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The value of the sport within social integration processes

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Introduction

Human history has been characterized by an extraordinary mobility which has determined in the past and still conditions the encounter among people, increasing the comparison between different histories and traditions and urging the building of cultures and models aimed to the promotion and the support of the processes of welcome and social integration within every nation.

The theme of the integration is placed in a wide and heterogeneous picture which prevalently involves condition of the females, of the immigrants and of the differently abled people.

The data provided by ISTAT (Italian National Statistics Institute) highlight a constant growth of the immigratorio phenomenon in Italy and point out the vastness and the heterogeneity of the problem “social integration” in our country which receives immigrants coming from all the continents. These data push the community to search for solutions that could open up a road to the knowledge, to the comprehension and the reciprocal acceptance, minimizing, at the same time, the impact among the community which takes in the nation and the communities of the immigrants.

Today the quality of the social inclusion of a nation (Baumann G., 2003 – Benhabib S., 2005, 2006 – Collinson S., 1994, Farfan M., 2001–2002, Taylor C., 1992) depends more and more both from the presence of normative mechanisms, which are activated by each state, and from a widespread culture, which could allow every woman and every man to feel citizens of the world, independently from the origins, the colour of the skin, the religious creed and the ideas.

Therefore the integration is a complex socio-cultural process which does not only found on information and regulations, but it is built on common experiences, places and initiatives, which support the active participation to working, educational and recreative activities, which, more than every other factor, determine the quality of the social inclusion, confirming and increasing the value of individual, familiar and group identity.

Besides to be subject to the presence of normative mechanisms, which can be activated by each state to support social inclusion processes, the “welcome process” needs a culture of active citizenship which could assign to every person the task to feel as a part of a community bigger than the borders of his own town, of his own area and his own nation and which could allow everybody to feel as a citizen of the world. The term “integration” is referable to the need of a “minority”, which is characterized from a cultural, ethnic, religious, physical or psychic identity, to insert itself in a social group, competing for his growth and for his development in an equal chance condition. Therefore the integration need is not bound to the numerosness of a human category, but to the disparity of its condition of access to the rights, as widely shown by the history of immigrant citizens inclusion that is developed along a way which often meets abuses of power and prejudices, indifference and intolerance towards diversity.

Therefore the theme of integration takes us back to the theme of rights, of active citizenship and inclusion which involve, from time to time, the immigrants condition.

In his noblest dimension, the sport has assumed, from its origins to today, an important function in social integration processes and contributes to the building of an open and solidary culture in an original way. The sporting practice, which is complex and not reducible to the only competitive element, has tried to give an answer to the needs of the territory and of the single citizen and to the requirements of a community which is morally responsible for the integration process of those who live in straitened conditions. The sporting practice not only determines the diffusion of socially shared principles, but also creates the conditions for their real application. From the first Olympic demonstrations of the ancient times to the paralympic competitions of the contemporary society, the sport has placed itself as a significant answer to the requests for the community, ensuring in his inspiring principles the organization of real solidary and not hypothetical paths which lead to a concrete application of the inviolable rights of the man.
The world of the sport, through the diversity of its applicatory, competitive, healthy, recreative and educational contexts, can allow the individual member of a social strongly heterogeneous community to live experiences able of "giving forms" to his unexpressed potentialities and to model himself, increasing the value of the uniqueness and the globality of his being a person and ensuring, in the comparison, the diversity and the personal identity. Therefore, the sport makes the meeting with other persons easier, it consolidates and creates new ties, it accepts and increases the value of what is socially and culturally considered as different, as something differing from us. An integrative process which is respectful of the rules, of the values, of the traditions, of "other" cultures as a matter of fact is a process aiming to realize cohesion among individuals and to spread an aggregation spirit in a social system which must always be more available to accept cultural and gender diversities, considering them as resources. The first relational skills area acquired within interpersonal relationships and within the social practices: "we become ourselves through the others... such a rule refers not only to the personality in its complex but also to the history of every single function".

