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Integrated football: An educative proposal from sport to inclusion

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the integrated football, a new frontier of sport for all in which people with and without disabilities play together. In the initial part of the paper, we clarify both the epistemological fundamentals of special education on which integrated football is based and the technical aspects of the game. In the second part, we show how in Italy the integrated football became a widely spread phenomenon so much that this country hosted the first regional tournament. In this regard, we discuss data collected about teams, coaches and players to demonstrate how integrated football meets the 'design for all' principles and offers a sport inclusion opportunity, regardless of age, sex and ability.

Keywords: Inclusion, sport, special education, design for all.

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1. Introduction (P. Moliterni)

This essay intends to present a new integrated sport (integrated football) as the outcome of a European Project funded by Erasmus+ Sport Programme for 2016–2017. The project involved representatives from Italy, Lithuania, Germany, Slovakia, Portugal and Bulgaria. This innovative sport developed by the Italian team (CSEN, Uniroma 4 and Association Mens Sana in Corpore sano) is the result of the long experience that Italy has matured in the field of inclusion, as it chose an education system inclusive of persons with disabilities since the 1970s.

During a 4-day event that took place in Berlin from 14 to 17 September within the 2016 European Sports Week, the Italian team was able to show partners a new inclusive way of working in the sports area. In fact, after the model had been set up, staff members of the project such as sport technicians and referees have been trained by Italian expert trainers on the rules and playing strategies and also, the underlying principles and the educational aspects of integrated football. In Berlin, the foundations of a common language have been laid, given the different systems of the countries involved. These, in fact, have different backgrounds with regards to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2003) has divided countries into three categories according to their policy on including pupils with special educational needs (SEN): The first category (one-track approach) includes countries that developed policy and practices geared towards the inclusion of almost all pupils within mainstream education (Italy, Spain and Portugal). The countries belonging to the second category (multi-track approach) have a multiplicity of approaches to inclusion. They offer a variety of services between the two systems, i.e., mainstream and special needs education systems (France, Lithuania and Slovakia). In the third category (two-track approach), there are two distinct education systems. Pupils with SEN are usually placed in special schools or special classes. Generally, a vast majority of pupils officially registered as having SEN do not follow the mainstream curriculum with their non-disabled peers. These systems are (or at least were until very recently) under separate legislation, with different laws for mainstream and special needs education (Belgium, Germany) (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003). Therefore, this variety of national situations is fundamental for spreading an inclusive sport. Given such variety of systems, inclusive sport represents a fundamentally important vehicle to spread values of equality, solidarity and respect for every difference.

In the first part of the article, we intend to clarify both the epistemological fundamentals of special education on which the integrated football is based and the technical aspects of the game while in the second part, we aim at showing how in Italy, the integrated football became a widely spread phenomenon so much that, immediately after the training, Sardinia hosted the first regional six teams' tournament. To this end, data on the tournament participants will be presented (mapping of the phenomenon and the individual characteristics) to demonstrate how integrated football meets the principle of *Design for All* and lay as a real possibility of realisation of all.

2. Pedagogical architecture of integrated sport (A. Magnanini)

The European project, called 'integrated football: the new frontiers of sport for all' aimed at establishing the European Network of integrated football which would provide contributions to the development of National policies and initiatives on large scale in order to promote this new sport activity and the integrated sport. Specifically, the researchers' team worked on the definition of an innovative training model for sport technicians and referees of integrated football where special pedagogical principles and technical principles of sport are combined (training, rules, communication, etc.). The training aimed, in fact, to combine the concepts of two areas (special pedagogy and sport), whose interaction allows the creation of inclusive sport. After the European Week of Sport in Berlin, in each participating country, a training course for integrated football sport technicians and referees has been organised (Rome, 3–5 February 2017; Berlin, 31 March 2017–12 June 2017; Sofia, 30–31 March 2017/1 April 2017; Guarda, 17–19 and 27 May 2017; Piestany: April 2017; Kaunas: 12–14 May 2017).

Each course, of 20 hours in total, included both frontal and practical lessons in integrated football, divided in to technical-sports and educational aspects. In particular, 6 hours were dedicated to special pedagogical aspects, in the construction of the educational relationship with athletes. The training involved 144 stakeholders (89 sport technicians and 55 referees).

Research in the field of special pedagogy applied to motor sciences highlights the educational aspect of sport itself which, in designed as integrated, may become a vehicle for equity and integration (de Anna, 2009; Magnanini, 2016; Moliterni, 2013; Moliterni & Magnanini, 2018). Within the concept of sport, the educational dimension is retrieved, which refers to an intentional project of personal growth. In this framework, sport has educational characteristics defined by: the continuative relationship with an adult, the order and the discipline, the respect of the rules, the teaching/learning that have as their object the sport itself, verification/selection, the device of victory and defeat and the will to improve oneself (Farne, 2008). According to Mantegazza (1999), sport is an important growth device for all people, especially during childhood.

