activity, e.g. club membership, private donations.

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Facilities

Development and access to engaging facilities and equipment

Facilities play a central role for the level of participation in sport and physical activity. Facilities should be accessible, motivating and respond to current demands of the various target groups. The distance to the facility is crucial for the level of participation. If users have to spend more than 20-30 minutes to reach the facility, it is considered as a major barrier for participation.

Efficient management, constant innovation and adaption to new trends are essential to support new activities and increase participation.

The challenge

- Most funding is spent on big sport arenas with little or no usage for grass-root sport and recreational physical activity.
- Establishment and maintenance of traditional sport facilities is straining public budgets.
- Lack of innovative and flexible facilities that cater for special target groups and new trends.
- Inefficient facility management results in high costs and low benefits for the users.

The solution

- Establish a new public-private financial model for investing in grass-root sport facilities.
- Develop efficient facility management models in cooperation with the grass-root sport sector.
- Develop national and European knowledge centres for innovative facilities and equipment.
- Increase the utilization of existing public and private facilities by creating flexible access.
- Incorporate and develop local outdoor environment for activities suitable for e.g. running, cycling, kayaking and street activities.
- Start cross-sector cooperation in facility development among e.g. architects, urban planners and nature managers, for instance by making a Facility Development Inspiration Catalogue with best practice examples from across Europe

Examples

- Public invitation and incitements to private donors to co-finance facility construction.
- Public sector consulting grass-root sport representatives in the planning and construction of new sport facilities and designing them in a way to meet the users' needs.
- Outsourcing of facility management to grass-root sport organizations.
- Investment in sport facilities as an obligation both in local city plans and for private construction companies, when erecting new buildings.
- Incorporating Sport and physical activity in city planning such as in parks, "green corridors" and harbor baths.
- Providing sport-friendly nature facilities, giving access to forests, fields, seaways, etc.



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Volunteers

Recruitment and training of volunteers

Voluntary work is considered the most important resource of the grass-root sport sector, and it is estimated that a large part of the sport sector would not exist without volunteers.

Seven percent of the Europeans or 35 million citizens are volunteering in sport, according to a Commission initiated study (2010). However, in nine European countries twice as many as average (14 % or more) are doing volunteer work in sport. More than 17 million Europeans are investing more than six hours per month in voluntary work in sport.

Volunteers are multipliers – both financially and activity wise. Volunteers are a committed and inexpensive resource for societies. Besides giving one's time and personal resources to other citizens by volunteering, the volunteers themselves also develop their knowledge and skills through practice and personal non-formal and informal education processes – this is indeed European Life Long Learning in massive scale.

The challenge

- Fewer volunteers among others due to demographic changes.
- Harder to recruit new volunteers.
- More complicated to be a volunteer as national regulations and rules governing sport tend to become more complicated and restrictive.

The solution

- Remove barriers and regulations which complicate doing volunteer work.
- Recognize and give credit for voluntary work in education, employment, etc.
- Formal recognition of the competences and skills gained through voluntary work.
- Support of education programmes and education systems for volunteers in grass-root sport.

Examples

- Documented volunteer work is giving “access points” when applying for further education.
- Support the voluntary engagements of job-seekers receiving unemployment benefits.
- Nationally supported internship systems for young people in grass-root sport organizations.
- Partnerships with municipalities on non-formal education programmes for volunteers.



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Conclusion:

- ISCA Europe strongly supports that both EU and national policies on Sport are increasingly being **evidence based**, taking into account the actual situation and challenges regarding e.g. financing, facilities and volunteering. At the same time, we strongly encourage European institutions to grant the grass-root sport and physical activity sector a prominent role in the coming EU Sports initiatives.
- Based on the evidence from the EU member states, we propose the common vision to be **'100 million more EU citizens active in sport and physical activity by 2020'**.
- We propose a consolidated policy response and investment in the three core pillars of grass-root sport:
 - public funding and investments
 - Development and access to engaging sport facilities and equipment
 - Recruitment and training of volunteers

ISCA Europe consists of the 45 European member organizations of the International Sport and Culture Association.

ISCA Europe has participated in a structured dialogue with the EU over the last decade. Our European activities have included more than 20 projects and contracts with the European Commission in the areas related to sport, health, youth, education and citizenship. ISCA is a member of the European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning and the International Platform for Sport and Development.

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