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## Sport Methodologies for People with Diversity

**Davide Di Palma**

Department of Movement and Wellbeing Sciences,  
University of Naples Parthenope  
Via Medina 40, 80133 Naples, Italy  
davide.dipalma@uniparthenope.it

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### **Abstract**

*The objective of this paper is to prove that Diversity Management is the combination of sport methodologies and management strategy able to pursue the multiple (social, sporting and economic) objectives of the sport system.*

*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.*

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**Keywords:** *Sport Methodologies; Diversity; Education; Social Benefit.*

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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 (Bollinger & Hofstede, 1989; Cesareo, 2000).

Infact, 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 (Granata, 2012). 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 main dictates of management model used in the company context, especially that of the U.S.A, which aims at valuing diversity. Through this approach, called Diversity Management, there would be attempts to pursue socio-economic benefits which can be obtained at a company level, also in the sports sector.

### **Research Methodology**

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.

The current socio-economic environment with which every individual deal everyday is now strongly influenced by the phenomenon of globalization, and by an elimination of any distance in the communication processes generated by the technological progress. As a consequence, this implies 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. (Alberici, 2007; Ambrosini, 2001).

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 (Caselli, 2003; Di Palma, 2014; Di Palma et al, 2016).

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 (Altavilla et al, 2014; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Farinelli, 2005).

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 (Houlihan & Malcolm, 2015; Isidori & Fraile, 2008).

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 (Porro, 2001).

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 (Isidori, 2012; Light & Dixon, 2007; Raiola et al, 2015; Di Palma et al, 2016).

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 economic and social consequences.

### **Results**

The research of the literature on sport and diversity has resulted in the need to consult a managerial model defined "diversity management" of which is described hereinafter the evolutionary path in time. In fact, result that this model is capable of valuing diversity.

The understanding of diversity has been evolving since the Seventies, when the term was used mainly in reference to minorities and women in the labor market. It has long been clear for the managers that talking about workforce diversity meant increasing the participation of women and members of national and ethnic minorities, thus hiring more workers belonging to "identity" groups. According to a constitutional amendment of 1974-1975, the U.S. Government pushed companies to hire more women and members of minorities, and give them more opportunities of professional growth (Brazzel, 2003).

Diversity experts have begun to question the effectiveness of the so-called affirmative actions. They have noticed that they were often isolated interventions in the field of human resources, which could not move out into the whole company and the working environment. In the beginning, creative recruiting and hiring methods were developed to change the human mosaic in the company. However, staff turnover rate was often high and women and members of minorities were not progressing up in the internal hierarchies as had been hoped. The beneficiaries of the actions ended up being stigmatized as unqualified. The dominant culture of white Anglo-Saxon men perceived equal opportunity as a covert form of reverse discrimination. As a result, equal opportunity programs in companies were often dismantled or neglected without bringing the expected benefits (Brazzel, 2003; Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998).

The need to move beyond the human resources department (and at the same time include it) is clear in the principles of the management model of Diversity Management, which acts as an active and inclusive policy for diversity in the company context and, as a direct consequence, for the community.

Diversity Management is, in fact, something more than just understanding and accepting diversity as such. The main question is analyzing how a company can actively and strategically deal with diversity. So it is about identifying what activities need to be placed into motion, in order to implement effectively a company strategy which integrates diversity as an asset into its identity (Mathews, 2010).

First of all, in this regard, a company needs to know whether and why it needs a strategy for diversity; secondly, it must carry out a self-analysis in terms of accommodation since, in order to accommodate certain differences, the company has to acknowledge and respect them. Thirdly, the integration process could be accompanied by tensions which should be accepted and resolved in a positive way (change management) Fourthly (and finally), probably the whole enterprise will have to change somehow, otherwise there would not be the cultural change needed for valuing diversity and the company itself (Bombelli, 2003; Castellucci et al, 2009).

In fact, once the focus of a company is on recognizing relevant differences and similarities within the company and in its environment, the next question is how to manage it all; the sensitivity to differences is necessary but not sufficient to make positive processes happen. As a result, Diversity Management is about integrating the ideas and practice of diversity into the managerial and learning processes within a company and its environment. Business decisions need to be taken in an atmosphere of trust, acceptance and appreciation. Thomas & Ely (1996) sum up this point very clearly: "Yet this new model for managing diversity lets the organization internalize differences among employees so that it learns and grows because of them. We are all on the same team with our differences not despite them".

Managers aim at getting results. They are normally not interested in the apparently pleasing grand theories. In order to achieve their objectives and gain advantage over their competitors, managers need to understand the external environment, the market, the company's mission, its vision, strategy and culture. So their main purpose is to be able to identify which is the mix of diversity with the potential to create for the company a strategic advantage and increase the ability to achieve the goals.

Having said all that, Diversity Management can be considered a process which creates added value for the company through an active and conscious development of a future-oriented, strategic and communication management process of accepting and using certain differences and similarities as a potential in an organization (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016).

### **Discussion**

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 management policies of inclusion, including Diversity Management, have a positive impact on various aspects of a company, including the improvement of the overall organization and of the skills and performance in areas such as communication, human resource management, identification of objectives and planning (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Serio, 2014).

More specifically, the analyzed management model can generate a number of social and economic 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 economic and social benefits at a company level, which can be potentially transferred to a sport level (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci et al, 2009; Laurinig, 2013).

**Table n. 1: The economic and social benefits of Diversity Management**

| <b>ECONOMIC BENEFITS</b>   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase in productivity;</li><li>• Encouragement to find innovative solutions;</li><li>• Ability to meet the most varied needs of consumers by increasing the customer base;</li><li>• Possibility to increase the competitiveness of the company.</li></ul>      |
| <b>SOCIAL BENEFITS</b>   |
| <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 <i>commitment</i> of employees;</li><li>• Set up of a more harmonious working environment.</li></ul> |

Source: Our Elaboration

It seems obvious that the first type of benefits will contribute directly to the pursuit of the economic objective that, over time, has become more and more important for the sports sector. Increasing the productivity of all human resources regardless of the specific characteristics, enhancing diversity and getting new managerial and marketing solutions allows for a considerable development of the whole world of sport. In addition, 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 (Castellucci et al, 2009; Di Palma et al, 2016).

The clear consequence of the above is the increasing competitiveness of the companies and the federal sports bodies, with a subsequent benefit for the whole economy (Di Palma, 2014). 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 (Altavilla et al, 2014; Isidori, 2012).

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 and economic 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 of an economic objective, and for the 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-economic benefit and make it sustainable in the long run.

In fact, the management approach of this model allows to develop many advantages both economically 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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