
Sport in the Prison System as a Training Tool to Ensure Processes of Re-Socialization

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Abstract

The purpose of this research work is to highlight the contribution that football can provide for the educational and formative recovery in prison. Prisoners are considered as weak points in the Italian prison system today, and this is why they need targeted educational interventions for their correct integration into the social context. This paper aims at promoting the educational importance of football according to the social life of any individual, with specific reference to young prisoners, analyzing both the psycho-physical and sociopedagogical point of view.

Keywords: Sport, Education, Prison System, Formative Growth, Re-Socialization.

Introduction

Sports activity, especially that carried out in team such as football, has considerable potential in terms of social and educational support for any individual.

In particular, this potential finds its exaltation when intervening in uncomfortable contexts and towards people who are in a disadvantaged situation, be it for social, economic or psycho-physical problems (Ascione, Belfiore & Di Palma, 2018; Di Palma et al, 2019b). It is precisely starting from this conception (strongly reflected in the reference scientific literature) that this contribution wants to investigate the social, educational and formative role that football activity can guarantee to young prisoners, in support to their growth and recovery in the community.

1. Sport: psycho-physical, educational and socio-relational aspects

In recent years, thanks to numerous studies and research activities carried out in this field, an important consideration has emerged: sport, particularly football, is a fundamental component in the life of the individual. The original meaning of the term sport is "movement"; it originated in Greece and has the purpose of enhancing the body, the ideals of strength, beauty and molar value (Le Boulch, 1979). So sport, and as a consequence football, can be considered as a cultural phenomenon and therefore an instrument thanks to which specific human needs are met. Its ultimate goal is the transmission of values, norms and behaviors to adopt in society to achieve social, physical and mental well-being (Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2017). Sports activity practice is an experience of individual growth and socialization, aiming at strengthening self-esteem, confidence and a significant relationship with the outside world. The above presupposes that a lifestyle including adequate sports practice favors the maintenance of a good level of health, and promotes the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, since it also supports the growth of the subject's identity (Sibilo, 2005).

Football is undoubtedly one of the most popular and well-known sports in the world. Like all other sports activities, it has the ability to unite, transmit emotions such as joy, sadness, enthusiasm, fear, tension, disbelief, exaltation; moreover, football is the sport that boasts the greatest visibility, and therefore can influence a huge and heterogeneous part of the

population. Young guys usually begin to play football at school age, or even in pre-school age thanks to the presence of sports centers aiming at improving the child's motor and technical skills in using the ball, and seeking to promote the knowledge of other peers and encourage socialization. Scientific studies have shown that, in childhood, there is a decay of physical activity, mainly due to parents' concern and that leads children to a sedentary lifestyle and physical inactivity; this causes problems at psycho-physical and social level such as obesity, a condition characterized by an excessive accumulation of body fat, which subsequently generates a difficult relationship with one's own body and peers, resulting in isolation. The practice of football generates a series of benefits at psycho-physical and social level as it prevents various chronic diseases, promotes socialization and therefore grants the child an adequate level of health, not intended as the absence of disease or infirmity. More specifically, it can be defined as a planned physical activity aimed at achieving a goal and improving or maintaining one or more components of one's own physical fitness. Given the young age with which the practice of football starts, the important function that a football school assumes clearly emerges. Its name suggests its key function, i.e. that to educate and train the child not only from the motor point of view but also from that social and relational. One of the most important features of this sport is the fact that it is a team sport and this greatly promotes socialization with other individuals, an aspect that is of particular importance for prisoners who strongly need positive relationships with the world outside the prisons. Therefore, this sport is very important also from the educational point of view, and consequently the role of the trainer-educator is of great importance too, who must teach the technical aspects of football, the movements and the schemes to follow, and must simultaneously be able to make people understand the importance of values such as (Di Palma et al, 2018; Farinelli, 2008): Respect (towards oneself, the rules of sport itself and others); Education; Team Cohesion.

Furthermore, the role of the trainer-educator also consists in giving confidence to the group and to the individual, specifically to those who are not really self-confident and often feel inadequate to the situation. In fact, it is well recognized that self-esteem influences the ways in which subjects face difficult events, and that corporeal experience is a fundamental element in the shaping of self-esteem, because people are their own bodies: beauty, physical skills, way of dressing, weight, height and state of health are all factors that affect not only children, but all the stages of human life (Bortolotto, 2002; Isidori, 2008). What we have affirmed presupposes that there is also a fundamental phase in the life of any person; we are speaking of adolescence, the most studied and feared period, characterized by the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is the phase in which individuals build themselves up by acquiring skills and developing, which requires facing a series of challenges, experiencing oneself. At this stage, it clearly appears that football practice is an ideal context for the construction of self-identity as it encompasses requests for protection and independence, care and autonomy, and this is why it can be defined as a mix between physiological development and emotional aspects.

