

## **From international and national sports policies to local social actions**

**Antonio Borgogni**

University of Cassino, Italy

**Abstract:** From the beginning of the nineties, the efficacy of Italian welfare policies, particularly those referring to sport, is closely linked to the changes which have occurred between local authorities, the State and the third sector. These changes must also be seen in relation to the international tendencies and processes taking place in the last decade of the previous century which aimed at promoting citizen participation, sustainability and children's rights. At the same time, within the third sector, the sports associations involved in the promotion of social sports began to voice their concerns regarding the welfare policies thanks also to the increase in their number in those years. In fact, the year 2000 saw the introduction of several laws which focused on the development of participatory decision-making at local level, as well as the financing of social projects proposed by the sports associations. This article describes the actions brought about as a result of those political decisions by outlining the applicative case of a national project conducted by the UISP, the leading Italian sports association, which, through different actions and methods in various cities, involved young people as active protagonists in the project.

**Keywords:** well-being, third sector, social sport, participation.

### **Introduction**

The outlook of this article will focus mainly on the policies initiated during the nineties, partially transformed into laws and carried out during the centre-left Government (1996-2001), which have maintained their effects until now even if they have often passed through opposite policies of the centre-right government (2001-2006). More recently, the Prodi government's attempt to bring about a reform of sport, aimed to define and privilege "citizenship sport", failed owing to the fall of the government (2006-2008). The article presents and analyses the local effects caused by those policies, which, in their turn, were affected by international processes and legislature leading the field in the democratization of decision-making practices.

### **1 Welfare policies affecting sport**

The relationship between sport and the welfare system in Italy can best be explained by illustrating the particular position that sports-related social policies have occupied during the formation and consolidation of the Italian Welfare State, and by pointing out some special features of the Italian model. Italy's welfare system is subject to considerable controversy, both in its peculiar historical development and in its very substance. The solutions attempted over time, in terms of individual policies and legisla-

tive and regulatory combinations, have only irregularly and unevenly covered the demands for intervention originating from a social system that has experienced an incomplete modernization.

Sports-related welfare policies have been markedly lacking in legislative frameworks of reference, consolidated action models, and consistent problem solving strategies. During the 1990s the measures taken by the centre-left governments to comply with the “Maastricht parameters”, and to bring the lira into the European single currency tended to prevail over strategic and long-term orientations. The financial restoration policies begun in the second half of the 1990s, brought to light the need for urgent reform of the welfare system itself. Moreover, the longstanding debate on reforming the pension system – also needed to deal with an increasingly old population – has had a certain distorting effect.

On the whole, the general image of the Italian welfare system among its citizens is that of an inefficient arrangement in need of a healthy reorganization and streamlining intervention. The absence of a systematic framework of rules and models of action has, in fact, made overall response to the levels of need uneven. Furthermore, the renewed leading role of local bodies in the overall arrangement of institutional powers, in the aftermath of the administrative reform of 1993, has yet to generate intervention strategies with the adequacy and rationality of action needed to raise the quality of local welfare and to distinguish its responsibilities from state policies.

Only in the 1990s did the state machine begin to adjust to these new directions, first by reforming the local electoral system, then by strengthening delegation to peripheral administrations and emanating decrees to streamline bureaucratic procedures until ushering in an authentic constituent phase which was to lead to a complete model of federalism, entrusting the central state with the tasks of political guidance, representation, and subsidization, and delegating almost all the administrative responsibilities to the local powers. (Ferrari et al., 2001)

The tendencies developed during the 1990s yielded three currents of social policies: assistance to the elderly, assistance to the disabled, and policies to reduce juvenile problems.

A crucial point in reconstructing the itineraries of the Italian welfare system is that of the relationship between centre and periphery, and the definition of functions and powers institutionally granted to the local autonomies. The creation of the Regions, which the constitutional charter of the 1948 had indicated as crucial to the better function of the state structure, occurred only in 1970, after which it went through a long breaking-in period.

During delegation to local autonomies – this time to the municipalities – in 1977, a presidential decree, ratified the obligation to complete the transfer, from the State to the Regions, of assets, resources, responsibilities, and personnel that were still within the sphere of the state.