The integrated football model was studied and conceived by the Italian team; thanks to the experience and tradition of the integration that our country has been developing since the 1970s (de Anna, 2014).

The key to this successful Italian experience has to be found in the school integration and in the changes that the educational system has developed in order to respond to everyone's educational needs: the common school. Since 1971, indeed, different laws have opened the way:

- Law 118/1971: this law insists that compulsory education had to take place in regular classes, except in the case of mental deficiencies or physical impairments that are so severe as to prevent learning or integration in common classes. The same law also places an onus on municipalities to make school buildings accessible for everyone, according to national standards;
- Law 517/1977: it is legislated to implement procedures to integrate handicapped pupils by providing special teachers, both in primary and middle schools;
- Law 104/1992: it is the main framework law for all disability issues. It guarantees specific rights for persons with disabilities and their families, provides assistance, stipulates full integration and the adoption of measures for prevention and functional recovery, and also, ensures social, economic and legal protection. The principle of integration and the right of pupils with disabilities to receive specific support are also included in all the subsequent legislation that regulates general aspects of the educational system such as enrolment, class size and pupil assessment as well as curricular teacher training and support teacher training;
- Law 328/2000: it states that families, together with municipalities and social services, may agree upon an individualised life project for their children, aimed at full integration 'within the family and social life';
- Law 170/2010: it recognises dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia as specific learning disorders.

Special pedagogy that reflects on an inclusive school (school *for* all, *of* all) has been able to develop inclusive sports models as sharing models.

The integrated sport has been promoted by a set of convergent paths which have been backed at international level by the:

- a) International Movement for sport for all (Council of Europe, 1992),
- b) International Movement for inclusion of people with disability (ONU, 2006);
- c) The scientific research of University of Rome of Foro Italico: 'Document of sport of all' and editorial publications (de Anna, 2009), workshops, conference (since 2001), etc.;
- d) School experiences: Ministerial Notes about the special needs to promote sports together such us integrated sports, (MIUR, 2007);
- e) Projects of sports associations and promotion agencies of sport.

Through the lenses of special pedagogy, the inclusive sport can be defined as a series of gymnastic, game, exercise or movement activities practised together by persons who do not and those who do have a disability (of various degrees), as a competitive challenge whether for recreational or professional purposes, where each player, through relatively intense physical effort, improves their own potential, based on equal opportunities and active participation, through flexible rules that allow for individual characteristics (Magnanini & Trull, 2015).

This definition clearly reflects the key elements of special education that ensure the inclusiveness of sport: accessibility (to places, but especially to activities), active participation, equal opportunities (ensured by the rules) and inclusive education.

Accessibility is a modern and wide-ranging methodology that has as its fundamental objective the design and construction of buildings, products and environments that are in themselves accessible to all categories of people, beyond the possible presence of a condition of disability (ECA, 2013). Active participation: on the court, person has an active, participatory and non-passive role (See the person for his resources and not disability—Special pedagogy approach). Equal opportunities are about the concept that we are all different but with the same rights. This implies a system of accommodation and principles of equality to be translated into ethical regulations in respect of differences. Finally, inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programmes and activities so that all students learn and participate together.

On this basis, Italy has developed an innovative model of integrated sport. An emblematic example is *Baskin* (Integrated Basketball) created in 2003 (Magnanini et al., 2010). The peculiarity is offered by an inclusive sport transformation, not by an adaptation on disability. This is a trend that is gradually developing at international level (Dagkas & Armour, 2012) and that will change the sport.

3. Integrated football (A. Ferraro)

Integrated football has been designed to allow persons with and without disabilities, men and women of different age groups, to play in the same team and to cooperate in order to reach the final goal.

A value chart sanctions and guarantees principles and ethical values of this sport (CSEN, 2016).

By putting in place a number of 'reasonable accommodations', the main objective of reaching full inclusion and participation is reached.

Sport is intended as the mean rather than the end. The integrated football promotes the values of sport in its educational and training value: respect for the adversary and loyalty, socialisation, self-confidence and confidence in others.

The integrated football does not have a welfare function, but a sporting discipline in itself, where all the players of the team can express themselves to the maximum of their potential and ability.

The integrated football is a sport activity that is inspired by football, baskin and handball.

Its laws are built adapting in an inclusive manner the four fundamental pillars of the game: space, roles, materials and tasks.

The space where the activities take place is an adapted futsal pitch with two lateral side goals in addition to the two traditional goals situated at the shorter lines. Moreover, two penalty marks are located on the midfield line for shooting at the side goals (Figure 1).