2. The prison in a perspective of re-education and resocialization

The term prison (in Italian "Carcere") derives from the Latin word "coerceo", which means to restrain in order to lead to correctness, to teach to obey and respect the rules of society. Prison can be defined as an institution seeking to prevent people who have not respected the laws from repeating the same mistakes, and consequently, to discourage other subjects of the society to commit new violations. Therefore, on the basis of this principle, any persons who do not respect the rules must serve a penalty that must be immediate, the gravity of which depends on its relevance, precisely to give importance to the sense of punishment. It is

possible to make a distinction between detention facilities in Italy, based on the different variables: House of Detention: for prisoners who have a sentence of more than 5 years. Attenuated Custody Institute for Drug Addicts: for drug addict prisoners who are given the opportunity to perform physical and mental rehabilitation. District Penitentiary: for prisoners who are awaiting sentence or with sentences which are less than 5 years; Houses of Treatment and Detention: for the prisoners who, after having served at least a year of imprisonment in a prison facility, have been recognized as having a mental illness, thus benefiting from a reduction in the sentence. Forensic Psychiatric Hospital: for prisoners who have been diagnosed with psychiatric mental illness, and therefore need special care.

Youth detention center, also called correctional center or reformatory for subjects being corrected, and penal institution for minors in Italy: employed for convicted minors. The main objective of the detention system is to eliminate all the penalties that are against the sense of humanity, because they must be based on the ability of re-education for those who have been condemned, and it is for this reason that the function of social reintegration of the penitentiary institution is necessary, which comes with the establishment of relationships with external bodies (sports associations) and with families, providing for job reintegration, social service, early release and home detention. This makes it clear that the ultimate goal of the penitentiary system is the re-education and reintegration of a detained person within the society, be it a minor or an adult, and for this to happen correctly it is necessary to avoid that prisoner people are deprived of emotional relationships (Benelli, 2012; Melis, 2006).

As stated by Aristotle, the need to socialize is inherent in the nature of people, regardless of their age; in fact, he asserted that human beings are "social animals". Subsequently, this concept was reiterated by Maslow with his pyramid of needs, within which it is possible to find the need for belonging manifested by the need for identification, care and affection. With the detention in juvenile age, social relationships are drastically reduced with the world outside the prison, with the consequent risk of getting to a form of deprivation of social relationship and to the total suspension of human relationships. It is clear that, despite the measures implemented in this particular age group, when entering into prison, the possibilities of relationships with the outside are scarce and episodic, and only concern family members; in cases the prisoner shows positive behavior, they are translated into temporary permissions.

As already mentioned, a further aspect to be taken into consideration is the duration of the penalty which varies according to the seriousness of the crime, and consequently, in cases where the detention is of long duration, it causes an attenuation of the bonds, especially with the prisoner's family, involving the consequent risk of creating a distancing between the parties and the creation of a sort of "double punishment", both for those who are guilty of committing the crime and those who are close to them. The purpose of the penitentiary treatment is to promote all the initiatives useful for the subject's "re-socialization".

Moreover, it is founded on religion, education, cultural activities and, last but not least, on recreational and sports activities. All the initiatives implemented for the prisoner must result from a specific pedagogical reflection, since the educator, while operating in precarious conditions, works in collaboration with a team that must keep in mind the concept of teamwork and, more importantly, the objective to be achieved (which should not be the prisoner but the person with whom he/she works) (Gonin, 1994; Vianello, 2012). All this further highlights the need for football practice, not only for exclusively motor purposes, but above all for the purpose of social re integration, because the social re-integration of young prisoners is a complex process due above all to critical points: difficult time of the working world; any prejudices to which they are subjected; loss of identity; climate of mistrust; low self-esteem; depression.

In this regard, factors such as physical and mental activity, socialization, skills increasing and prisoners' self-esteem improvement are necessary to establish the basis for a future contact with society. Therefore, the youth detention center must become a place to find and re-build the young guys' identity, needed to put them in the necessary conditions so that their relationship with the social context of the external world can be favoured, surely through the practice of football employed as a means to improve relational skills, empathy and social inclusion (Rosa, 2019).

