



Contribution of sport to regional development through Cohesion Policy 2021-2027

SHARE initiative



Sport

Contribution of sport to regional development through Cohesion Policy 2021-2027

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Coordinated by



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Executive Summary

The economic and social dimension of sport

Sport is an important economic sector in the European Union, with a share in the national economies which is comparable to agriculture, forestry and fisheries combined. Moreover, its share is expected to rise in the future. In 2005, the overall sport sector accounted for 1.76% of the EU global GDP, while the total employment generated by sport activities was 4.5 million persons - equivalent to 2.12% of the total EU employment.¹ By 2012, the sport-related GDP within the EU increased to 2.12% amounting to **€279.7 billion, while the share of sport-related employment amounted to 2.72% of the total EU employment, equivalent to 5.6 million persons.**² Despite these figures, the economic and social impact of the sport-related industries is still often underestimated.



Sport encompasses all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.*

However, sport is a fast-moving policy area. The Lisbon Treaty confers on the EU specific powers to take support, coordination and development measures in the area of sport, with the overall aim of developing the European dimension in sport (Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). In the last decade, EU policy makers have further recognised the importance of sport, not only for the obvious health and wellbeing reasons, but also for a number of key areas such as: social cohesion, innovation and research, territorial regeneration, economic growth or tackling climate change. Some notable EU documents are:

- The 2007 White Paper on Sport³ which, in its societal chapter, identified the importance of specific EU programmes and funds to support actions in the field of sport.
- The European Commission 2011 Communication on 'Developing the European Dimension in Sport'⁴ which highlighted the need to mainstream sport into other policy areas. It stated that the Structural Funds can support investments in the field of sport provided that these are in line with the broader scope and priorities of each Fund.

* Definition of sport in Recommendation No.(92) 13 Rev, of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Revised European Sports Charter (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 24 September 1992 at the 480th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies and revised at their 752nd meeting on 16 May 2002) <https://rm.coe.int/16804c9dbb>

¹ SportsEconAustria et al. (2012) Study on the contribution of sport to economic growth and employment in the EU. A study for the European Commission, DG EAC. Brussels, 21 November 2012

² SportsEconAustria et. Al. (2019), Updated study on the economic impact of sport through sport satellite accounts. A study for the European Commission DG EAC, Brussels, 18 May 2018.

³ See further: European Commission, White Paper on Sport, Brussels, 11.7.2007 COM(2007) 391 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0391&from=EN>

⁴ See further: Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Developing the European Dimensions in Sport COM (2011)

- The 2011-2014 EU Work Plan for Sport⁵ which gives priority to a number of actions to strengthen the sport sector, including sustainable financing of grassroots sport. In order to support the implementation of these actions, the Council agreed on the set up of six Expert Groups, including an Expert Group on Sustainable Financing of Sport (XG FIN). One of the main outcomes of the XG FIN was to invite the European Commission and the Member States to improve the long-term sustainability of grassroots sport by highlighting the value of sport as a tool for local and regional development, urban regeneration, rural development, employability, job creation and labour market integration, as well as by ensuring that EU funding (including Structural Funds) can be used to support sport or sport-related projects.
- The 2018 Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States⁶ which further recognised the economic dimension of sport and its socio-economic benefits and invited the European Commission along with other EU institutions and EU Member States to further strengthen the cooperation on the potential of sport to contribute to regional development.

Generally, sport makes a direct contribution to economic activity and social cohesion in any given region, as evidenced by the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development through the Structural Funds, as well as other previous research⁷, by:

- **Creating direct business activity (from large football enterprises to local sport clubs and gyms);**
- **Generating locally-rooted employment (including indirectly through construction projects);**
- **Driving attractiveness and impacting positively the image of territories;**
- **Contributing to innovation and fuelling Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with sport content;**
- **Promoting well-being and social cohesion, and engaging with social groups other policies fail to attract;**
- **Increasing soft mobility solutions and decreasing negative health impacts thanks to increased physical activity.**

A series of projects financed by the Structural Funds illustrate how sport-based initiatives contribute to the above-mentioned aspects related to regional development. The five annexes of this paper present in detail such sport-led initiatives, as well as concrete ways in which sport specificities can deliver on the five main objectives of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027.

⁵ See further: 'Resolution of the Council and of Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011-2014, Brussels, 1 June 2011, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42011Y0601\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:42011Y0601(01)&from=EN)

⁶ See further: Conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the economic dimension of sport and its socio-economic benefits. Brussels, 29 November 2018. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14945-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

⁷ See further: CSES, *Study on the Contribution of Sport to Regional Development through the Structural Funds*, final report for the European Commission, 2016, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3e9c6d76-9aa1-11e6-9bca-01aa75ed71a1>, CDES, *Study on the funding of grassroots sports in the EU*, report for the European Commission, 2013, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/50e6357c-6e20-43fc-8cf7-b7ca073b197c>, ESSA-Sport, *European Sport and Physical Activity Labour Market report*, 2019

The place of sport in the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) represent the funding instrument underpinning regional development and Cohesion Policy - one of the main European programmes, having the second largest financial envelope after the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the 2014 – 2020 EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The legislative proposal for the 2021 – 2027 MFF aims to implement a modernised Cohesion Policy with a larger budget of €374 billion, which exceeds for the first time the CAP's foreseen budget (of €365 billion for the same period).⁸ The European Union institutions are focusing on making Europe more adaptable to societal and economic challenges of the 21st century. Overall, the Cohesion Policy's newly proposed regulatory framework is also governed by simplification and flexibility principles, especially in terms of management of the different funds for regional development and closer involvement of cities in the delivery of the different funding streams. According to the Commission's proposal, the future Cohesion Policy is focusing on 5 main objectives (compared to 11 thematic objectives under the current policy framework):

1. a **Smarter Europe**, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses;
2. a **Greener, low-carbon Europe**, implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change;
3. a **more Connected Europe**, with strategic transport and digital networks;
4. a **more Social Europe**, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare;
5. a **Europe closer to citizens**, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

Although sport has not been specifically mentioned in the EU regulations underpinning the Cohesion Policy, and this is still the case for the 2021-2027 regulations, there have been several positive examples of the use of sport for regional development. It is worth noting that the above-mentioned proposed policy objectives are not sector-specific and are designed to encompass a wide set of projects and activities boosting regional development in Europe, regardless of the type and sectorial focus of the organisations delivering these projects. This means the approach to delivering on these objectives can be broadened in terms of activities pursued, including through sport. Nevertheless, unlocking funding for sport-based initiatives which pursue these policy objectives can be quite challenging, given that the wide variety of ways in which sport can contribute to territorial development (and thus the five main objectives) are not very well known yet, nor used by regions across Europe.⁹ Additionally, some managing authorities may not assess positively sport projects unless they are explicitly mentioned in the Cohesion Policy regulations. This can lead to important differences in the funds uptake from country (region) to another, which further emphasises underinvestment in sport in certain areas.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/factsheets-long-term-budget-proposals_en

⁹ Observation developed during the several field missions (capacity-building activities pursued in the framework of the SHARE initiative 2018-2019 – KEA European Affairs.

Therefore, this research paper articulates the different ways in which sport could deliver on the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy's five main objectives and highlights evocative examples of how sport-based initiatives were developed with Structural Funds across Europe, from the precedent, as well as the current programming period.

Sport contributes to the objective of a **Smarter Europe (PO 1 - see Annex 1)**, by addressing several investment priorities such as: strengthen research, technological development and innovation, enhance the competitiveness of SMEs, promote sustainable and quality employment, invest in education, training and lifelong learning, or modernise public administration. The project examples provided in Annex 1 highlight how advancement in sport is strongly connected with innovation in sport science, performance monitoring and the development of various ICT applications which can provide testbeds for developments related to other sectors, such as medical care, new materials or information systems and therefore, enhance the competitiveness of SMEs in these sectors. This is why it is essential to strengthen sport ecosystems to produce spill-overs in other tangential sectors. Moreover, a Smarter Europe has a clear focus on investing in education coupled with promoting quality professional development opportunities. Sport projects could promote sustainable job creation and quality employment, as well as labour mobility and could allow individuals to acquire or improve soft skills which enhances their employability.

In the context of a **Greener, low-carbon Europe (PO 2 - see Annex 2)**, the contribution of the physical activity-oriented initiatives can be significant. Promoting active lifestyles and investment in infrastructure for active mobility is essential to guarantee uptake of active alternatives to carbon transport needed to address increasingly problematic urban mobility challenges. Equally, investment in the rehabilitation of existing sporting infrastructure and development of new infrastructure to create energy-saving and efficient structures that allow the organisation of low-environmental-impact, potentially large-scale, sporting events constitutes another relevant priority. This also applies in parallel to the development and protection of green infrastructure supporting the growth of active tourism and outdoor sport activities such as cycling, hiking, kayaking, skiing in a sustainable way. More investment, finally, can steer the sport industry towards more sustainable and low-carbon-producing manufacturing of sporting goods.

Sport-led initiatives could deliver on the objectives of a **more Connected Europe (PO 3 - see Annex 3)** by enhancing access and use of ICT, by investing in labour mobility of sport workforce, by enhancing institutional capacity and promoting active citizenship. A number of projects funded in past and present programming periods, mostly via the European Social Fund, highlight these benefits by showing how development of ICT applications in sport science can promote the development of sport competence clusters, how labour mobility and quality employment can be promoted through online platforms for e-learning courses, or how the principles of transparency and shared-knowledge which are at the basis of an efficient public administration and institutional capacity could be promoted via sport activities.

Sport projects can be closely linked to **the social dimension, thereby to a more Social Europe (PO 4 - see Annex 4)**, of the EU Cohesion Policy, as sport is particularly effective in enhancing social inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities, refugees, people at risk of poverty or the unemployed youth. Projects from both the past and present programming periods, financed in particular via the European Social Fund, have proven sport's capacity to create a sense of belonging and teamwork or to inculcate generic and transferable skills which enhance employability. Many EU countries have already implemented operations to facilitate access to sport for citizens at risk of poverty, or for refugees and migrants to integrate them in the society or have developed tailored training programmes for the young to allow them to improve their skills and qualifications.

Sport-led initiatives can actively contribute to bring **Europe closer to its citizens (PO 5 - see Annex 5)**, by fostering an integrated and sustained development in urban, rural and coastal regions. The investment priorities under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can particularly support these objectives, due to this fund's focus on spatial and sustainable development, and they can be complemented by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), according to regions' specificities. The European Social Fund can also support sport projects to bring Europe closer to citizens, by facilitating social inclusion in order to achieve an integrated and sustainable development.

Given the *manifold impacts of sport activities to regional development*, the paper notes that integrated cross-sectorial approaches to regional development which centre on the sport sector have increasingly started to develop across Europe. These initiatives aim to involve various connected economic sectors, such as tourism, new technologies, ICT education, transport or healthcare in order to strengthen the local sport ecosystem, by developing and promoting sustainable business opportunities, a healthier and more active lifestyle and a low-carbon, experience-based economy.

Annex 1: A Smarter Europe through sport

One of the five Cohesion Policy main objectives beyond 2020 is to create a Smarter Europe through innovation, digitisation, smart economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses. The new objectives of the EU's investment instruments will reflect and respond to the changing societal needs.

The aim of this paper is to outline and explore how sport projects could help the EU in delivering on a Smarter Europe. In addition, this section seeks to provide advice on how future funding could be used in the upcoming financial period, notably by mapping the areas in which sport could contribute to a Smarter Europe.

Successive EU policy announcements¹⁰ acknowledge the important role of sport in European societies, and in particular, the role of sport as a subsidiary actor in promoting a Smarter Europe. The EU rationale behind enhancing a Smarter Europe is outlined in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as well as on the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF).