Therefore the sporting experience with an integrative nature can be a real incubator of the sociability for socially and culturally heterogeneous groups, realizing a training of the interpersonal relations which is based on the respect of the rules, on the loyalty, on the recognition of the other and on the solidarity and it projects itself in an educational and formative dimension, skilled to offer tools and skills which could allow the individual to be able and to be able to do in a community dimension. In his collective forms as the team games, the sport realizes highly valuable experiences in order to recover the desire to be the centre of attention of those who have been deprived, in reason for their diversities, of all the opportunities of relational growth and enrichment and it allows the individual to find his dimension and realize his subjectivity.

Aims

The research is directed towards the investigation of the value of the sport within integration and social inclusion processes, pursuing the following aims:

A. Highlighting the integrating and inclusive value of the sport.
B. Analysing the data concerning the presence of immigrants on the Italian national territory and highlighting the various existing communities and the respective origin countries.
C. Verifying the participation of Italian students to the sporting activities within the school.
D. Examining the data concerning the presence of immigrants in Italian schools and their participation to sporting activities.

Methodology

The complexity of the phenomenon of social inclusion and integration, and the necessity of noticing the participation to the sporting practice of the immigrants who are resident in Italy, have required the integration of a descriptive research model and a comparative research model. In the first phase, the base search has been directed towards the collection of:

- Ministerial dispositions and legislative documents on the right to the sport for everybody and specifically for the immigrants being in force at national and European level (Italian Constitution, Lussemburgo Publication 2007, European Sports Charter)

In the second phase, the base search has been directed towards:

- Analysing the most recent available data on social integration of the immigrants (this research was realized from 2003 and was born of a convention between the Social National Statistics Institute and the Italian Work and Social Policies Ministry).
• Analysing the most recent available data on the motor and sporting practice in Italy (trade investigation Multiscopo of the Istat "Aspects of Daily Life", turned to describe a few behaviours which are connected to the use of the spare time, from 1997 to 2006 in Italy).

• Analysing the relationship between school institution, immigration and sport, with reference to the school sporting practice of the immigrant children (ISTAT investigation spread on January 29 2007, data of the informative system of the Ministry of the Education, programs of training for the support teachers to the disabled in the schools).

In the last phase it has been realized a study following the model of the comparative search (Tomasson M. F., 1982 - Muus P. J. et al., 1998) which has allowed a comparison and an interpretation of the statistical data concerning the social integration of the immigrants, their presence in Italian school institutions and their sporting participation.

Results

(a) The integrating and inclusive value of sport

As already said, in his noblest dimension, the sport has assumed, from its origins to today, an important function in social integration processes, contributing to build an open and solitary culture in an original way. The complexity of the sporting phenomenon, understanding in its meaning contradictory appearances as competitive spirit and promotional activity, professionalism and dilettantism, commercial interests and gratuitousness, often risked to reduce in the public opinion the representation of the formative potentialities of sport, underestimating his precious social contribution.

The world of sport, through the diversity of its applicatory, competitive, healthy, recreative and educational contexts, can allow the individual member of a social strongly heterogeneous community to live experiences able of "giving forms" to his unexpressed potentialities and to model himself, increasing the value of the uniqueness and the globality of his being a person and ensuring, in the comparison, the diversity and the personal identity. The sport defined as "physical activity which, through a more or less organized participation, is aimed to the expression or the improvement of the physical and psychic condition of people, with the promotion of the socialization", it represents a fundamental element in the evolutionary process of the community, a tool which supports an equality of rights and chance within a field of competition regulated by shared principles and rules. The UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, adopted by the General Assembly, affirms that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms... without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion"; it not only gives back dignity and value to the human person, but it defines also the civil and moral responsibility of the single countries in promoting supplementary and inclusive paths.

The principle of equality and shared participation to the sporting activities finds confirmation in the article 23 of The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which sanctions that "equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas" and in the European Sports Charter whose principal aim is "to enable every individual to participate in sport". And then it is useful to start from the knowledge of the history of the single sporting discipline, of its different diffusion within various nations, of the diversity of approach and of starting to the sporting activity in the specific national and local experiences, which could help the diffusion of new knowledge on the various traditions of every people inside the group. These various traditions can harmonically coexist in the sporting route which becomes human growth "the growth of the man is a process of interiorization of the ways of acting, imaging and symbolizing which "esist" in his culture, manners which enlarge his powers. Therefore, he develops these powers in a way which reflects the uses to which he destinies them" (Bruner, 1968, pp. 320-321).