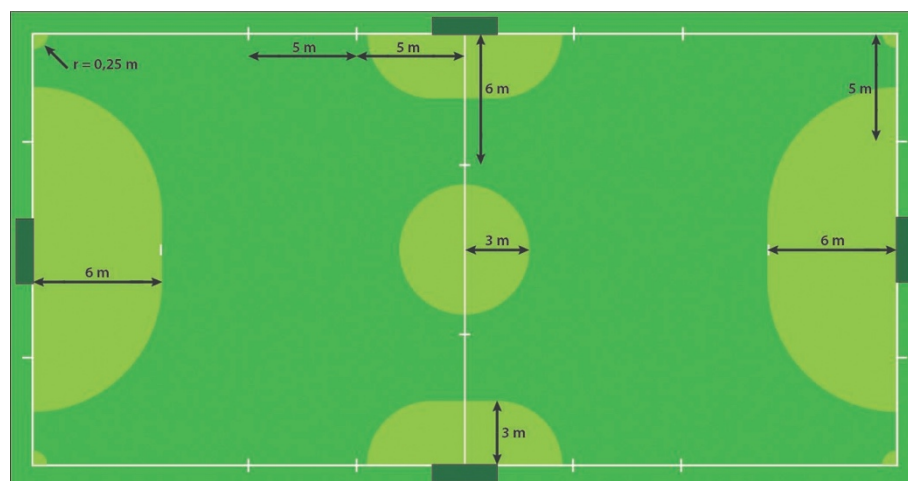


Figure 1. The integrated football pitch

Roles are numbered from 1 to 5 and each one has its own rules. The sum of the players' roles a team deploys on the field must not exceed the threshold of 20.

Every player has a role defined by his/her motor skills. Roles 3–5 are assigned through a motor functional test (no medical assessment) that evaluates ball control, slalom, forth and back, ball pass, shooting and header (Figure 2). Sole observation is already sufficient for the assessment of Roles 1 and 2.

In this way, each role has its own functional profile. The Role 1 player is the goalkeeper at the shorter line goal. He/she is able to perform aimed motor-coordinated acts and can be of any age and gender, with or without disability. Roles 2, 2W and 3 are athletes with disability. The Role 2 athlete might be blind who is able to move autonomously by only walking, but unable to run (or does very slowly) and capable of kicking at the side goal from a 6-m distance. The Role 2W is a wheelchair user, who is capable of throwing at the side goal using hands with possible material adaptation. The Role 3 runs not easily, he/she is slow, clumsy, shows scarce coordination and balance, has little ball control. He/she does not perform the slalom correctly and/or does not change foot when required (or does inaccurately). The Role 4 is an athlete with or without disability. He/she is capable of doing aimed motor-coordinated acts (walk, agile run). When running, he/she has a regular and continuous ball control. He/she can perform a number of basic football techniques quite well at medium speed. Finally, the Role 5 is an athlete with or without disability. He/she is capable of doing all aimed motor-coordinated acts and can perform all basic football techniques showing good/quite technical skills.

Each player faces a sports confrontation with an opponent of the same role.

The final aim is that of an equal and fair sports competition while at the same time ensuring that all players to play an active role.

The materials and tasks can be also modified. For example, the regular ball can be substituted with others that are smaller, lighter ones or made with different materials under particular conditions for the Roles 2 and 2W. Moreover, within the team, a player might play the role of a tutor to help the actions of a mate with disability (Role 2 or 2W).

4. Method (L. Cioni)

After the Italian training, the integrated football spread in Sardinia, an Italian region.

A self-administered questionnaire was developed in order to map and describe the Sardinian integrated football tournament. It was sent to the six team managers together with a letter including

background information and filling instructions. The questionnaire was allowed to collect data about three areas:

- Sport associations
- Operators
- Players

5. Results (L. Cioni)

All team managers completed the questionnaire.

The Sardinian integrated football tournament involved six teams and was hosted in five different cities between September 29 and 24 November 2017. The teams were from different social and educational contexts such as sport associations (3), social cooperatives (2), school (1).

The adults involved in the management and organisation of integrated sports activities (such as team managers and coaches) were 16 (nine females and seven males) with an average age of 42 years (minimum 27–maximum 56). Their study qualifications referred to three different areas: degree in sport science (3), degree in education and psychology (4), degree in literature (1) and high school diploma (7).

As shown in Figure 2, the total number of players was 106:75 with disability (58 males and 17 females) and 31 without disability (18 males and 13 females).

Fifteen players (seven with disabilities and eight without) were in the age group 0–18; 50 players (41 with disabilities and nine without) were in the age group in the 19–40 and 41 players (27 with disabilities and 14 without) were over 40.