3. A case study: The educational and formative function of football for young prisoners

In today's society, to ensure that the objectives of re-education and re-socialization in the prison context can be realized, especially with reference to young prisoners, it could be useful to use sport, and therefore to the practice of football, which can facilitate and stimulate the learning process in this sense (Di Palma et al, 2019a; Rosa, 2019). Like all team sports, football provides that the individual's commitment is required to meet the group's objective, and that therefore promotes the

development of constructive relationships between individuals in order to pursue a common goal; physical effort is the means by which the individual's educational and social growth within the community is encouraged (Farinelli, 2008; Isidori, 2008).

This makes it possible to appreciate the usefulness of this discipline in relation to prisoners; football is a formative and educational tool for them, and in the light of this, it is possible to affirm that it has a specific pedagogical importance, since especially in an age like the one examined, it can be understood as a fundamental tool to favor and simplify the knowledge and the transmission of all the fundamental rules useful for social life, without neglecting the ability to convey values such as loyalty, team spirit and tolerance. To facilitate the correct social reintegration of young prisoners, various initiatives are planned within the facilities: the participation of public and / or private associations; the presence of volunteers to create a long-lasting social relationship with prisoners over time, thus also at the end of the sentence and beyond the boundaries of the penitentiary institution. It has been highlighted that practicing football is fundamental for the innate ability to "recall" certain values like the importance of being together and thus of the group, which consequently simplifies the possibility of finding one's own identity. Moreover, it increases confidence and self-esteem, and improves decision-making autonomy.

All this allows owning concepts like cooperation and competition; consequently, the relationship between subjects is facilitated and new social roles are experimented, for which the group has a very important role as it becomes a sort of preparation for re-integrating into society.

This solves a possible problem that a young prisoner, after having extinguished his sentence, can find: feeling himself a foreign subject to the company, proving to have compromised social and psychological level (Rosa, 2019). Recent research has shown that a sports group in general, and specifically a football team, can positively influence the prisoner by preventing his involvement in activities which can be deviant precisely because of the intrinsic ability that the group itself possesses. At the same time, and for the same motivations, it can negatively influence it precisely because of the need to satisfy the desire to belong to the group, and if in the latter there is the presence of a delinquent value, consequently it will have opposite (and thus antisocial) effects (Di Palma et al, 2019°). What we have stated highlights that it is the group that establishes behavioral dynamics, creating a bond of interdependence with any of its members just like a social system.

Through this sports activity, the young prisoner is helped to rediscover the pedagogical principles and values that should support his existence, including that of recognizing himself

as a young person who is part of a group, with the necessary autonomy for the development and knowledge about his own personality. For this to happen, it needs the right participation among the members of the group, so as to favor the establishment of confidence in interpersonal relationships, whether they are other prisoners or young guys outside the prison. Based on what we have claimed and by analyzing factors such as family, prison and lack of social relationships, it is easy to understand how the spring of deviant behavior happens easily, and this also explains the need and importance of activities with social ends, such as sport, in order to allow leaving violent environments and generating awareness in the prisoner about what happens in the surrounding environment. Finally, based on it, he can rebuild his own model of social interaction.

It is clear that football, whether played by the youth or not, goes beyond the educational aspect as it also has social functions, prevents pathologies, brings amusement, and supports democracy, legality and the promotion of the territory, allowing satisfying and controlling one's own emotional needs and creating, at the same time, a moment of experimentation, confrontation and self-control with others. This proves that football has an ambivalent and multi-faceted function. It creates a moment of encounter and confrontation, of selfishness and prevarication; it is a way to give vent to one's own physical and mental energies, in order to satisfy one's own sense of self-efficacy and generate pleasure in being involved in the game, allowing satisfying one's own selfish nature, experimenting, exploring and overcoming one's own limits both with the mind and with the body, thus provoking what can be called "educational game" (Ascione, Di Palma & Napolitano, 2018; Rosa, 2019).

Conclusions

Youth football can be defined as an "educational game", useful for finding lost but necessary values for prisoners. For this reason, it has a fundamental task in the life of all people who, by practicing it and therefore by living multiple body experiences, can learn about and be aware of their own body, their relational and social skills. This is the goal that youth football aims to achieve, that is to increase the desire and habit of young people to face challenges, develop self-efficacy, assess and dominate themselves, preferring the possibility of building a relational dimension for social life.

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