Table 1: Specific objectives of the policy priority 'A Smarter Europe' 2021-2027¹¹

A Smarter Europe			
Specific objective 1	Specific objective 2	Specific objective 3	Specific objective 4
Enhancing research & innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	Fostering growth and competitiveness of SMEs (start-up/scale-up)	Developing skills for smart specialisation strategies, industrial transition and entrepreneurship	Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies and governments

Based on the previously-developed categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport¹², the specific objectives linked to 'a Smarter Europe' policy priority (Table 1) could be met via the following lines of action applied in the sport sector:

➤ **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**

- Enhance innovation in terms of materials, equipment and technologies;
- Promote IT and digitisation in sport, notably for performance measurement and recording and new sport equipment;
- Smart Specialisation Strategies around sport;

(in line with Specific objectives 1 & 4)

➤ **Direct support to sport SMEs and related business support organisations**

- Enhance closer relationship between the education system, the training system and the enterprises;

¹⁰See further: 'Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030' - Council conclusions (9 April 2019) <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8286-2019-INIT/en/pdf>, 'Draft conclusions of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the economic dimension of sport and its socio-economic benefits' - Adoption <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13764-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

¹² The categorisation was developed in the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development: CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

- Promoting small businesses in the field of sport through innovation and networks;
- Develop a business-friendly ecosystem, conducive to the competitiveness and innovation of sport SMEs, notably through business support organisations, such as incubators and clusters;

(in line with Specific objective 2)

➤ **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility**

- Supporting labour mobility and exchange of good practices through mobility of sport staff and volunteers;
- Enhance the transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications to promote mobility of learners and workers;
- Creating employment in professional sport, sport businesses and facilities as well as in related activities, such as equipment, media, advertising, marketing, catering etc.;

(in line with Specific objectives 2 and 3)

➤ **Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**

- Promote education and training skills to meet new technological demands;
- Developing participants' soft skills through sport, including working in a team, commitment, communication etc.;
- Provide better education opportunities and thus better job aspirations to dual career athletes;
- Improve the health of employees and also their productivity and well-being through an easy access to sport activities;

(in line with Specific objective 3)

➤ **Social engagement and improving governance and administrative capacity**

- Using sport's powers of engagement to interact with citizens, companies and government;
- Improving the institutional capacities of sport organisations and associations at all levels to enhance cooperation, shared practices and knowledge;
- Reduce burden on social security spending and enhance spending in other administration services;

(transversal action, in line with all the Specific objectives above)

The next sub-sections consider how cohesion funding could be unlocked for the identified sport intervention areas above and the broader Smarter Europe objectives, building upon good practice project examples.

1.1. Sport-led initiatives contributing to a Smarter Europe

This section will explore how the objective of a Smarter Europe could be linked with funding opportunities for the sport sector under the future Cohesion Policy, notably by showcasing examples of funded projects which could be used as a source of valuable lessons and inspiration.

Among the funding streams, the ERDF, and to a certain extent, the ESF and the CF are the ones most strongly dedicated to enhance a Smarter Europe.

In the context of a Smarter Europe objective, ERDF provides the largest potential for supporting projects in the sport sector. The ESF has a strong focus on providing financial support for the development and structural adjustment of regional economies, economic change, enhanced competitiveness as well as territorial cooperation throughout the EU. The ERDF is generally most relevant to the following areas of intervention:

- **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**
- **Direct support to sport SMEs and related business support organisations**

Whereas, the ESF is generally most relevant for the following areas of intervention:

- **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility**
- **Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**
- **Social engagement and improving governance and administrative capacity**

As demonstrated by the above categorisation of Structural Fund interventions based on sport, sport-led projects and initiatives could be linked with all five of the areas of intervention above. The section below also briefly explains how such areas of intervention are relevant under the future Cohesion Policy. Depending on the angle and the objectives to be fulfilled, a continuing focus on these areas under a Smarter Europe priority would allow sport projects to have positive impacts through a variety of tools, both at individual and societal levels.

1.1.1. Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation

At a general level, there are opportunities within ERDF programmes to support sport-related projects that aim to strengthening research, technological development and innovation. Sport is an area of considerable innovation, taking advantage of sport science, advanced training facilities and sophisticated performance monitoring, and in a wide range of other activities from medical science and battery technology to ICT applications. The following projects provide eloquent examples of how sport can be included in smart specialisation strategies and how the potential of regional sport ecosystems can be capitalised in wider innovation and growth processes at cross-roads with various societal and economic fields.

- **Nano4Sport¹³** is an INTERREG VA Netherlands – Flanders project looking for smart, innovative solutions that allow better, safer, more and lifelong sport. Nano4Sports looks at the possibilities of sensor technology and aims to impact the way citizens exercise and how they feel in their own skin. Thanks to sensor technology, coaches, top athletes and amateur athletes can improve their sporting performance and mitigate injury risks. Nano4Sports will develop highly advanced sensors that the athlete can wear well during exercise and give him or her feedback on many things, such as physical activity, posture, heartbeat, muscle exertion or skin guidance.
- **Inno4Sport¹⁴** is an INTERREG Europe initiative which brings together five European regions to support and enhance sport clusterisation processes based on quadruple helix cooperation and consequently promote the innovative value chains of sport to promote spillovers in other economic sectors. Taking into account the different regional contexts (e.g. development levels, available expertise on clusterisation processes), specific points to address have been identified by focussing on 4 thematic sub-objectives: the creation of opportunities for market access, the exploration of cross-over cooperation, the development of harmonisation processes with regional development programmes and the creation of interlinkages with consumer needs and societal trends. These objectives are to be reached through an intensive process of interregional learning, knowledge exchange and inter-cluster cooperation process.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The importance of promoting innovation is one of the Cohesion Policy objectives and it includes the *developments in sport technology and other innovation, as well as smart specialisation strategy* to which sport projects can certainly contribute.

1.1.2. Direct support to sport SMEs and related business support organisations

Sport can further enhance the competitiveness of SMEs, as sport can itself be a significant economic and growing activity in its own right. Apart from the growth in employment in sport facilities and gyms, as physical activity becomes ever more part of a modern lifestyle, activity tourism is the fastest growing segment of a diversifying tourism sector and facilities and support for cycling and walking is playing a major role in the development on low-carbon transport systems. Furthermore, sport can also have major impacts in terms of ICT technological advances and marketing activities, which in turn enhance the competitiveness of SMEs. For instance, the following projects will better highlight the practicalities of sport-led projects designed to promote the competitiveness of SMEs.

- **ProFit¹⁵** was an INTERREG IVB North-West Europe project which aimed to stimulate innovation and new business creation in the sport sector by developing an EU network of **FieldLabs** focused on sport. The FieldLabs are located in urban communities where citizens can engage in innovative sport activities across the EU. This project was designed with the aim to stimulate both business activity and employment. Most notably, ProFit had a direct impact on supporting

¹³ For further information: <http://www.nano4sports.eu/>

¹⁴ For further information: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/inno4sports/>

¹⁵ For further information: <http://www.fieldlabs.eu/> ; Bladel, C. van (2016). Fieldlab Sport Innovation & Stimulation. Progress Report 2015 (Final). Eindhoven: Sports and Technology.

the SMEs, as the SME profits derived from this project provided a key impulse for further business development. ProFit had a direct contribution to the economy of the cities and regions, by promoting social innovation and encouraging the development of start-ups around projects for the FieldLabs urban communities.

- **The Social Good Lab¹⁶** is a 9-month booster programme funded with ERDF in partnership with Paris Région Innovation Lab and the Comptoir de l'Innovation aiming to support entrepreneurs and start-ups in the Greater Paris in developing innovative technological services which respond to social and environmental issues. Start-ups selected as part of the Social Good Lab's accessibility program will have access to an incubation offer. As part of the candidature of the City of Paris to host the 2024 Olympic Games, The Social Good Lab offers its programme to support retired sportsmen in their conversion to become entrepreneurs.
- **EventScotland (International Events)¹⁷** was an ERDF-funded project developed in cooperation with the Scottish government with the aim being to implement a strategy for developing a strong and dynamic events industry as part of its promotion of Scotland as a tourist destination and as 'the perfect stage' for events and festivals. Within this, and working with Scottish Enterprise and Business Scotland, EventScotland is assisting the internationalisation of SMEs developing major events, both in order to deliver events of the highest standard and to be able to offer goods, equipment and services for other events elsewhere in the world. The rationale for this aspect of the Programme includes the observation that only 13% of SMEs in Scotland were exporters in 2012, down from 16% in 2007. Barriers to exporting include lack of suitable products, lack of business planning around exporting or perceived barriers such as cost, time and identifying overseas customers.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The presented projects highlight one of the Cohesion Policy objectives as *to provide direct support to empower SME's competitiveness in the realm of sport.*

1.1.3. Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility

Sport is a labour-intensive sector, which means that the sport-related economy generates growth in terms of employment. Furthermore, it engages a wide range of social groups and has the potential to promote mobility of learners and workers as a route to recognised and comparable qualifications. The projects outlined below give practical lessons on how sport-related projects could promote sustainable and quality employment, as well as labour mobility.

- **Introduction of New Educational Systems for Quality Distance Learning in Sport and Sport-Related Programmes¹⁸** was an ESF-funded project focused on promoting quality employment, as well as labour mobility in Bulgaria. Implemented by the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski", the project focused on the establishment of a centre to provide online learning and training courses for professionals working in the field of sport education and training. The

¹⁶ For further information: http://www.mon-incubateur.com/site_incubateur/incubateur/social-good-lab-paris-13eme-arondissement

¹⁷ For further information: <http://www.eventscotland.org/funding/international-programmes/>

¹⁸ For further information: <http://www.nsa.bg/bg/process/id,2308>

project led the beneficiaries to obtain or improve their qualifications status as sport coaches and teachers which in turn improved their chances of finding employment in these roles meanwhile provide them with up-to-date knowledge.

- **Sport Leadership Education for Women: Leading like a woman¹⁹** is a project developed in Finland by the Finnish Olympic Committee with the support of the ESF. It aims to strengthen women's leadership skills and knowledge of decision making in sport, encourage more women to stand for election and increase the number of female decision makers at local, regional and national levels. It aims to achieve that by developing personal development plans and mentoring sessions through sport education with women across Finland. The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable educational concept that could be apply in learning facilities and institutions also after the project will end. The project is a good example of bridging the gender gap and encouraging women's leadership in different sectors of activity through soft skills gained via a sport education.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned examples directly fall under several priorities of Cohesion Policy, such as *improving the quality of employment*, as well as *enhancing labour mobility*.

1.1.4. Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment

A skilled workforce is crucial for the optimal functioning of any sector, especially when taking into account the diversity of jobs across the sport sector. Most notably, the need to improve employee competences to reduce disparities between skills and labour market needs, as well as the shortfall in high-skills for the applications of new technologies is expected in the sport sector. And yet, sport embeds a series of transferable skills which enhance labour versatility and is a particularly useful instrument for motivating social groups that other, more formal, training approaches fail to engage. The projects outlined below give practical lessons how sport-related projects could develop the skills and knowledge of labour in the sport sector.