The growing attention to the sporting dynamics and the importance recognized to the physical activities are due to the consciousness that inside the community the sport allows a positive revaluation of the body as intermediary of the knowledge and protagonist of the communication, as a medium for the organization of the relations and a privileged tool for the promotion of the psycho-physical wealth of every person in his uniqueness and specificity.

The sporting game opens a symbolic communication which is able to knock down the linguistic barriers, supporting a gesture and mimic communication which transmits information and emotions and makes imitative forms of learning easier and urges the function of the mirror-neurons "... the neurons which are responsible for the production of such motor images would be the same which are destined to activate themselves during the planning and the preparation of his execution by the pupil. In other words the mirror-neurons activation would produce a "internal motor representation" of the observed act, from which the possibility of learning by imitation would depend" (Rizzolatti, 2006, p. 95).

In this reading key the sporting phenomenon is proposed as a "gymnasium" which exercises to the cooperation, actively building subjective and collective behaviours which are fundamental in the creation of the community sense. It is an
active empowerment form which, according to the F. Ouellet model (Ouellet, 1991, p.160), can contribute to the integration as it allows to use and to assume behaviours which put values in game as tolerance, respect of differences and solidarity.

The approach to the sporting practice of an ethnically not homogeneous group, composed of people who belong to various cultural traditions, speak different languages and are bound to different uses and customs, cannot leave the definition of a complex path out of consideration. This complex path must project the sporting activities in a socio-educational and formative dimension, which is capable to offer tools and skills in order to allow the individual to be able and to be able to do in a community dimension through experiences through experience of high value content.

The sporting experience at an integrating level can support the recognition of the other, the careful observation of the various communicative codes which are present within the group. "The observer's act is a potential act caused by the activation of the mirror-neurons which are able to codify the sensory information in motor terms and make possible the "reciprocity" of acts and intents that is at the base of our immediate recognition of the meaning of the gesture of the other" (Rizzolatti, 2006, p. 127). An individual or team play-sporting journey produces functional performances and communicative spaces among subjects who belong to different social cultures and areas, and it supports the building of an emotional space which arouses the relationship with the environment, the places and the traditions. "As soon as we see someone perform an act or a chain of acts, his movements have for us an immediate meaning, whether he wants it or not" (Goleman, 1996, p. 54).

The sport includes various cultures, it draws up ethnic differences in a common container, a fertile ground for the organization of empathic paths, of emotional self-regulation considered as "the capacity to motivate themselves and persist in pursuing an aim despite the frustrations; to control impulses and put off the fulfilment; to modulate his own mind states avoiding that the pain prevents us from thinking; and, moreover, the capacity to be empathic and hope" (Goleman, 1996, p. 54). A way defined "Complex Instruction" was already traced on a theoretical level by Elisabeth Cohen in 1989 at the University of Stanford; she was considering important the cooperation within the mechanisms of learning and the use of the typical of the sporting games corporeal gestures and movements to replace and to help the communication.

In social inclusion processes the sporting practice helps the individual to answer to his insecurities and respects the destabilizing news represented by the diversity: the comparison in the competitive phase, the game of the roles which characterizes the disciplines of team, the necessary cooperation among the athletes. All these elements fix a true acceleration to the social inclusion as the sport makes the meeting with other persons easier, it consolidates and creates new ties, it accepts and increases the value of what is socially and culturally considered as different, as something differing from us. A supplementary process through a type of sport which is respectful of the rules, of the values, of the traditions and of the "other" cultures is a process which realizes cohesion among the individuals and spreads an aggregation spirit in a social system which must always be more open to accept cultural diversity as a resource, to recognize a potential of unexpressed subjective capacities within the limit of a pathology. The first relational skills are acquired within the social practices which are present in movement games: "we become ourselves through the others ... such a rule refers not only to the personality in its complex but also to the history of every single function" (Vygotskij, 1990, p. 200).