These changes in administration form the basis of the development of relations between welfare policies, the third sector and the sports system.

## 2 The Second Republic:<sup>1</sup> the third sector and the sports system keep in contact

The growth of the third sector.

During the seventies and eighties the powerful Italian Olympic Committee (C.O.N.I.) lost a part of its hegemony. The partial but, from the perspective of this article, very important innovation was the formal legitimization of the role performed by the “sports promotion bodies” which, after being recognized in their function as “associations with social purposes”, were admitted into the official sports system. As a typical result of the Italian sport and political model, the bodies were created by direct emanation of the political parties or the religious associations.

This cultural and organizational evolution originated in the transformations that took place with regard to the way Italians participated in sport, in terms of both quality and quantity. Since the late 1960s, participation in various kinds of physical/motor activities had gained growing numbers of citizens. The female component showed impressive growth, but there was also a massive growth in participation of the elderly, who discovered participation as an active strategy against aging. After the progressive consolidation of the third sector during the 1980s, the 1990s saw a growth and the definitive affirmation of the sector: while its contribution to Italy’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) during the 1980s stalled at 1% per year, as against an average of 4.6% in the other large European nations, and the employed made up 1% of the total, in 1999 the workers employed in the non profit sector were 3.5% of the total and the turnover rose to 2.7% of the GDP (Ranci, 2001). During one year, 1.5 million Italians take part in at least one volunteer-work initiative, and 560,000 do so at least two afternoons per week.

At the end of the nineties, the sector comprised 150,000 voluntary associations, 15,000 organizations operating within the sector of social solidarity, 4,250 social cooperatives, over 2000 foundations and 18,000 various other structures. About 40,000 of these different organizations were economically important from the point of view of employment and turnover (Barbetta, 2000; Barbetta & Schena, 2000).

At the end of the last millennium, after a twenty-year period of intense growth, the Italian third sector may be collocated, in terms of quantity, immediately behind Germany and close to the levels of France and Great Britain

The growth in voluntary work at the end of the 1990s contributed partly to its institutional recognition. The third sector in Italy was, in fact, formally consulted in the definition of sectorial policies and the preparation of the Budget law. In December 2000, by specific request of the third sector, Parliament approved the law n. 383 on *Disciplina delle associazioni di promozione sociale* (Law on Social Promotion Association), which still governs social promotion. This law continues to ensure significant fiscal and administrative advantages for non-profit organizations by providing them

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1 The period referred to, still in progress, is from the beginning of the political and institutional crisis linked to the scandal called “Tangentopoli” in 1992, and may be defined by the 1994 elections, which were held with the new majority electoral system.

with considerable developmental possibilities (Ferrari et al., 2001). On the whole, it would seem that the Italian model of the third sector in its passage towards institutionalization is gradually smoothing out its original defects.

### The political situation

These changes have taken place within a political situation of destabilization and continual change.

In the early 1990s, the transition from the First to the Second Republic, marked by the crisis of the legitimacy of the institutions involved in the “Tangentopoli” corruption scandal, by the passage to a majority electoral system, by the disappearance of the old parties, and by the advent of new political players, was complex, and at times fraught with difficulty.

After the Berlusconi government (1994), the centre-left ruled Italy for five years (1996-2001) with three different coalitions (Prodi, D'Alema, Amato). Those governments placed greater attention on sport as a widespread social issue. Institutionally, this phase also saw an increased influence by the third sector, sanctioned by the Padua agreement of 1998 which was signed by the leaders of the larger non-profit associations, including the major sports promotion bodies, and Prime Minister Prodi. This was the climate which generated the 1998's innovative legislation on non-profit organizations of social utility (*organizzazioni non lucrative di utilità sociale – Onlus*), on assistance (2000), and, as mentioned above, on social promotion (2000).