- **FUTSAL (Football Used Towards Social Advancement and Learning)²⁰** secured funding from the INTERREG IVA Ireland-Wales Programme with the overall aim to provide education and work opportunities for young people in disadvantaged areas. It sought to obtain the benefits of sport-based interventions in the form of improved engagement in educational programmes, psychological health and wellbeing. In particular, FUTSAL was developed with the following objectives: the first objective was to use the powerful attraction of football to re-engage unemployed men and women with mainstream education to increase their prospects of employability or to enhance their prospects of going on to further education. The second objective was to influence and assist community regeneration via employment and volunteerism. The participants engaged in a programme of sport themed activities. Further

¹⁹ Project presented by the Finnish Olympic Committee in March 2019, within a SHARE capacity building activity in Finland

²⁰ For further information: <http://projectfutsal.ie/>;
http://www.irelandwales.ie/projects/priority_1_theme_1/futsal

Education complemented by a broad range of FAI and WFT certified coach education awards. FUTSAL is a project which highlights the power of sport-led initiatives in terms of promoting labour versatility and transferable skills through football themed education.

- **Development of the sport workforce**²¹ is a project funded by the ESF and the Republic of Slovenia. Its purpose is to increase the quality and the competitiveness of the sport workforce with the aim of improving their competences and reducing the gap between the needs of the labour market and the skills of the sport workforce in Slovenia. Specific objectives were (1) to increase the knowledge in sport and its application in practice (e.g. funding PhD studies, exchange, etc.), (2) to acquire the knowledge at the highest level of education, and to increase the health enhancing physical activities (e.g. funding the Higher education – formal education), (3) to promote interdisciplinary education, and enable the transfer of knowledge in coaching, competitive sports, etc. (e.g. funding the education of coaches, administrators, etc.), and (4) to provide the continuous interdisciplinary education, connect the sport workforce with the system of public health, and to transfer knowledge in sport recreation, as well as in sport for elderly people (e.g. funding the work of kinesiology experts within the system of public health).

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The relevance of investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning is captured by the future Cohesion Policy, especially when it comes to using sport to develop *transferable skills for employment*, as well as to *improving skills and competences* of people working in the sport sector *to close the gap between the demand of the labour market and the existing workforce*.

1.1.5. Social engagement and improving governance and administrative capacity

Further efforts are required to raise the level of good governance in sport. All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability in decision-making, and inclusiveness of interested stakeholders. In that sense, sport-funded projects could contribute to enhancing institutional capacity and improving the efficiency of public administration. The example will better exemplify this notion.

- **SUCCESS**²² was an ESF-funded project implemented in Malta with the purpose to improve good governance and develop competencies to operate within EU forums effectively. This was achieved through the implementation of a capacity building programme for public service sport administrators, to strengthen the institutional and administrative capacity of the body responsible for sport regulation and administration in Malta - KMS (Kunsill Malti Ghall-iSport – Malta Sport Council) and related relevant organisations. Through the strengthening of

²¹ For further information: <https://www.olympic.si/trenerji/razvoj-kadrov>

²² For further information: EOSE Final Report ESF 4.216 - SUCCESS – Capacity Building Programme for Public Service Sports Administrators Sept 2015, <http://eose.org/2015/06/mobilitysupportjobs-from-theory-to-practice/>

management skills in sport organisations, the project has resulted in greater professionalism, with an improved governance and administrative capacity reported.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

Strengthening the institutional and public administration capacity is captured by the future Cohesion Policy, especially when it comes to *modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor-made assistance*.

1.2. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to demonstrate how sport-led initiatives could contribute to a Smarter Europe, which is the one of the Cohesion Policy main objectives for the upcoming financial period 2021-2027. The categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport outlined how the general objectives of enhancing EU smarter dimensions could be linked with a sport perspective.

Drawing on the past and present programming periods examples, a variety of projects illustrates how the EU funding allowed sport-led initiatives to deliver on the objective of a Smarter Europe, in line with the future Cohesion Policy's priorities. The main funding programmes behind these types of projects were the ESF and the ERDF. The key areas of intervention related to the main objectives of 'a Smarter Europe' policy which are addressed through sport-led initiatives are the following:

➤ **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**

Sport is an area characterised by constant innovation and development. Indeed, advancement in sport is strongly connected with development and innovation in sport science, advancement in training facilities and performance monitoring and multiple ICT applications. It can also provide excellent testbeds for other developments relating to diverse areas, such as medical science, textiles, new materials, information systems and performance measurement. Therefore, as the discussed projects highlight, it is essential to strengthen research, technological development and innovation opportunities in the sport sector and capitalise on sport ecosystems to favour spill-overs in other economic sectors.

➤ **Direct support to sport SMEs and related business support organisations**

Sport can further enhance the competitiveness of SMEs, as sport can be itself a significant activity in its own right. Furthermore, sport can also have impacts on ICT technological advances and marketing activities, which in turn enhance the competitiveness of SMEs. For instance, the discussed projects highlight the details of sport-led projects designed to promote the competitiveness of SMEs and its trickle-down effects on local communities, as well as at the regional and national levels.

➤ **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility**

Sport is a labour-intensive sector, which means that by sport-related economy lay the foundation to achieve a more proportional growth of employment. Furthermore, these have the potential to promote mobility of learners and workers through the implementation of recognised and comparable qualifications. The projects presented clearly highlight key practical lessons on how sport-related

projects could promote sustainable and quality employment, as well as labour mobility, within the sport sector. Sport is particularly good at engaging a wide range of social groups in these processes.

➤ **Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**

EU interventions for a Smarter Europe have a clear focus on investing in education, training and vocational qualifications with quality professional development opportunities. In view of the growing demand for such professionals, people working in the sport sector should have access to comparable training and qualifications which allow them to improve their skills in the sector and meanwhile enhance their personal and professional growth. The project examples clearly show how vital it is to invest in sport sector professionals to encourage a smarter Europe.

➤ **Social engagement and improving governance and administrative capacity**

All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of transparency, accountability and shared-knowledge. Sport-funded projects could promote these principles and also present practical ways of how the principles could be implemented. In particular, the project SUCCESS implemented in Malta demonstrates how the ESF has enabled public service sports administrators with relevant and up-to-date skills. As shown, this has resulted in a tangible more efficient public administration in Malta. The projects highlighted to enhance institutional capacity and an efficient public administration could be used as sources of lesson learnt.

Annex 2: A Greener, low-carbon Europe through sport

The EU has acknowledged the need to focus more on a sustainable future and tackling climate challenges. A Greener, low-carbon Europe is defined as one of the Cohesion Policy main objectives beyond 2020 on which the EU would like to build in the new financial period. This goal should be based on the further implementation of the Paris agreement and additional investments in the field of energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change.

The objective of this paper is to outline and explore how sport projects could help the EU in delivering on a Greener, low-carbon Europe. In addition, this research paper seeks to provide advice on how the Cohesion Policy funds could be used in the upcoming financial period, notably by mapping the areas in which sport could support the green and low-carbon objective.

The Commission's long-term strategy on addressing environmental challenges is presented in a recently adopted Communication 'A Clean Planet for all' and will be further finetuned with the European 'Green Deal' to be presented by Frans Timmermans (Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for the European Green Deal).²³ These documents outline the Commission's vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive, green and climate neutral economy. They also serve as a reaffirmation of Europe's commitment to act as the leader in environmental action.

Pursuing the objectives of a climate neutral economy will transform the European energy system, agricultural and industrial production and the way people live and work. The Commission actively supports businesses, administrations and consumers so that together, we can turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy.

The sport sector should be understood as a vital and active European economic sector, which impacts on our natural environment but also interacts with and contributes to the conservation of that environment. Various initiatives in the field of climate change, where inevitably a transition is needed, the sector has already been taking concrete actions. The international sport organisations led by the United Nations Climate Change have already recognised the importance of this topic and their role in combat against climate change. They published a Sports for Climate Action Framework in December 2018.²⁴ The reasoning behind this framework is to raise awareness and action to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement through the commitment of other sport organisations, teams, athletes and fans. The framework was signed by 17 high-level organisations and the International Olympic Committee took the role of leadership.

The participants in the Sports for Climate Action Initiative will commit to follow these five principles:

- Principle 1: Undertake systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility;
- Principle 2: Reduce overall climate impact;
- Principle 3: Educate for climate action;
- Principle 4: Promote sustainable and responsible consumption;
- Principle 5: Advocate for climate action through communication.

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0773>

²⁴ United Nations Climate Change – Global Climate Action, *Sports for Climate Action Framework*, 2018, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Sports_for_Climate_Action_Declaration_and_Framework.pdf

Table 2: Specific objectives of the policy priority ‘A Greener, low-carbon Europe’ 2021-2027²⁵

A Greener, low-carbon Europe			
Specific objective 1	Specific objective 2	Specific objective 3	Specific objective 4
Promoting energy efficiency measures and renewable energy through investment in generation capacity, smart energy systems, grids and storage and other infrastructure at local level	Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience	Developing the (Transition to) circular economy, through investment in the waste sector and resource efficiency	Enhancing biodiversity, promoting green infrastructure in the urban environment and reducing pollution

Based on the previously-developed categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport²⁶, the specific objectives linked to ‘a Greener Europe’ policy priority (Table 2) could be met via the following lines of action applied in the sport sector:

➤ **Promoting sustainable transport**

- Promoting active travel, particularly in relation to urban mobility and more strongly emphasising alternative low-carbon transport means such as walking and cycling;
- Investing in alternatives to car transport by developing a network of low-carbon-sharing systems, including bicycle and scooter sharing networks;

(in line with Specific objective 1 and 4)

➤ **Other measures reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable tourism**

- Investing in sustainable sport infrastructure and facilities and improving the energy efficiency of the existing buildings;
- Using green approaches and technologies;
- Investing in green tourism by promoting low-carbon sport activities and linking environmental education with outdoor experiences;

(in line with Specific objective 4)

The above-presented specific actions will be explained in relation to different Cohesion Policy funds in section below, building upon good practice project examples. Two other categories of investment could also be envisioned in the future funding streams, although the current research has not identified relevant projects in those fields.

➤ **Investing in technology, industrial production and innovation**

- Investing in innovative sport solutions which will produce a lower carbon impact, covering sport equipment and goods;

(in line with Specific objectives 3 and 4)

²⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

²⁶ The categorisation was developed in the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development: CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

➤ **Greening the sport sector**

- Investing in SMEs in the sport sector to facilitate their transition to the low-carbon economy;

(transversal action, in line with all the Specific objectives above)

The next sub-sections consider how cohesion funding could be unlocked for the identified sport intervention areas above and the broader Greener, low-carbon Europe objectives, building upon good practice project examples.

1.1. Sport-led initiatives contributing to a Greener, low-carbon Europe

This section will explore how the general objective of a Greener, low-carbon Europe could be linked with funding opportunities for the sport sector under the future Cohesion Policy. The section will also present several already funded projects, which could be used as a source of valuable lessons and inspiration for the upcoming financial period.

Among the funding streams, the ERDF is one of the most relevant for identifying sport-led initiatives through which climate challenges could be tackled. Aiming to decrease disparities among regions, the ERDF will focus its investments on innovation and research, as well as on developing the low-carbon economy in the next multiannual financial framework. As such, ERDF is most relevant for the following areas of intervention:

- **Promoting sustainable transport**
- **Other measures reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable tourism**
- **Investing in technology, industrial production and innovation**
- **Greening the sport sector**

However, ESF could also intervene in financing actions under the above areas of intervention.

As demonstrated by the above categorisation of Structural Fund interventions based on sport, sport-led projects and initiatives could be linked with all three of the areas of intervention above. The section below also briefly explains how such areas of intervention are relevant under the future Cohesion Policy. Depending on the angle and the objectives to be fulfilled, a continuing focus on these areas under a Greener, low-carbon Europe priority would allow sport projects to have positive impacts through a variety of tools, both at individual and societal levels.

1.1.1. Promoting sustainable transport

The industrial transition towards less-carbon dependent societies will require more investment in safe and clean transport. In that sense, sport can provide a myriad of possibilities. Active travel entails the idea that walking or cycling are vital and beneficial modes of transport. Furthermore, the situation is being transformed by the development of electric cycles, which are extending possibilities in terms of the distance travelled, the geographical areas, where cycling is possible and the age groups involved.