In such social perspective the execution of a sporting gesture must be a clever, personal and effective demonstration of body, the alternative multi-solving capacity to access to knowledge and to conquest of the autonomy which the movement can offer made plain. The desire to be the centre of attention of those who, because of their diversities and having to live far from their homeland, have been deprived of many growth and personal affirmation opportunities, it can be supported through a sporting practice which can translate it in an opportunity of moral and ethical deliverance. As a fact, the sport allows every person to affirm himself without cultural and social barriers, harmonically finding its dimension, realizing its subjectivity through the constant engagement of the intelective dimension which expresses the body and the movement translated in "capacity to use one's own body in much differentiated and able manners, for expressive more than concrete purposes" (Gardner, Italian translation 1993, p. 228). In particular, the social inclusion in the phases of the pre-adolescence and of adolescence are conditioned by an intense relation between sporting activities and movement and processes of cognitive development; they stimulate the processes of maturity of the child and support a different access to the learning systems. "It is possible to assume that the first 10 or 15 years of life, the years in which the mental age grows, they constitute the period in which, as a matter of fact, new conceptual structures are formed": new cellular mobs which directly rise in the sensory stimulation, or new superior order mobs. This is a period in which they develop themselves and the structural parts and the schemes of the next thought. And this process can arrive to term with the progressive canalization and checking of the perception which is operated by the previous perceptive
structures: the new wine goes in the old barrels. After this, in the thought of the adult, every new concept is a reorganization of the pre-existent ones; the possible amount of new ideas depends on the amount and variety of the more primitive ones, which were formed before" (Hebb, 1980, p. 197).

(b) The immigratory phenomenon in Italy

The estimates of the demographic behaviours concerning the year 2007 testify the presence of positive dynamics about some migrant movements. From the data spread by the ISTAT in the October 2007 it emerges that the foreigners resident in Italy are about 2,938,922 (1,473,073 males and 1,465,849 females) and compared to the previous year (2006) an increase of the registering on registry office of 10.1% (268,408 units in more) is registered. The reason of this growth is due to two factors:

1. The natural settlement of the foreign population keeps positive and it is increasing compared to the previous years thanks to a structure based on young ages and to an increase of 11% of the children born in our country of foreign parents compared to the year 2006.

2. The more recent regularization provisions (Law 189/2002 article 33, Law 222/2002) have allowed several immigrants already presents in Italy to regularize, during the years, their position, registering themselves on the registry office.

These data provide a measure of the not negligible presence of the neo-community and extra-community citizens and of their contribution to the increase in the population in our country which, during 2006, passed 58,751,711 to 59,131,287 people, with an increase of 379,576 units.

On the whole the increase in the foreign population has contributed to the growth of the population resident in Italy for about 70.7%.

At national level the first three foreign communities which are significantly present in almost all the areas of the country, even if with greater intensity in a few areas, they are the Albanian, Moroccan and Rumen ones. On the whole, the countries of the area of Eastern-Central Europe (if we consider also the two countries which became part of the European Union from January 1, 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria)), represent, by now, almost the 39% of the foreign population resident in Italy with beyond 1,100,000 presences, against 26% constituted by the immigrants from the whole African continent (750,000) and from 17% of the immigrants coming from Asia (512,000 citizens).

The foreign citizens' presence in Italy is referable in the 90% of the cases to work reasons (above all between the men, about 78%, while for the women this number gets down to 44%) and to family reasons, also for effect of the regularization of 2002 which has strongly increased the number of those who have been able to make use of the faculty to reconstitute in Italy the really familiar core. The remaining 10% of the foreigner citizens lives in Italy for study reasons, elective residence, religious reasons, political asylum, humanitarian reasons or adoption.
These data confirm the permanent character assumed by the migrant flows in our society, determining cheap changes, social transformations and demographic changes which have redrawn a social model, directly and indirectly requiring the adoption of renewed life styles.