### The sports system

Although these measures did not regard sports activity specifically, they had positive effects on the operation of the basic clubs and on their tax and administrative arrangements. However, there were also interventions aimed directly at sport and in some cases highly innovative – and therefore destined to unleash resistance and conflicts, with the CONI system naturally at the epicentre. Among the legislative measures passed were: the establishment of the university Department of Sports Sciences which brought Italy in line with the prevailing international legislations; the establishment of *Comitato sport per tutti* (Sport for all Committee), the promotion bodies and local autonomies were recognized as true “organs” of the sports system, and no longer merely as beneficiaries of financial distributions and members – as they were earlier – of a non-influential “council” subordinate to the Olympic Committee.

On the strength of their recognized institutional role, the major associations developed intervention programmes in the areas of social issues, forming agreements with the Ministries of Justice and Social affairs. Protocols of understanding were signed with the Ministry of Education for motor education campaigns in the schools, where for years CONI had imposed a model based on the Youth Games and the Student Championships, with exclusively competitive aims. Experiments on the urban environment and natural parks were started in cooperation the Environment Ministry and ecological associations.

Most municipalities set up local welfare initiatives, in which an essential operative function was acquired by the conventions signed with non-profit sports organizations for programmes aimed at the disabled, the elderly, immigrants, and convicts.

This cultural transition was well represented by the largest sport for all Association in Italy: the UISP – created in 1948 as an emanation of the Left-wing parties – which changed its name in 1991 to become *Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti* (the Italian union of sport for everyone, and no longer *sport popolare* – popular sport), and proclaimed its transformation from a sports promotion body to an association of citizens.

A strategic passage in the direction of fully introducing sport into the context of public policies was the national sports conference held in Rome in December 2000. The conference outlined the contours of a deep reform of the system. In the government's intentions, this reform was linked to two basic choices: (a) fully inserting sport into public policies and the welfare state's responsibilities; (b) decentralizing the sports system in the territory, in line with the state's incipient federalist reform. At the conclusion of the national conference, the Ministry announced the directions that were to usher in the reform and democratization of the sports system. The right to sport, understood as an authentic "new right of citizenship", was to be introduced into the charter of federal autonomies, supplementing the Republican Constitution of 1948. A national basic sport fund was established and administered entirely by the regions and local autonomies, beyond the control of the Olympic body (Porro, 1999).

Thus, the Italian government intended to place sport, once and for all, within the framework of "public assets" and to introduce it into the political agenda of federal institutional reform. Italy will strive in this way to include, in its own legislation, the directives of the EU's Nice summit of December 2000, which drew a clear distinction between high-level sport and sport for everyone, stressed the latter's potential social integration functions, and showed the way of "joint cooperation" between commercial sport and sport for the citizens.

Those decisions opened the sports system to a broader field of actions: social prevention, inclusion, widening of age groups, territorial participative planning of sports and play grounds, analysis of the environmental impact of small sports events, and so on.

Maybe the most important success of this new deal in sport has been the need to enter into a project-oriented mentality, quite new for a sports system used to requesting and waiting for funding.

Of the legislative interventions that were to follow this re-ordering, certainly the three most important provisions for the purposes of developing social policies at local level were the law no. 285, approved in 1997 (mostly dedicated to children); the 383 approved in 2000 (which recognized the role of the Social Promotion Associations.); the 328, also approved in 2000, (which established the principle of the need for an integrated system for developing interventions and services at local level and, through the "Area Plans", introduces the participative paradigm in the public decision making process).

The Ministero dei Beni culturali (Ministry of Cultural Assets) in that period, vested with powers of “supervision” over the sports system, officially declared in its own guideline document (July 1999) declaring that “affirming citizens’ right to sport is an integral part of welfare reform”.