The benefits of active travel are well documented. Evidence suggests that active travel helps in increasing the health of individuals by giving them opportunities to be physically active while commuting and also acting to change habits away from a sedentary lifestyle. In addition, active travel has positive impacts on the environment, since it reduces the consumption of fossil fuels, including carbon.

The successful and far-reaching promotion of active travel is illustrated by the European Mobility Week, an EU-wide campaign which encourages safe and clean urban mobility. The main elements of the campaign and its relation with a low-carbon Europe are presented below.

- **European Mobility Week²⁷** is a campaign started in 2002 and organised in a partnership with three types of stakeholders at local, national and EU levels: the European Commission (DG MOVE), the European Coordination (networks of local authorities and mobility and communication experts), and the National coordinators (representatives from national ministries and agencies). The campaign is strongly focused on urban areas - cities and towns as the main sources of pollution, congestions and other transport-related problems. The main objectives of the campaign are to promote innovative, clean and safe solutions for urban mobility. The 2019 theme is *Safe Walking and Cycling* and will put the spotlight on all benefits related to these modes of transport, specifically health and environment impacts.

Besides the communication campaign itself, certain projects focused on active modes of transport have been funded by the ERDF and provide valuable lessons for the future programming period. The Finnish, Spanish and French projects summarised below show how local citizens have embraced the benefits of active travel and how the EU investment helped in transmitting that message.

- **Mikkeli cycling and walking help²⁸** were developed through an ERDF project aiming to create high-quality routes for cycling and walking in the Finnish town of Mikkeli. The project aimed to encourage local habitants to be more active and engage in walking and cycling along the town centre, while also boosting social activities and events in these areas. The anticipated impacts were to reduce emission and mitigate climate change challenges, increase well-being and social and cultural sustainability and equality of the community.
- In the city of Clermont-Ferrand (France) a bicycle parking area in front of the train station was constructed. It is called **C. Vélo Box²⁹**, is sheltered and secured and has already encouraged many citizens to turn to cycling. The city's objective is to develop inter-modality between cycling and the public transport modes, such as trains, city buses and coaches. Thus, the C. Vélo Box includes 150 sites accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to users who have opted for a subscription. The C. Vélo Box benefited from an ERDF grant, as it reduces greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the use of sustainable transport.

²⁷ For further information: <http://www.mobilityweek.eu/>

²⁸ CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016.

²⁹ For further information: <https://www.c-velo.fr/>

- **MTB circuit and centre Moncalvillo**³⁰ were developed through an ERDF project in La Rioja region in Spain, which aimed to improve the general health conditions of its habitants, while respecting and not changing the original environment. The project developed a network of twenty routes (250 km) connecting nine municipalities. Each route has specific information (overview, distance, altitude etc.) and signalise different levels of difficulty: Green routes (easy), blue (easy), red (difficult) and black (very difficult). Thanks to the project routes, local businesses have grown alongside them, such as washing and bicycles repairing kits in sport centres, showers and bike rental services.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned examples fall under the policy objectives of the future Cohesion Policy, inasmuch as they provide alternative travel means to reduce societies' carbon footprint and thus contribute to *developing a low-carbon economy*.

1.1.2. Other measures reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable tourism

Tourism has many positive benefits both for individuals who travel and the hosting societies, but it also leaves a significant carbon footprint. One of the strongest synergies, which could be created, is using sport activities to contribute to a greener tourist sector. The added value of these types of project is their focus on environmentally sustainable policy solutions, spreading the tourism load over a larger area and the promotion of alternative means of transport.

Different examples illustrate beneficial collaborations developed between green tourism based on sport activities and lower carbon footprint. For instance, the projects summarised below, Bike Route of Friendship and Health – Porečanka between Croatia, Italy and Slovenia and Eurocyclo between Belgium and France demonstrate the success of a formula consisting of investing in greener tourism through the promotion of low-carbon sport activities.

- **Bike Route of Friendship and Health – Porečanka**³¹ was an INTERREG VA Italy-Slovenia project connecting three regions on the North Adriatic coast, located in three different countries – Trieste (Italy), Koper (Slovenia) and Istria (Croatia) with a route for non-motorised traffic (bikes, walking, roller-skating). The project combined the idea of green tourism based on the low-carbon physical activities which regenerated villages and boosted the popularity of these regions. The project is in accordance with the principles put forward in the EU macro-regional strategies of these regions as it promotes sustainable mobility, interesting tourist and cultural destinations, lower environmental risks, biodiversity and ensuring competitiveness and institutional reinforcement. The project had positive environmental developments and encouraged local residents and tourists to use more sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling which reduced carbon dependent transport.

³⁰ For further information: <http://centrobttmoncalvillo.com/>

³¹ For further information: <http://www.parenzana.net/en>

- **Eurocyclo**³² is an INTERREG VA Belgium-Northern France project which is based on the growth of the European cycling clientele to develop a qualitative tourist offer for cyclists around 3 major cross-border routes, the EuroVelo 3, 4 and 5 and also la Lys, to which node networks are attached, which are being expanded with 4 cross-border sections and 1 experimental network in the Bay of Somme. The project focuses on investing in the construction of sections, black points and passages that today form linear interruptions and also in the placement of information and service furniture. The expected results are an increase of 100,000 overnight stays and 150,000 visitors to the tourist sites, the creation of 8 important cross-border tourist products, the construction of 60 km of green roads, the signposting of 3,500 km of the networks.
- **LAST MILE** project aims to find innovative, flexible solutions for sustainable regional mobility systems to cover the last mile in tourism regions. It wants to offer visitors the possibility to travel the 'last mile' of their travel chain sustainably and, at the same time, provide alternatives to car use for residents on their daily trips. The project sets a concrete focus on the problematic accessibility of the last link of the travel chain from origin to destination (the so called "last mile") and collects and analyses solutions to cover this bottleneck with sustainable modes of transport. The environmental benefit and resource- and cost-efficiency in the long run are considered. As part of the project the following local initiatives were supported:
 - Cycling route from Lleida to La Pobla de Segur is an INTERREG VA project developed as part of the Last Mile Interreg Initiative enabling bike-train combination to "Lakes Route", which combines the use of the bicycle with the train along the Lleida-la Pobla de Segur line. It should be taken into account that cycle tourism is a long-distance cycling, which means a recreational activity, sporting and non-competitive combining physical activity with exploring the region from a touristic angle. Thus, it becomes an economic engine with great potential in Catalonia. In that meaning, the territorial area between Lleida and La Pobla de Segur has a cycling potential with important possibilities to create the conditions for taking advantage and offering new ways of mobility in this area.
- **BalticBike** system is a private initiative that received an EU funding from the European Fisheries Fund (EFR). The system employs 6 fulltime workers and 6 additional workers in summer season. The project was developed in response to the growing demand and expectations of tourists to increase the sustainable mobility in the tourist area. Constantly improved bicycle tourism infrastructure and mobility approach on the Polish and German side is beneficial for the development of initiatives related to bike rental systems.

Moreover, the next projects demonstrate how sport-based initiatives can contribute to the regeneration of former industrial areas and consequently assist in the transition from an old industrial economy to a greener hospitality and experience economy, while generating social and environmental benefits and developing the touristic potential of the area.

³² For further information: <https://www.interreg-fwvl.eu/fr/eurocyclo-lancement-officiel>

- The **Adventure-Tourism Centre of Kivioli**³³ in the industrial North-Eastern area of Estonia is a sport infrastructure developed on the highest artificial hill in the Baltic States (which was created from the residue from processing of oil shale). The ERDF contribution helped create the physical infrastructure based on the hill and sport facilities (for skiing, cycling, snowboarding, car course, motocross, health track) which contributed to the overall restructuring and diversifying of the regional economy in Ida-Viru County, Estonia. Ever since the completion of the centre, the attractiveness of the region skyrocketed, with 30,000 – 50,000 national and international tourists that visited the area annually. An enhanced stay of visitors was also recorded in the next years (an average stay is now 2 nights). The centre has helped position Estonia as an international adventure tourism destination. These include fire-fighting academy, adventure trail on poles, summer snow tube track with escalator lifts, disc golf tracks, bicycle pump rack etc. This project is also an excellent example of modernised sport infrastructure, which is discussed in more details in the next section.
- **Vuokatti Campus**³⁴ an area for leisure, work and study in the Kainuu region, Finland. The Vuokatti Campus creates an attractive environment that combines top-level sport training and studying in top facilities. For example, many national cross-country skiing teams practise in Vuokatti. Additionally, the Vuokatti Campus enables business and research around sport. This environment of outdoor sport as well as nature tourism makes the Kainuu region more valuable.

The next examples highlight the broader strategy of green infrastructure which aims to restore the health of ecosystems, ensure that natural areas remain connected together, and allow species to thrive across their entire natural habitat, so that nature keeps on delivering its many benefits to its inhabitants.

- **OPEN** (Oulu Parks – Enjoying Nature) focused on providing quality natural outdoor environments for the citizens of Oulu, Finland, aiming to activate people to spend time in the outdoors and to engage in regular physical activity in green spaces. Communicated as a form of preventive medicine Oulu strives to replicate the model across Finland. The Oulu Parks Concept funded with ERDF brings together different types of sites in the region in a green continuum, from large park-like nature sites in the city centre to the National Parks in wilderness, regardless of the site owner. The Oulu Parks Concept brought together those individual sites to form part of a network under a common brand – “Oulu Parks”- that was then communicated and marketed as a part of preventive health services in the project region, thus raising the profile and increasing appreciation of the sites. The project has established a model to make information about the “Oulu Parks” network accessible and can be replicated across Finland.
- **AIR** (Activation, Interaction and Recreation) project in Oulu, Finland funded under ESF used nature and outdoor experiences in OPEN sites in their activities aimed at preventing social exclusion among young people undergoing rehabilitation, other special target groups and also in improving occupational therapy. It modelled the use of the natural environment and nature related activities in various forms of rehabilitation to prevent social exclusion. Participants – rehabilitation groups at the Oulu Deaconess Institute – are taken on nature trips with the aim

³³ For further information: <https://seikluskeskus.ee/en/activity/adventure/>

³⁴For further information: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/ecoris3/news/news-article/1888/vuokatti-campus-an-area-for-leisure-work-and-study/>

to bring different outdoor experiences to the lives of young people and immigrants on rehabilitation programmes. Trips have involved engaging in various forms of physical activity in natural settings and taking part in nature management work in nature reserves, visiting cultural heritage sites, and observing nature. Feedback has been gathered from the participants. Another pilot action involved outdoor activities and nature management work in nature reserves related to occupational therapy. One action of the project was to develop training for health care professionals, in collaboration with the health sector. The purpose of the study module was to increase the capacity of practical nurse students to utilize the natural environment and outdoor activities in their future work.

Besides linking up alternative modes of transport and physical activities, one inevitable avenue is investing in sport infrastructure to make it more energy efficient and sustainable. This synergy is demonstrated by a couple of Belgian and Romanian ERDF projects, as part of which a sport hall and facilities were reconstructed to be more energy efficient.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned examples are relevant for the policy priorities of the future Cohesion Policy, as they contribute to the *protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism*. Such policy priorities can be leveraged to develop rural active tourism infrastructures and projects.