(c) Motor and sport activities in Italy

The Multiscopo investigation of ISTAT "Aspects of Daily Life", led in February 2006 and spread in November 2007, concerned the behaviours which are bounded to the spare time and to the culture, starting from the analysis of the Italian social and territorial registries characteristics, it has allowed to draw an Italian society's image in its complexity. Questionnaires structured in thematic areas have allowed, year by year, to register useful information about the styles of life of the population, whose expectations, motivations and judgements contribute to define the social information. The tracking of the sporting practice has based itself on the subjective evaluation of the interviewees and their personal sporting activity definition (compared both to what one understands for sport and to the modes of the practice). In 2006 20.5% of population of 3 years or more has declared to practise in the spare time one or more sports in a continuative way and 10.3% has practised sport in an irregular way. Overall, the sporting practice has interested 30.8% of population of 3 years or more. The people that, even if they do not practice a sporting activity, declared to develop some physical activity (as making walks for at least two km, swimming, riding a bike or other) are 27.3% of population of 3 years or more. At last, the quotes of sedentary people, of those who do not practice either a sport or a physical activity in the spare time, has turned out equal to 41.1%. The sporting practice levels are much higher among men: 24.4 % of them practises sport with continuity and 12.7 % occasionally practices it, while among women the shares are decidedly more contained, only 16.8 % practises sporting activities with continuity and 8.1% occasionally. However among women the share of those who develop some physical activity turns out greater (the 28.4 % of men against 26.1 % ). In the whole, women prove to be more sedentary than the men: 45.9 % of them has declared not to practise sport nor physical activities in the spare time against 36% of men). Besides, the highest shares of continuative sportsmen are found in the age class between 6 and 17 years and particularly between 11 and 14 years, 56.2 % declares to practise sport in continuative way.

(d) Relationship between school institution and immigration

A further investigation of the ISTAT "School, University and Inclusion in the World of the Work", in agreement with the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of the University and of the Research, has allowed a wide and detailed informative investigation in relation to the principal indicators of the Italian education system according to its the recent internal transformations. The deep changes bound to the gradual putting into effect of the Law 53/2003.

At present the system is constituted by about 57,514 schools in whom almost 9 million of pupils study and about 950 thousand teachers work. On a foreign students' population that is equal to 431,211, the countries more represented are the Albania with 70,031 students, Morocco with 59,914 students and the Romania with 52,765 students. However the presence of foreign pupils is not very much homogeneous and differentiated on the national territory: it is much more high in the areas of the Centre and of the North of the country, in particular in the North-East, and it not only relates both to the big cities and to the small towns.

Conclusions

In Italy the growing attention concerning the immigratory phenomenon has been determining during the years the passage from a phase of welcome of the foreigners to a phase of evaluation of educational strategies for the realization of social integration and inclusion paths.

The multiplicity of normative acts and ministerial dispositions has given to the compulsory school the principal task to promote the intercultural integration, to support the heterogeneity of the citizenships, at the same time it expects a specific teachers training and the realization of educational and formative interventions which can answer to the requests of a complex and heterogeneous collectivity. The emerging of a continuative sporting practice in the age strip between 6 and 17 years and corresponding this period to the one of the compulsory school, confirms the necessity of assuring continuity in the practice of the motor and sporting activities inside the world in and out of the school. Moreover, the presence of foreign citizenship minors is made up of 665,625 units at January 10, 2007 and the parallel frequency to the school activities of only 431,211 foreign students shows that 35.2% of immigrant minors are not frequenting school institutions and do not benefit from the supplementary and educational opportunities of the sport starting from the first school years.
Further inquiries

The problem of the immigrants integration in Italy inserts in a wider prospective of protection and defence of the citizen which includes the wide range of the human rights: before of being “foreign”, these people are titular of rights and duties which leave out of consideration to the nationality.

The increase in value of the sporting activities in the environment in the school and outside the school can arrange, through authentic social inclusion processes, chances which can satisfy the most various and the most suitable for the individual needs.

In this perspective "the sport provides an important place for the exploration of new horizons and civil and human rights... more practically, the sport can contribute to increase the consciousness, required by international organizations, to search to promote the development and can provide aid for the daily realization of the human and civil rights ".

The implementation of the sport associations and the amplification of the net of relationship among foreign communities, voluntary service associations and corporations, could allow a greater cohesion and social responsibility, developing the cultural exchange and the creation of a climate of respect and tolerance. Therefore the creation of sporting associations for immigrants, in agreement with the principal Italian sporting federations, could make the social inclusion process easier through sensitive to the cultural differences and the individual characteristics sporting ways.

References


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