### **3 The international frame**

In parallel with this process of deep changes, the welfare system in Italy during the nineties was influenced by new sensibilities which developed new approaches and procedures such as new rights of citizenship, the sustainable paradigm, and participative method. A short analysis of these approaches lead us to list: a) Children’s rights, as sanctioned by the approval of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 in New York which became law 176 in 1991 in Italy; this field opened the road to the above mentioned law 285 (1997), the first one focused on childhood as a subject of rights and not only the object of adult or parental attention; b) the idea of sport as a right for the citizenship which, financed by law 383/2000, opened the social approach to sport to experimentation in a systematic way; c) the increasing attention drawn to the environment, deeply contributing to the far increasing diffusion of the sustainability paradigm; d) strictly related to the latter, the consciousness of a decreasing quality of life in the urban context, and the demand for more spaces for children (e.g. the project “The sustainable cities of boys and girls” of the Environment Ministry), for the body and for non formal sports and playgrounds (environment related sports events like the run “Vivicittà” (“Live the city”) or more structured projects of urban rehabilitation); e) participative processes coming from northern European experience and using the sustainable paradigm as a frame (Agenda 21, Aalborg commitment 1994).

Just as a reminder of how far this process of influence between global and local is progressing we should bear in mind that, in 2007, the European Commission “White Paper on Sport” was received enthusiastically by the Italian sport for all associations because they recognized, in the relevance given to the social role of sport, the very acknowledgment of citizenship sport in public policies.

The aforementioned international and national processes have led to new cultural and political sensibilities displayed in laws which are not only more attentive to social phenomena, but also designed to decentralize in order to create more involvement on the part of local authorities and associations. Among the laws already quoted, the 383 of 2000, allowed the associations to receive, through public notification, financing aimed at developing social actions at national or local level.

The law concedes a definitive right of citizenship to the associations which promote social actions by official registering them, and providing a national centre as well as national funding. The aim is to favour the formation of new associations and consolidate those already in existence.

The project presented in the following paragraph falls within the application of this law.

## 4 The “Young People” project: models of social prevention and protection

The project, carried out by the UISP at both national and local levels in 2003/04, has been chosen because of its richness and complexity. Different experiences, coordinated at national level and carried out in close connection with local administration, have built a coherent example of the steps leading to connect global (national but also influenced by international processes, as mentioned above) and local actions aimed not only at discovering the best practices but also at initiating new projects.

The project develops positive models that put young people in touch with a participative community.

UISP experimented multiple projects throughout the national territory, aimed at social prevention and protection of young people between the ages of 14 and 25 years. The project idea developed by monitoring experiences at various levels, aimed at the exchange of best practices and the search for models that can be reproduced in the various territorial contexts, taking into account their possible diversities. “We want to implement a system project to promote a network of initiatives on the national territory where young people’s self-promotion and participation emerges, moving them closer to practising active citizenship” (UISP, 2005, 79).

### 4.1 Methodology

Keywords of the project were active inclusion, integration and self-promotion. The methodological reflection, carried out with the coordinators of the project, allowed us to identify methods, approaches and procedures which can become models of interventions on young people. Those models should be transferable not only inside the Association’s various territorial contexts, but also outside the Association.

In order to validate the project and elaborate intervention criteria which are useful tools for other situations, the UISP engaged two methodologists, university lecturers in the field of Economics and Social Sciences,<sup>2</sup> to study, validate and map the project models deriving from three different situations in the cities of Ferrara, Genoa and Turin. A project data bank was produced as a result of this activity which includes tools, methodologies and a project archive. The methodology which was created allowed budding in five other cities. Two forums on the young people’s theme were organized.

### 4.2 Validation

The validation was a process that allowed us to have a model to apply to different contexts. Specifically within this project, the aim of the validation phase was to test, from a sociological and economical point of view, some local interventions commonly considered to be of good quality. The main goal of this validation process was linked to creating a unitary intervention methodology through planning guidelines containing

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2 Maurizio Marano, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics, University of Bologna; Giulio Moini, Researcher, Faculty of Sociology, University of Rome “La Sapienza”.

instructions so that all the territories could implement social promotion interventions, supported by tools that were scientifically based yet easy to apply.

### 4.3 Case Studies

#### 4.3.1 *GENOA Olympic Maghreb*

The main aim of the project is the secondary prevention of hardship and criminality for non EU-citizen minors aged between 12 and 21 years, while promoting adulthood and independence.