- **Sustainable innovation of the swimming pool in the Vrije Universiteit Brussels student campus³⁵.** The 25-year-old swimming pool needed a thorough renovation. In terms of energy efficiency in particular, it was high time to adapt the building to modern energy standards. The technical installations will be replaced and a new instruction pool will be built next to the existing one. The renovation and new construction received an ERDF grant for, among other things, a compact building with new flat and green roofs, a well-insulated ceramic coating, energetic glazing, a nightly cover on both pools, heat recovery thanks to efficient air pumps, recuperation of the filtered rinse water, LED lighting, disinfection of the water with chlorine produced via salt electrolysis.
- **Rehabilitation of the sports hall of the Bethlen Gabor school in Odorheiu Secuiesc, Romania³⁶** is an ERDF-funded project which aims to recondition the old sport facility in the school by making it more energy efficient and, at the same time, to enhance the infrastructure in order to accommodate extra-curricular activities such as dance, martial arts or other team games. The broadening of the sport offer has also an educational purpose, contributing to the acquisition of soft skills and lifelong learning for the youth.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The future Cohesion Policy foresees *investment in green urban infrastructures*, as part of the policy objective to develop a Greener, low-carbon Europe. The examples above are clearly aligned with such objective and can serve as examples for future sport-based projects.

³⁵ For further information: <https://www.vub.be/2020/swimming-pool>

³⁶ For further information: <http://regio-adrcentru.ro/elevii-scolii-beort-complet-noua/>

1.2. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to outline how sport-led initiatives could contribute to a Greener, low-carbon Europe which is one of the Cohesion Policy main objectives for the upcoming financial period 2021-2027. In this context, the sport sector should be understood as one of the vital human and social activities which also needs to strive to achieve the objectives of the EU low-carbon economy and reduced carbon emission by 2050. The first policy step towards these objectives could be seen in the 2018 Sports for Climate Action Framework signed by key international and European sport organisations, including the International Olympic Committee and FIFA.

The categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport of demonstrated how the general objectives of a Greener, low-carbon Europe could be fulfilled through the tools offered by sport. Drawing on the present and past programming periods, a variety of sport-led projects pursuing these objectives was identified. The main funding programme behind these projects was the ERDF, but ESF played an important role as well. The key areas of intervention related to the main objectives of 'a Greener, low-carbon Europe' policy priority which are addressed through sport-led initiatives are the following:

➤ **Promoting sustainable transport**

The strongest synergies have been noticed in relation to sport-led initiatives, which address urban mobility challenges, ranging across air and noise pollutions and traffic congestion. As the project sampled showed, urban sport projects often include a transport dimension where cycling, walking or running are presented as alternatives to carbon transport. The EU-wide campaign European Mobility Week is an example of good practice where local, national and European stakeholders are gathered around the idea of promoting healthier carbon-free transport modes, in particular cycling and walking options. Similarly, the ERDF projects implemented in France (C.Vélo Box), Finland (Mikkeli cycling and walking help) and Spain (MTB circuit and centre Moncalvillo) have the same objectives of facilitating walking and cycling activities for all citizens and people with reduced mobility.

➤ **Other measures reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable tourism**

Tourism is a major economic activity which produces a significant carbon footprint. Sport activities could support the process of making tourism less-carbon dependent and mitigating its carbon outputs. The added value can be created in linking a green tourism strategy with indoor and outdoor low-carbon sport activities, such as cycling, walking, and kayaking. For instance, Bike Route of Friendship and Health is a unique project implemented in Croatia, Italy and Slovenia which connected the North Adriatic villages and towns via cycling and walking tracks which are highly used by tourists and commuters. Eurocyclo also connects Belgian and French territories through soft transportation, aiming to also enhance touristic flow in the regions. The Adventure-Tourism centre in Kivioli, Estonia blends the development of the touristic potential of an area with the transition from old industrial economy to a greener, experience-based economy, while offering an example of modernised multi-purpose sport large infrastructure built to contain the local environmental hazard.

Moreover sport-based initiatives can contribute to the so-called 'green infrastructure strategy' aiming to restore the health of ecosystems and ensure that natural areas remain connected together, for the benefits of all their inhabitants. Such strategy is highlighted by some projects developed in Finland, such as OPEN (Oulu Parks – Enjoying Nature) and AIR (Activation, Interaction and Recreation).

The improvement of sport infrastructure and facilities is an important objective which saves energy and enhances energy efficiency. The renovation of the swimming pool in Brussels and Romanian Reconstruction of Sports Facility in Odorheiu Secuiesc projects showcase the need to invest more in sport infrastructure which would result in decreased maintenance costs, improved energy efficiency, while at the same time broadening the educational offer for the local youth. Investing in technology, industrial production and innovation and greening SMEs in the sport sector.

The areas in which more funding should be made available and projects implemented relates to further investment in technologies used for the production of sporting goods, along with more incentives for SMEs operating in the sport sector to motivate them to use low-carbon solutions and tools. Funding should facilitate this sector's transition to less-carbon dependent manufacturing, hence allowing it to pursue the objectives of reduced carbon emissions.

Annex 3: A more Connected Europe through sport

One of the five new Cohesion Policy main objectives beyond 2020 is to create a more Connected Europe through a number of long-term paradigm shifts such as for instance the introduction of the 5G technology which will provide virtually ubiquitous, ultra-high bandwidth, and low latency "connectivity" not only to individual users but also to connect objects. Therefore, it is expected that the future 5G infrastructure will serve a wide range of applications and sectors including professional and amateur uses, e.g. connected & automated mobility / transport, eHealth, energy management, and of course sport and health-enhancing physical activity related applications.

Sport and physical activity could be promoted via digital technologies meanwhile technologies in sport can contribute to leveraging the full potential of the EU's Digital Single Market. This can be achieved by matching ICT innovations and ever-growing consumer expectations and demands, placing sport as an important demand driver for digital services and content. Digital technologies in sport include: innovation relevant at personal level (wearable technology) to innovation relevant to business-to-business solutions of a sophisticated data analytics that provide a competitive edge in professional sport. Technological advancements are already influencing how sport content is being consumed and sport content delivered with new virtual reality experiences. While this offers new spectator experience it also affects and may influence the existing business model between sport event organisers and broadcasters, possibly bringing more individualised offerings of sport content and opening up new ways of serving consumer demands.

The objective of this paper is to outline and explore how enhancing physical activity and sport funded projects could help the EU in delivering a more Connected Europe. In addition, this chapter seeks to provide advice on how future funding could be used in the upcoming financial period, notably by mapping the areas in which sport could contribute to a more Connected Europe.

Successive EU policy publications and policy papers have already acknowledged the important role that sport has in European societies, and in particular, in terms of promoting a more Connected Europe. The development of ICT is vital for Europe's competitiveness in today's increasingly digital global society. A recent study by Deloitte³⁷ shows that an increasingly connected and digital world is forcing the sport industry to adapt, where the Internet of Things is increasingly adopted to bridge the gap between the physical world and the digital space.

When it comes to ICT related matters and referred to the current programming period, EU regions and Member States that want to use ERDF are required to develop innovation strategies for smart specialization (RIS3) based on the idea of rational strategic management, which often encapsulate a strong emphasis on ICT. This implies exploring the relationship between strategic policy design and policy performance.

³⁷ Deloitte Digital, *Internet of Things in Sports – Bringing IoT to Sports Analytics, Player Safety and Fan Engagement*, 2018

Table 3: Specific objectives of the policy priority ‘A more Connected Europe’ 2021-2027³⁸

A more Connected Europe			
Specific objective 1	Specific objective 2	Specific objective 3	Specific objective 4
Enhancing access to, use and quality of digital connectivity	Developing a sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent, secure and intermodal Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)	Developing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility	Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility

Based on the previously-developed categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport³⁹, the specific objectives linked to ‘a more Connected Europe’ policy priority (Table 3) could be met via the following lines of action applied in the sport sector:

➤ **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**

- Using sport to promote ICT connectivity at the regional level;
- Enhancing technologies to promote the development of applications aimed at health enhancing physical activity;
- Enhancing technologies to promote the development of applications aimed at promoting participation of vulnerable groups in sport activities, particularly at the grassroots level;
- Enhancing technologies to enrich the potential of e-sport both in terms of financial revenues and participation;
- Using sport to promote ICT products, services and e-commerce related to sport;

(in line with Specific objective 1)

➤ **Improving sport skills & competences and supporting labour mobility**

- Promoting the opening of innovative pathways to enhance employability in the sport and e-sport sector, particularly of those who tend to experience marginalisation;
- Developing e-learning and sport qualifications more comparable across the EU (such as EQF, ECVET, EQAVET and Europass);
- Promoting the use of digital badges for sport professionals visible and recognised across the EU;

(in line with Specific objective 1)

➤ **Enhancing mobility and promoting active citizenship**

- Contributing to the development of sustainable transport, by establishing healthier and more beneficial alternatives to conventional road transport which could facilitate access to sport initiatives;

³⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

³⁹ The categorisation was developed in the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development: CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

- Enhancing mobility opportunities and exchange of good practices for sport personnel – in particular, for sport instructors, coaches and other sport staff directly working at the grassroots level;
- Enhancing mobility opportunities for sportspeople – in particular, through the implementation of a digital EU sport-card and related apps;
- Promoting active citizenships and cross-borders collaboration through sport initiatives driven by ICT means;

(in line with Specific objectives 3 and 4)

➤ **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

- Improving the institutional capacities of sport organisations and associations at all levels to enhance cooperation, shared practices and knowledge;
- Improving institutional capacity to appropriately connect and communicate with sport organisations and associations at the grassroots level;

(transversal action, in line with Specific objectives 1, 3 and 4)

The next sub-sections consider how cohesion funding could be unlocked for the identified sport intervention areas above and the broader ‘more Connected Europe’ objectives, building upon good practice project examples.

1.1. Sport-led initiatives contributing to a more Connected Europe

This section will explore how the objective of a more Connected Europe could be linked with funding opportunities for the sport sector under the future Cohesion Policy, notably by showcasing examples of funded projects which could be used as a source of valuable lessons and inspiration.

Among the funding streams, the ERDF has made available over €20 billion for ICT investments during the 2014-2020 funding period. These investments further support the aim to endorse a more Connected Europe in the next multiannual financial framework. The ESF also provides potential for supporting projects in the sport sector.

The ERDF is generally most relevant to the following areas of intervention:

➤ **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**

Whereas, the ESF is generally concerned with the following areas of intervention:

- **Improving sport skills & competences and supporting labour mobility**
- **Enhancing mobility and promoting active citizenship**
- **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

As demonstrated by the above categorisation of Structural Fund interventions based on sport, sport-led projects and initiatives could be linked with all of the areas of intervention above. The section below explains how such areas of intervention are relevant under the future Cohesion Policy. Depending on the angle and the objectives to be fulfilled, a continuing focus on these areas of intervention under a more Connected Europe policy priority would allow sport projects to have positive economic and societal impacts.

1.1.1. Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation

At a general level, there are opportunities within ERDF programmes to support sport-related projects that focus on enhancing access to, use and quality of digital connectivity.

- **ESPAD (Embedded Sport Performance Analysis Data)**⁴⁰ was a project developed by INRIA⁴¹, the French National Institute for computer science and applied mathematics. It originally consisted of experimenting and developing wireless sensor network technologies for performance evaluation and the measurement of athletes in various sports. This pioneer project, completely financed by the ERDF, found other applications afterwards, within the eSport industry. The ESPAD project was conducted by INRIA, but other ERDF related projects included these coordinated by the French Skiing Federation, the Regional Rowing League and by the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned example directly falls under several priorities of Cohesion Policy, such as *encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation* that contribute to an increased connectivity within societies.

1.1.2. Improving sport skills & competences and supporting labour mobility

The workforce is crucial for the optimal functioning of any sector, including the sport one. The ESF has directly invested in projects aimed at promoting the employability and mobility of the sport workforce through e-learning qualifications and innovative programmes. The two projects outlined below give practical lessons on how sport-related projects could develop employability in the sport sector.