Disabilities were of different kinds: intellectual (48), multiple (24), physical (2) and sensory (1) (Figure 3). About 70% of players with disabilities played Roles 2 and 3. Only 4% played Role number 5.

Over 87% of the players without disabilities played Roles 4 and 5. About 13% were assigned the role number 1 (goalkeeper).

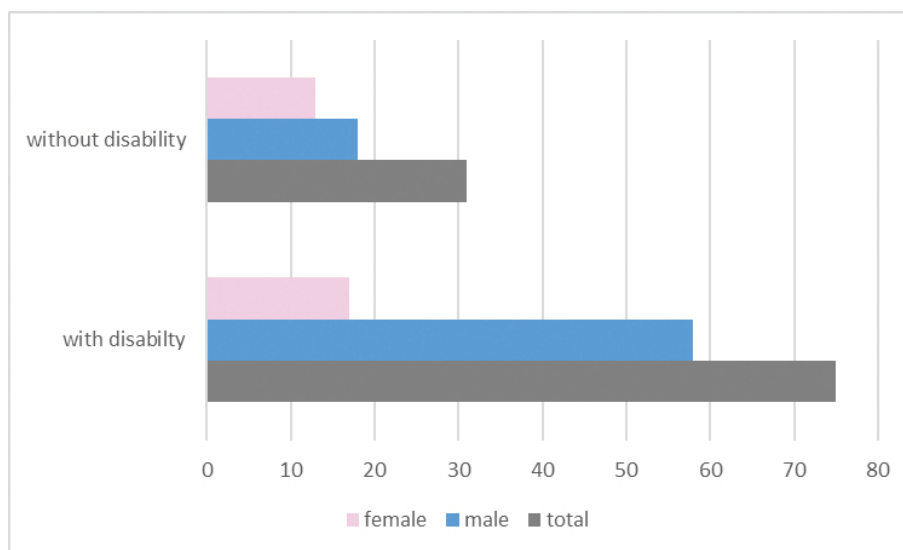


Figure 2. Involved players

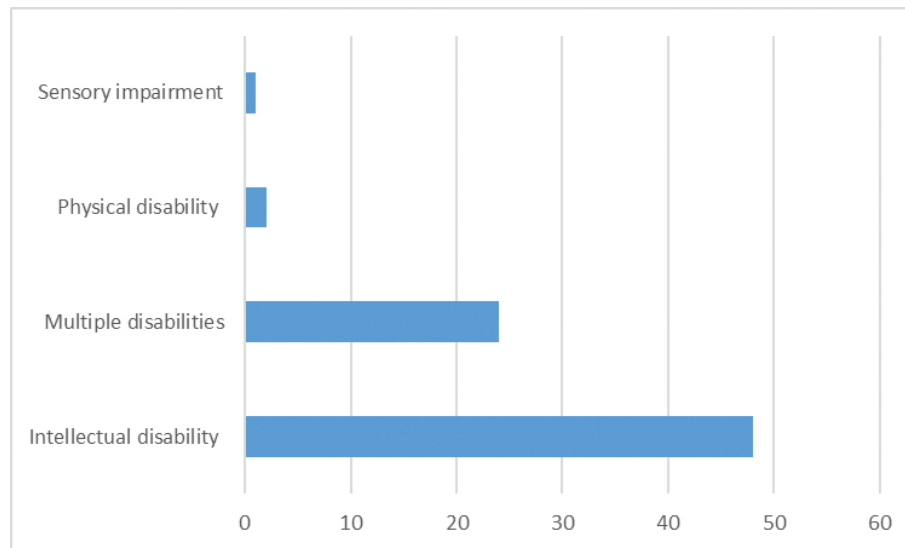


Figure 3. Disability types

6. Conclusion (P. Moliterni, A. Magnanini, L. Cioni & A. Ferraro)

The collected data show that the sport for all is possible, provided that it is designed and implemented according to educational and inclusive principles. A proof of that is the participation of 106 different athletes by age, sex, presence/absence of disability and type of disability in the same context and in the same game.

In their daily lives, people with disability encounter barriers that limit and influence their possibilities of dealing with and of relating to people without disabilities on an equal basis.

Integrated football aims to overcoming such difficulties by promoting the full inclusion and development of people with and without disabilities through sport in an inclusive environment.

On the other side, persons without disability who play integrated football benefit from the relationship with persons with disability. This relationship represents a resource for all in terms of personal improvement and social enrichment. As a matter of fact, both persons with and without disability learn to adjust and interact as equals in a group of people with different abilities by developing new communication skills and using their creativity.

The integrated football is a good inclusive sport activity as it values diversity and promotes the development of each person's potential, regardless of one's health condition.

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