The Olympic Maghreb Club is a centre, managed by the local UISP Committee, aimed at non EU-citizen minors, prevalently North Africans, often clandestine; few other ethnic groups are present. They live in the city in dire conditions, often in a state of manifest deviance at high risk of being involved in criminal activities, and in some cases permanence in the minor penal area. The Club, in convention with the Municipality of Genoa has its office in the heart of the historic centre and offers about 120 participants an array of possibilities concerning individual or group needs.

“*Low threshold services centre*” can be the definition of the centre’s main activity. At the club, minors can make use of the daily services such as showers for personal hygiene, washing and drying laundry, evening snack or meal, shelter.

The Olympic Maghreb Club is a poly-functional centre aimed, on the one hand, at solutions to urgent problems and, on the other, at promoting individual and group resources and competences, favouring socialization, self-promotion and self-organization skills. All interventions are aimed at the project goal: 1) the low threshold services centre; 2) educational, recreational and socializing activity centre: during evening hours (6-10 pm) users participate in activities suited to their age group, such as sports (mainly soccer) inside and outside the club, musical activities, film forums, TV-videos, ethnic festivities, etc. ...; 3) educational accompaniment for minors who have shown a need or interest in approaching school, work, institutions or the National Health Service; 4) work insertion. There are four educators, two volunteers and one coordinator.

#### 4.3.2 *FERRARA Il corpo va in città – (The body goes to the city). Involvement of informal groups of young people in territorial planning*

The “*Il corpo va in città*” was a project, now an Association, active in Ferrara, of participative town planning: it involves the citizens in decisions regarding restructuring spaces and residential roads through surveys, town planning laboratories, information, and animation. The distinguishing aspect of the project is the proposal of the body as an analyzer of the quality of life in town:

the body we are talking about is the one of daily gestures that coordinates itself to climb steps or kerbs, that plays, rides a bicycle, roller-blades, that sits down, shakes hands, makes friends, is involved in sport (Balzani & Borgogni, 2003, 82).



The heading group of the project, carried out in cooperation with UISP Committee and the Faculty of Architecture of Ferrara, is interdisciplinary, composed of educationists, psychologists, architects and physical educators. The focus of the actions here described was on teenagers and young adults who have been involved in territorial town planning actions.

The actions carried out and monitored by this projects are

- the one within the Local Agenda21, in which the interventions involved high school students and were aimed at re-planning the schoolyards;
- the one in the Barco neighbourhood of Ferrara; here the informal territorial planning with young people on the spot (on the benches, under the trees, on the boundaries of public parks) was included in a larger research, whose aim was to investigate the mutual perception between the old and new inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The research was followed by street workshops with young people and by planning workshops with specifically chosen adults.

The method, consisting in “hooking” and involving young people, has been based on a mixed use of simple tools and materials together with advanced technologies. These projects were carried out in collaboration with “Area Giovani”, a service for the young people of the Municipality of Ferrara. The initial phase of sensitization, based on street focus groups, was followed by a town planning survey, based on Kevin Lynch’s method of “mental maps” (1960) and on the system of perceptive qualitative survey developed by the Department of Architecture of the University of Ferrara; the latter allowed us to construct maps based on the senses and sensations.

These strategies of planning urban spaces reached the following objectives and results: offering metaproject models to public administration, committed to their realization; helping young people to trace paths of protagonism/citizenship; training new professional figures (so-called “operatori diffusi”, i.e. “broad actors”), who emerge, in the sense of the term used by E. Morin (1986), from sharing different knowledge systems; sensitizing young people to their living environments and in the planning and realization of some of the town planning interventions proposed.

#### 4.3.3 *TORINO prima & doping*

The idea came from the previous project financed by the European Community called “Dracula doesn’t drink doping” and carried out in the cities of Avellino, Siena and Turin. The main objective was to sensitize as many youths as possible on the issue of drug-related poisoning and doping through their direct involvement in the definition and creation of the most appropriate communication codes to their peers, which derive from an empiric, values and languages-related development. In comparison with the acknowledged scarce effectiveness of “traditional” campaigns when addressed to young people, this initiative considers youths as expert protagonists in the analysis of the phenomenon and related behaviours. The target group was composed of some secondary school pupils.