- **Club Development: Wellness and Knowledge through Sport**⁴² was a programme developed by the Football Association of Finland with support from the ESF. The programme supported the full-time employment of football development officers in clubs. The funding was used to employ full-time project officers at football club in Finland. The persons are employees of the clubs but they are also used to deliver wider sport and health objectives for the local authorities. The aims were to ensure the employees are self-sustainable after the three-year period, bring the clubs closer to the needs of the wider community and to prove that football partners are trustworthy and can deliver. The benefits at club level were having a full-time staff member to work on the club's administration, promotion and finances. Clubs have also had greater exposure to more diverse groups in the community and club facilities have been more fully used. All the individuals recruited made their positions sustainable after the three-year period.

⁴⁰For further information: http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/studies/structural-funds-annex-1_en.pdf

⁴¹ For further information: <https://www.inria.fr/en/>

⁴² For further information: <http://www.palloiluesr.fi/>

- **Curricular/methodological development and professional training for teachers for daily physical exercise⁴³** was an ESF project developed by the University of Physical Education located in Budapest, Hungary. It was focused on the implementation of methodological development and professional training for teachers for daily physical exercise. Indeed, physical education and sport methodologies were modernised and redesigned to support the renewal of the recently implemented daily physical education curriculum in schools. This made use of exercise and training methods used in game sports. Most relevant to the thematic area covered here, this project has implemented a web-based interactive platform which functioned as an e-learning application containing several hundred hours of videos, animations, figures and tables supporting the transmission of information and knowledge in the realm of sport. Also, a mentor or sport professional online assistance system was developed for teachers and coaches where questions could be asked and support received.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned examples directly fall under several priorities of Cohesion Policy, such as *enhancing employability*, as well as *improving skills and competences*, which contribute to an increased dynamic of the sport sector.

1.1.3. Enhancing mobility and promoting active citizenship

As previously mentioned, sport projects directly increase the sustainable mobility of citizens, contributing to connecting communities through an active lifestyle. The example below highlights how Cohesion Policy funds could be used in developing infrastructure and services to better connect different regions and help citizens to commute in a sustainable way.

- **CHIPS - Cycle Highways Innovation for Smarter People transport and Spatial planning⁴⁴** is an INTERREG VB North-West Europe project between Flemish Brabant, Gelderland, FrankfurtRheinMain and Ruhr regions which aims to develop innovative solutions and measures to make the most of cycle highways in order to help users orientate better, to inform them about the environment, to offer safer and more comfortable journeys and to ultimately increase the number of commuters on the cycle highways. CHIPS involved other international partners: the British bicycle promoter Sustrans, the Dutch university of applied sciences NHTV and the European Cycling Federation (ECF). In total, the CHIPS partners invest in five cycle highways.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned project contributes to the Cohesion Policy future priorities, inasmuch as enhancing citizens' mobility through alternative means of transport contributes to a more connected society.

⁴³ For further information: : <http://www.English.tf.hu>; www.virtualcampus.tf.hu

⁴⁴ For further information: <https://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/cycle-highways-innovation-for-smarter-people-transport-and-spatial-planning/>

1.1.4. Improving governance and administrative capacity

To enhance institutional capacity and create an efficient public administration, more efforts are required in terms of raising the level of good governance in sport, which is an area of public policy and responsibility. All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability in decision-making, and inclusiveness of interested stakeholders. In that sense, sport-funded projects could contribute to enhancing institutional capacity and improving the efficiency of elements of public administration. The example below shows the success of ESF funding addressing the need for investing in institutional capacities of the sport sector.

- **SUCCESS⁴⁵** was an ESF-funded project implemented in Malta in order to improve good governance and develop competencies to operate within EU forums effectively. This was achieved through the implementation of a capacity building programme for public service sports administrators, to strengthen the institutional and administrative capacity of the body responsible for sport regulation and administration in Malta - KMS (Kunsill Malti Ghall-iSport – Malta Sport Council) and related relevant organisations. Through the strengthening of management skills in sport organisations, the project has resulted in greater professionalism, with an improved governance and administrative capacity reported.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

Strengthening the institutional and public administration capacity is captured by the future Cohesion Policy, especially in terms of *modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor-made assistance*. The above-mentioned example directly addresses these needs, in line with a technologically dynamic and more connected society.

1.2. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to demonstrate how sport-led initiatives could contribute to a more Connected Europe, which is one of the Cohesion Policy's main objectives for the upcoming financial period 2021-2027. The categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport outlined how the general objectives of a more Connected Europe could be linked with a sport and physical activity perspective.

Drawing on current and past programming periods examples, a variety of projects illustrate how the EU funding allowed sport-led initiatives to deliver on the objective of a more Connected Europe, in line with the future Cohesion Policy's priorities. The main funding body behind these types of projects was the ESF, and the ERDF to a lesser extent. The key areas of intervention related to the objectives of 'a more Connected Europe' policy priority which are addressed through sport-led initiatives are the following:

⁴⁵ For further information: EOSE Final Report ESF 4.216, *op.cit.* 2015.

➤ **Encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation**

Promoting access to, and use and quality of ICT, and regional ICT connectivity are important elements of EU policies. Sport-led projects could act as a strong tool to encouraging developments in sport technology and other innovation. Indeed, it appears that improvement in ICT applications with a focus on sport science can promote the development of sport competence clusters, particularly in terms of e-sport economy. The past projects such as ESPAD in France, and those implemented by the French Skiing Federation, the Regional Rowing League and by the Institut National des Sciences Appliquées could be used lessons from which to learn.

➤ **Improving sport skills & competences and supporting labour mobility**

Investing in employment and labour mobility remains a key priority, as this represents a labour-intense sector. People working in the sport sector, should have access to EU tailored and recognised training which would allow them to improve their skills and employability at the EU level, meanwhile enhance their personal and professional growth. The project examples funded under the past programming periods highlights the effectiveness in adopting ICT technologies to promote employment and labour mobility, in particular, through the adoption of online platforms for e-learning courses.

➤ **Enhance mobility and promoting active citizenship**

Many Europeans people can relate to sport as sport speaks the language of many EU citizens. With technological advances it has become more accessible to reach and consume sport and its competitions in spite of their geographical locations. Likewise, technology providers and companies could be used to further promote active citizenship and mobility through sport, for example through appropriate transportation and strategic infrastructures planning, as seen in the CHIPS project example. Such initiatives could also facilitate access to education and training, the adoption of new technologies to improve learning (such as ICT applications for e-learning), the creation and improvement of sport centres, the accessibility of existing structures for people with reduced mobility, the creation of Centres of Excellence involving VET institutions. As such, in the next programming period, these advantages should be more explicitly recognised.

➤ **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of transparency, accountability and shared-knowledge. Sport-funded projects could promote these principles and also present practical ways of how the principles could be implemented. In particular, the project SUCCESS implemented in Malta demonstrates how the ESF has enable public service sports administrators with relevant and up-to-date skills. This has resulted in a tangible more efficient public administration in Malta. The project highlighted to enhance institutional capacity and an efficient public administration could be used as sources of lessons learnt.

Annex 4: A more Social Europe through sport

One of the five new Cohesion Policy main objectives beyond 2020 is to create a more Social Europe through the enhanced implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and support for quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare. The new objectives of the EU's investment instruments including the Cohesion Policy funds will reflect the changing societal needs.

The objective of this paper is to outline and explore how sport and sport funded projects could help the EU in delivering on a more Social Europe. In addition, this research paper seeks to provide advice on how the future funding could be used in the upcoming financial period, notably by mapping the areas in which sport could contribute to a more Social Europe.

Several EU policy announcements acknowledge the important role of sport in European societies, and in particular, societal benefits resulting from it. The EU rationale is outlined in the 2007 White Paper on using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities⁴⁶, which regards the social dimension of sport through its potential to improve the health of European citizens and reinforce European human capital (knowledge, readiness, motivation and skills).

Sport's potential in relation to preventive healthcare is the subject of international policy papers as well. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO)⁴⁷, physical inactivity (lack of physical activity) has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality (6% of deaths globally). Moreover, physical inactivity is estimated to be the main cause for approximately 21–25% of breast and colon cancers, 27% of diabetes and approximately 30% of ischaemic heart disease burden. Regular and adequate levels of physical activity in adults reduce the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, breast and colon cancer, depression and the risk of falls, improve the bone and functional health, and are a key determinant of energy expenditure, and thus fundamental to energy balance and weight control. Physical inactivity is estimated to attribute to one million deaths (about 10% of the total) per year in the WHO European Region. It also accounts for 8.3 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs⁴⁸ – about 5% of the total) in the Region.⁴⁹

In addition, sport can also play an important role in promoting active citizenship through different volunteering opportunities and facilitating the integration of different groups into European societies. Volunteering work also provides an input (of labour) into the conduct of community and elite sports with an important impact on economic activity.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe⁵⁰ launched 10 actions to make the right training, skills and support available to people in the EU. The European Commission recognised skills as a pathway to employability and prosperity. Sport activities can create and develop important transferable skills and leadership values which can foster competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation.

⁴⁶ European Commission, White Paper on Sport, *op.cit.*, 2007

⁴⁷ For further information: <https://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/pa/en/>

⁴⁸ DALY is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death

⁴⁹ Key Facts on physical activity in the WHO European Region, <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/data-and-statistics/10-key-facts-on-physical-activity-in-the-who-european-region>

⁵⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>

Table 4: Specific objectives of the policy priority ‘A more Social Europe’ 2021-2027⁵¹

A more Social Europe		
Specific objective 1: employment	Specific objective 2: education, training	Specific objective 3: social inclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing the effectiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing infrastructure; • Modernising labour market institutions and services; • Promoting a better work/life balance, a healthy and well-adapted working environment and active & healthy ageing ; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and life-long learning through developing infrastructure; • Improving the quality, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems; • Promoting flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all; • Promoting equal access to quality and inclusive education and training; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the socioeconomic integration of marginalised communities, migrants and disadvantaged groups; • Ensuring equal access to health care through developing infrastructure, including primary care; • Enhancing the equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable services;

Based on the previously-developed categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport⁵², the specific objectives linked to ‘a more Social Europe’ policy priority (Table 4) could be met via the following lines of action applied in the sport sector:

➤ **Addressing health and other societal challenges and contributing to happiness & well-being**

- Promoting healthy ageing and combating social exclusion of elderly and people with disabilities;
- Promoting active lifestyle through different public campaigns and grassroots sport organisations;

(in line with Specific objective 1)

➤ **Social engagement**

- Using sport to promote social inclusion and access to training and employability of disadvantaged groups (e.g. children at risk of poverty, refugees, people with disabilities);
- Using sport to combat poverty and discrimination;
- Using sport to enhance social cohesion and sense of belonging;

(in line with Specific objective 3)

⁵¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

⁵² The categorisation was developed in the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development: CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

➤ **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility**

- Workforce development opportunities – training and skills development for the sport sector, with a special focus on sport instructors, coaches and other sport staff directly working with children and people from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Promoting social businesses in the field of sport, through development of social ecosystems and networks;
- Supporting labour mobility and exchange of good practices through mobility of sport staff and volunteers;

(in line with Specific objective 1)

➤ **Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**

- Dual careers – training for athletes to prepare for work after their professional career ends;
- Promoting equality of opportunities in the sport sector such as coaching skills for women or employees from disadvantaged background;
- Upskilling of long-term unemployed to work in the sport sector;
- Investing and promoting grassroots sport as extracurricular activities in educational institutions;
- Developing participants' soft skills through sport, including working in a team, commitment, communication etc.;

(in line with Specific objective 2)

➤ **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

- Improving the institutional capacities of sport organisations and associations at all levels to enhance integrity and transparency in the sport sector;

(transversal action, in line with all Specific objectives above)

The next sub-sections consider how cohesion funding could be unlocked for the identified sport intervention areas above and the broader 'more Social Europe' objectives, building upon good practice project examples.

1.1. Sport-led initiatives contributing to a more Social Europe

This section will explore how the objective of a more Social Europe could be linked with funding opportunities for the sport sector under the future Cohesion Policy, notably by showcasing examples of funded projects which could be used as a source of valuable lessons and inspiration.

Among the funding streams, the ESF, and to a certain extent, the ERDF, are the ones most strongly dedicated to strengthening solidarity and the social dimension of Europe.

In the context of a more Social Europe objective, ESF provides the largest potential for supporting projects in the sport sector. The ESF has a strong focus on investing in human capital, while improving opportunities for the most disadvantaged member of European societies through its strong focus on social inclusion. The ESF is generally most relevant to the following areas of intervention:

- **Addressing health and other societal challenges and contributing to happiness & well-being**
- **Social engagement**
- **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility**
- **Improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**
- **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

As demonstrated by the above categorisation of Structural Fund interventions based on sport, sport-led projects and initiatives could be linked with all of the areas of intervention above. The section below explains how such areas of intervention are relevant under the future Cohesion Policy. Depending on the angle and the objectives to be fulfilled, a continuing focus on these areas of intervention under a more Social Europe policy priority would allow sport projects to have positive economic and most of all, societal impacts.

1.1.1. Addressing health and other societal challenges and contributing to happiness & well-being

At a general level, there are opportunities within ESF programmes to support sport-related projects that have a general focus on raising personal wellbeing that have wider social (and economic) benefits. Participating in sport can help individuals to be more physically and mentally fit, while also improving soft competences, such as confidence, motivation, discipline, self-esteem, communication and team-working. For instance, Fit for Business is a project which empirically shows how sport and physical activities could improve employees' well-being, work motivation, while also positively affecting their eating habits.

- **Fit for Business**⁵³ was a successful INTERREG IVA Germany-The Netherlands which involved 41 companies and local governments with a total of 7, 674 employees. The project aimed to improve the health conditions of employees, raise awareness of the importance of an active lifestyle and create new networks consisting of sport clubs and private companies. The impacts of the project were very positive: 90% of the participating organisations thought that the project was effective. A third of the participating employees believed that they feel more energetic and are better prepared for work. The percentage of employees following healthy diet has improved: 56% (DE) and 88% (NL) eat vegetables and fruits every day. Before, only 40% (DE) and 67% (NL) stated the same.

In addition to positive impacts which sport can have on individuals, sport can also produce positive impacts in relation to society at large. ProFit demonstrates these individual and societal impacts created through sport. The impacts could particularly be strengthened by including the most vulnerable groups in the community such as children and elderly and giving them possibilities to be more physically active in order to improve their well-being.

⁵³ CSSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

- **ProFit**⁵⁴ was an innovative sport project funded through the INTERREG IVB North-West Europe programme. It aimed to stimulate innovation and new business creation in the sport sector through the development of an EU network of field-labs. The field-labs were located in four European urban areas: Eindhoven, Delft (NL), Kortrijk (BE) and Sheffield (UK) where local citizens could engage in designing innovative sport activities. A product innovation competition was also part of the project to inspire and source new products to test in the field-labs. The examples of developed products are interactive grass pitches adapted to specific groups like elderly or a supervised playground located in a neighbourhood with young families and an elderly home (NL).

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

One of the Cohesion Policy objectives is to empower health systems, notably by *investing in health promotion and disease prevention*, to which the above-mentioned sport projects certainly contribute.

1.1.2. Social engagement

Sport can also strengthen social inclusion of different marginalised or disadvantaged groups, including refugees, the young unemployed, people with disabilities and children at risk of poverty, mostly through a developed set of training and shared activities which create sense of belonging. Sport is particularly good at getting through to disadvantaged groups, including people who would find it difficult to be involved in formal education and training processes, because of a lack of study skills or even language difficulties. Moreover, sport can be an effective tool to bring people together and teach them democratic values, particularly respect for others, equality and tolerance. The Interreg **Youth-Sport-Vol** project demonstrates how sport can facilitate access to labour market for young unemployed people and foster their social inclusion in Estonia and Finland via a volunteering sport programme.

- **Youth-Sport-Vol**⁵⁵ is an INTERREG VB project developed in the Central Baltic which aims to increase social inclusion of young unemployed and enhance their employability through the development and piloting of cross-border sport volunteers' model in Estonia and Finland. Through voluntary work, the young unemployed gain work experience in different organisations with people from different nationalities and age groups. The project set up the Sport Volunteers Permanent Secretariat in Sport Year Foundation for the sustainability of the model.

The **HAKA project** in Paris (France) shows how sport is used in school to promote the learning of responsibility and citizenship, of respect for oneself, for others, for the social rules and how sport contributes to providing equal opportunities and integration by giving all pupils the same rights and duties.

⁵⁴ For further information: <http://www.fieldlabs.eu/>

⁵⁵ For further information: <https://www.sculpt.org/en/about/interreg-central-baltic-youth-sport-vol-project>

- Saint-Jean de Sannois College in the Paris region favours sport to support its students' success. It launched the **HAKA project**⁵⁶, funded by the ESF, which aims to re-motivate secondary school students at risk of dropping out through sport and individualised tutoring. Because these young people generally experience academic difficulties and show a real motivation for sport, these sports paths allow them to reveal their potential, channel their energies and acquire values such as respect, team spirit, gender equality and even surpassing oneself. Organised as a team of educators and teachers, sport activities also serve as a support for traditional teaching to explain basic knowledge in a concrete way. For example, a stadium is used as a measurement tool by mathematics teachers. Each young person is continuously monitored by one or more educators who accompany him/her in his/her autonomy and relationship with the group. In the evenings, students also receive enhanced tutoring, supervised by educators and teachers. They can thus reinforce their learning and (re)learn the work methodology, while being surrounded and supported in the success of their future project.

Similar projects on inclusion of other groups at risk of exclusion, such as refugees and migrants could be found in many EU countries funded by different European and national schemes. Many of them provide valuable lessons for the future programming period. Welcome to Football is a project which provides an example of how a national professional sport association could support the social objective of social inclusion of migrant and refugees through free football practice, which aims to bring communities together.

- **Welcome to Football**⁵⁷ is a German Football League (DFL) ESF project started in Germany. Bundesliga Foundation initiated connecting professional football clubs with local amateur clubs through alliances. These alliances allow migrants to join amateur football clubs to play and train in football. The project also provides social and educational services, in particular education, language classes and other integration measures, such as excursions, tours, and family/fans activities. By participating in local sport activities, migrants receive emotional and physical support and have possibilities to spend quality time with their neighbours. The anticipated impacts of this project are more integrated local communities and enhanced social cohesion.

The project below, **Rising You(th)**, demonstrates how a sport-led project could help in fulfilling multiple Structural Funds objectives. This project offers free climbing activities to migrants and refugees in order to enhance their social inclusion and build a more multicultural society. In addition, the project is also focused on combating poverty through providing training for participants to become climbing assistants.

- **Rising You(th)**⁵⁸ is a project run by Nature and Minor Ndako in Flanders and Brussels where 1 in 5 unemployed young people have a migration background. The idea behind the project is to encourage migrants and refugees over the age of 14 to participate in climbing activities to build a multicultural society. Beside participating in climbing for leisure, young people have opportunities to take part in the programme Rising You(th) where they are trained to receive

⁵⁶ For further information: <https://saint-jean-sannois.apprentis-auteuil.org/editorial/sport-et-culture/projet-haka-les-parcours-sportifs-une-pedagogie-differente-pour-la-reussite-scolaire/>

⁵⁷ Ecorys, *Mapping of good practices relating to social inclusion of migrants through sport*, final report to the European Commission, 2017, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f1174f30-7975-11e6-b076-01aa75ed71a1/>

⁵⁸ Idem

a climbing qualification to undertake a variety of tasks related to safe and secure climbing. These qualifications also help them to find a stable employment in Belgium.

One innovative social approach consists of linking sport training with social reintegration of young offenders to help them with the reintegration into society. The example of this synergy was found in Poland where an ESF project combined social reintegration and sport qualifications focused on developing empathy.

- **Life Signpost for NEET youth and juveniles**⁵⁹ was an ESF-funded project targeting minors in Polish correctional institutions who were trained and re-educated through a series of six sport-based training qualifications with an emphasis on empathy. The training sessions consisted of learning to swim, lifeguarding, first aid, lifesaving on a boat, motorboat helmsman, and volunteering to help people with disabilities. The project was very well received by participating schools and previously unmotivated young participants. Additionally, positive impacts, not solely on participants' personalities, but their practical and social skills were noticed.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The above-mentioned examples directly fall under several priorities of Cohesion Policy, such as *promoting the socio-economic integration of third country nationals and of marginalised communities*.

1.1.3. Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility as well as improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment

A workforce is crucial for the optimal functioning of any sector, including sport, where the demand for qualified staff is growing in professional sport activity, in sport centres, gyms and fitness centres, in schools that are including more physical activity in the curriculum and in the activity tourism sector. To achieve the social objectives of investing in human capital and ensuring that skills of people working in this sector are relevant for labour market developments, more programmes should be developed. The projects outlined below give practical lessons on how sport-related projects could develop the skills and knowledge of employees in the sport sector.

- **Education for sport**⁶⁰ was an ESF project which provided language and interpersonal training for Polish staff of sport organisations and individuals actively participating in the sport life. It aimed to improve their linguistic and interpersonal competences, especially in the context of the organization of EURO 2012 which was happening in the region. The project delivered English and German language courses and interpersonal training for 720 people.

⁵⁹ For further information: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=46&langId=en&projectId=2817>

⁶⁰ CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

- **Improving the qualifications of teachers of physical and sport education**⁶¹ was a ESF project implemented in Slovakia. The main focus was strengthening the qualifications of teachers of physical and sport education. The emphasis was on innovative ways and methods of physical education teaching at primary and secondary schools. The project created and implemented new innovative educational programmes in schools, improved the qualifications of teachers and increased the attractiveness of physical education and sport among young people.
- **Skills4Life – Skills for Life**⁶² is a project funded under ESF in Lapland aimed at creating a modular education program of skill acquisition, utilising digitisation. This will be reflected in the creation of a skill-learning centre of excellence that promotes physical activity and life management through skills training. The skills managers who are trained in the project work as skill-driven experts in their own operating environments by leveraging know-how theories and applying and developing new innovations and models for skill acquisition. It is anticipated that an entirely new set of skills trainings will be created and included in the curricula at Lapland University of Applied Sciences and the Lapland University Group.

Children are one of the most active participants in sport. In order to protect their well-being and the well-being of some disadvantaged groups like people with disabilities, more tailored training programmes for people working in the sport sector should be developed. Investing in the skills of sport workforce should be one of the main priorities which would enhance the competences of instructors and other staff in sport organisations, consequently increasing the quality and safety of sport environments. These types of projects have been usually funded by the Council of Europe in partnerships with Erasmus+. This can be seen as one dimension on which the ESF would focus more in the next programming period.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

Such sport-led initiatives clearly feed certain objectives of Cohesion Policy, such as, *fostering active inclusion with a view to promoting equal opportunities and active participation, and improving employability.*

1.1.4. Improving governance and administrative capacity

Finally, more efforts are required to raise the level of good governance in sport. All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability in decision-making, and inclusiveness of interested stakeholders. In that sense, sport-funded projects could contribute to enhancing institutional capacity and improving the efficiency of public administration. The example of this endeavour has been identified in Hungary where ESF funding addressed the need for investing in institutional capacities of the sport sector.