The project includes a sensitization and information campaign organized by young people for young people on the issues of drug-related poisoning and doping in sports.

“Peers” are often used in the educational work, as they are useful in the contact phase of forming a group, as mediators in language and content.

The results achieved: diffusion of information on the problems and on the dangers linked to drug-related poisoning and doping affecting large groups of young people. Positive influence the youths’ perception of psychophysical well-being and, consequently, on their lifestyle choices; acquisition of documents on drug-related poisoning and doping of innovative nature liable to have a deeper impact. The output was the creation of communication tools like a web page and brochures.

#### 4.4 “Budding”

The contents and methods of the three projects allowed us to carry out a “budding” phase in which five UISP Committees developed similar projects: Campobasso, Livorno and Orvieto chose the “I giovani per i giovani contro il doping” action to be developed in their towns; Nova Siri and Pesaro chose the “Involvement of young people in territorial planning” action as a model.

#### 4.5 Evaluation method (excerpt from the methodologists final report) (UISP, 2005)

The evaluation method intended to integrate an economic/business system as well as one of a more sociological nature, in consistence with a multi-cultural logic that appears essential for the development of a non-profit organization such as the UISP.

Generally speaking, the concept of Best Practice describes the method by which a programme, an action or a measure is structured and developed that has been ascertained as: having a tangible impact; implementing durable changes; being potentially repeatable; developing a high degree of innovation.

The basic criteria isolated in order to evaluate the project best practices were: participation; realization of the project; punctuality; temporal continuity; growth/modularity of the projects marked by temporal continuity, correctness and administrative regularity; economic/financial sustainability.

With the aim to investigate these criteria, the evaluation format was divided into five main sections: 1. Definition of Best Practice; 2. Context analysis; 3. Project characteristics; 4. Networking; 5. Empowerment

A true impact evaluation will probably be possible only in a few years time, either inside or outside the association, in the territorial contexts where the budding phase took place and in other contexts. Nevertheless, the result is undoubtedly evident regarding quality and contents, given the use of a transverse methodology on operations of various content aimed at the young people. The success of the experience can certainly also be evaluated from the emotional point of view of the young men and women involved in the various projects, by the operators and managers directly or indirectly involved. From the association’s point of view, it meant entering the “young people’s planet” through the many initiatives aimed at them and trying to systemize the differences, by offering greater self-promotion directly to the young people in order to make them the main ones involved in the choices concerning them. The project

validated experiences consolidated in the association territories and initiated the budding of new projects, in accordance with experimented parameters. A data bank was also set up to collect project data, which in these years the association has processed and entered, and its characteristics can be defined as best practices.

## 5 Conclusions

Welfare policies, the third sector and sport in Italy all developed separately until the 1980s; from that point on, thanks also to the promotion of participatory processes and the declaration of rights at international level, a rapid evolution, even which, at times, originated from inconsistent political decisions, has led to greater synergy between these three contexts coinciding with the affirmation of the importance of subsidization which directly involves local bodies and associations. This development has also involved that part of the sports system carrying out projects of social promotion, giving them the recognition they had previously lacked. The laws promulgated between 1998 and 2000 have allowed those sports associations also recognized for promoting social actions, the opportunity to set up both integrated and large scale action projects.

The project herein described constitutes an example from various points of view: it is the junction in a network connecting new sensibilities carried out at both international and local levels; it presents a range of actions representing contexts in which socially promoted sport constitutes a significant and integrated part of welfare policies; it identifies methods aimed at involving young people as useful and repeatable tools for best practice in other contexts; it defines, from the social and economic points of view, monitoring criteria for the sustainability of similar projects; finally, it offers helpful, concrete tools not only for the development of actions but also for integrated welfare policies which place sport at the centre of solutions to problems and social promotion

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**Antonio Borgogni** is a Researcher at the Faculty of Motor Sciences at the University of Cassino. He carries out in-depth studies on the didactics of sports with particular emphasis on the social aspect of sport and the relationship between the body and the city through the theory that hypothesizes the body as the analyser of the quality of city life.