⁶¹ Idem

⁶² For further information: <https://www.lapinamk.fi/fi/Yrityksille-ja-yhteisolle/Lapin-AMKin-hankkeet?RepoProject=221638>

- **Exploration of the dimensions of physical activity and sport in Hungary⁶³** was an ESF funded project aiming to explore how the European dimensions of sport can be transferred to the Hungarian setting. The project developed legal and political tools serving the current and future goals for human resources and organizational capabilities in sport.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

Strengthening the institutional and public administration capacity is captured by the future Cohesion Policy, especially when it comes to *modernising labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and ensure timely and tailor-made assistance*.

1.2. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to demonstrate how sport-led initiatives could contribute to a more Social Europe, which is the one of the Cohesion Policy's main objectives for the upcoming financial period 2021-2027. The categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport outlined how the general objectives of a more Social Europe could be linked with a sport and physical activity perspective.

Drawing on the current and past programming periods examples, a variety of projects illustrates how the EU funding allowed sport-led initiatives to deliver on the objective of a more Social Europe, in line with the future Cohesion Policy's priorities. The main funding body behind these types of projects was the ESF, and the ERDF to a lesser extent. The key areas of intervention related to the objectives of 'a more Social Europe' policy priority which are addressed through sport-led initiatives are the following:

- **Addressing health and other societal challenges and contributing to happiness & well-being**

Promoting health and well-being of EU citizens are important elements of EU social policies. Sport-led projects could act as a strong tool to encourage physical activities and promote their health benefits. Encouraging healthy ageing and combating social exclusion of the elderly through organised sport and adapted sport facilities is an example which should be explored more in the upcoming programming period. The past projects such as **Fit for Business** in the Netherlands and Germany and ProFit implemented in the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK could be used as sources of lessons learnt.

- **Social engagement**

Sport has an important role to play in strengthening social inclusion of different marginalised or disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities, refugees and children at risk of poverty. It is a particularly effective approach in this area. To meet these objectives, sport-led projects design training sessions and shared activities which create sense of belonging and team work and inculcate generic and transferable skills. As such, it also helps the unemployed regain access to the labour market and reintegrate themselves into society, as it did the Interreg project Youth-Sport-Vol. Sport is also used to increase the motivation of students at the risk of school dropout and to promote responsibility, citizenship and equal opportunities, as it was shown by the HAKA project in Paris. Many EU countries have already implemented projects on facilitating access to sport activities for refugees and migrants

⁶³ Idem

to integrate them into societies. Welcome to Football, Rising You(th) and Life Signpost for NEET youth and juveniles are a few examples of projects which aimed to enhance social inclusion of targeted disadvantaged groups through organised sport activities.

➤ **Impacts on related employment and supporting labour mobility as well as improving sport skills & competences and using sport to develop broader skills for employment**

EU social interventions have a clear focus on investing in human capital and providing a workforce with professional development opportunities. People working in the sport sector, especially with children should have access to tailored training which would allow them to improve their skills and qualifications and enhance their personal and professional growth. Projects such as Improving the qualifications of teachers of physical and sport education in Poland and Education for sport in Slovakia show how vital it is to invest in sport sector professionals to strengthen this social dimension. Projects such as Skills4Life in Lapland invest in the development of innovative programmes for skills acquisition through physical activity, harnessing sport as a basis for personal development and youth preparation for work.

➤ **Improving governance and administrative capacity**

All sport organisations and associations should be governed based on the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability etc. Sport-funded projects could promote these principles and also present practical ways of how the principles could be implemented. Some project examples such as Exploration of the dimensions of physical activity and sport in Hungary demonstrate how the ESF has enabled a national sport organisation to improve its institutional capacities.

Annex 5: A Europe closer to citizens through sport

The objective of this paper is to analyse and understand how sport could support the EU in achieving one of the main objectives of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, which is to bring Europe closer to citizens through sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives. This fifth main objective of Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 is cross-cutting and can contribute to the specific objectives of the other four main objectives of the new Cohesion Policy.

The introduction of this fifth cross-cutting policy objective corresponds to the increased focus on Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) in the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. SUD is expected to be implemented via integrated strategies adopting a functional territory perspective with more delegation of tasks to the local level and via increased synergies between the different funding streams.

In preparation for the SUD strategies foreseen via the fifth policy objective of the future Cohesion Policy was the Urban Agenda for the EU agreed under the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016⁶⁴, which is a wider ‘umbrella’ strategy to strengthen urban policy initiatives at all levels. The agenda focuses on a series of priority themes and actions delivered through thematic partnerships of cities, Member States, the EU institutions and knowledge platforms (e.g. URBACT, or ESPON), as well as with the collaboration of other experts and stakeholders.

In this context, sport-based initiatives could take a crucial role in bringing Europe closer to citizens, given the benefits of sport and physical activity in forging urban and territorial attractiveness policies.

The 2007 White Paper on Sport highlights the importance of sport and related investments in supporting the sustainable and integrated development of local communities, and the societal and economic benefits this provides⁶⁵. In fact, among others, investments in sport can support processes of urban regeneration and place development, as well as the economic diversification and modernisation of coastal and rural areas. Finally, sport can also play an important role in supporting environmental protection policies by providing good practice examples of sustainable development at the local level, and by raising the public engagement on the topic through role models. Similar acknowledgements are also made in the 2015 United Nations resolution entitled ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Urban Agenda for the EU – ‘Pact of Amsterdam’, agreed at the Informal Meeting of EU Ministries Responsible for Urban Matters on 30 May 2016, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/pact-of-amsterdam.pdf

⁶⁵ European Commission, White Paper on Sport, *op.cit.*, 2007

⁶⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

Table 5: Specific objectives of the policy priority ‘A Europe closer to citizens’ 2021-2027⁶⁷

A Europe closer to citizens	
Specific objective 1	Specific objective 2
Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental development, cultural heritage and security in urban areas	Fostering the integrated social, economic and environmental local development, cultural heritage and security, including for rural and coastal areas also through community-led local development

Based on the previously-developed categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport⁶⁸, the specific objectives linked to ‘a Europe closer to citizens’ policy priority (Table 5) could be met via the following actions applied in the sport sector:

- **Infrastructural and spatial development:** the development of sport infrastructure and facilities represents an important way to foster sustainable and integrated development at the regional and local level. In fact, the construction and maintenance of sport-related infrastructures and facilities might provide clear benefits:
 - *Urban regeneration:* the development of sport facilities can strongly improve the attractiveness of the cities, by contributing to processes of sustainable spatial and place development. This aspect becomes even more significant in relation to those efforts aimed at mitigating the deindustrialisation processes affecting several peripheral and urban areas;
 - *Employment multiplier:* investing in sport through the development of sport-related facilities and infrastructures might significantly benefit other sectors (i.e. environmentally sustainable construction or transport industries, research and innovation, etc.) and provide opportunities for sustainable employment opportunities in socially and economically deprived areas;
 - *Social inclusion:* the urban regeneration of industrial and peripheral areas can positively affect the image of these areas, thus fostering the social inclusion of their inhabitants. In addition to this, sport might also contribute to the development of community identities and strengthening local social fabrics through the engagement in sport activities.
- **Economic development and diversification:** investment in the sport sector might represent an important driver for economic development through the diversification of the economic activities traditionally connected to rural and coastal areas. In this way, sport plays a significant role in achieving integrated and sustainable development by establishing synergies and linkages with other sectors, according to the specificities of the local and regional areas:
 - *Rural areas:* sport might benefit both socially and economically deprived rural areas by contributing to their economic development through clustered approaches or broader development strategies, which might also indirectly affect other sectors (i.e. tourism,

⁶⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN>

⁶⁸ The categorisation was developed in the 2016 study on the contribution of sport to regional development: CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

textiles, marketing, etc.). In this way, investments in sport might thus provide opportunities for sustainable and integrated businesses and labour market growth, as well as contributing to the broader modernisation of the economic and productive sector;

- *Coastal areas*: in coastal and maritime areas, investments in sport might be linked to the development of sustainable tourism and creative and cultural industries (CCI), and thus positively counteracting the seasonality of tourism or other maritime activities. This would also eventually enhance the distinctiveness of the local or regional area.

➤ **Environmental protection**: investments in sport-related activities might also contribute to those efforts aimed at tackling climate change and promote environmentally sustainable development solutions. Among the benefits for the environment that can be provided through sport investments it is possible to mention the following ones:

- *Transport alternatives*: investments in sport might also contribute to change the citizens' attitudes and habits in terms of means of transport and commuting;
- *Conversion of brownfield areas*: investments in sustainable sport facilities might represent an important solution to regenerate specific areas that might have been affected by contamination or pollution. In different sport clubs and stadia, the impact of emissions and the development of environmentally sustainable facilities have already played an important role in relation to the protection of the environment;
- *Role models*: investments in sport networks, events or campaigns might also provide opportunities to increase public engagement on issues such as environment protection and the impact of climate change. The celebrity factor of sport professionals might, in fact, strongly contribute to the public behaviour change in this regard and thus support an integrated and sustainable development of these local areas.

The next sub-sections consider how cohesion funding could be unlocked for the sport intervention areas above and the transversal 'Europe closer to citizens' objectives, building upon good practice project examples.

1.1. Sport-led initiatives contributing to a Europe closer to citizens

This section will analyse how the objective of bringing Europe closer to citizens could be met through the development of sport-based initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives. As mentioned above, sustainable urban and territorial development is foreseen through an integrated approach that combines different priorities of operational programmes and draws ideally on all current ESI Funds (i.e. ERDF, ESF, EMFF and EAFRD). As a result, all these funding streams have the potential to deliver on the objective of bringing Europe closer to citizens. This section will present relevant examples of projects funded mostly through ERDF and EAFRD.

1.1.1. Infrastructural and spatial development

The ERDF can be used to support sport-related investment that contribute to spatial development and urban regeneration priorities. In fact, one of the investment priorities under this specific fund relates to the provision of resources to improve the urban environment, to revitalise cities and to support the physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived peripheral areas. Moreover, 5% of the national ERDF allocation was proposed to be earmarked for the sustainable urban development purpose through the new Cohesion Policy.

For instance, the project *Creation of a Sports Pavilion in the Urban Zone* developed under the Urban initiative of the Municipality of Palencia contributed to the integrated development of two deprived peripheral areas within the Palencia urban area.

- **Creation of a Sports Pavilion in the Urban Zone of Palencia, Spain**⁶⁹: in order to contribute to the urban, economic and social development of the *El Cristo* and *Ave Maria* districts, the project funded by ERDF had three different strategic lines. In particular, the project was aimed at supporting the endogenous development of the area, the integration of the districts within the urban area and the integration of the groups of the districts within the process of regeneration through the creation of a new sport infrastructure that can host different kinds of sport events (e.g. exhibition, courses, competitions, etc.). The project proved to be quite successful in terms of visitors attracted and social integration of the inhabitants of these districts into the urban area (mainly Roma people and migrants). Moreover, the facilities created under this project are environmentally sustainable and provided the opportunity to regenerate an area characterized by high levels of environmental degradation.

In addition to this, some projects might also contribute to the regeneration of declining industrial areas by transforming their urban landscape and addressing environmental issues, such as the industrial pollution. In this sense, the Adventure-Centre of Kivioli project represents a significant example.

- **The Adventure-Tourism Centre of Kivioli**⁷⁰: this project supported by ERDF funds helped create a multi-purpose sport infrastructure on the highest artificial hill in the Baltic States (which was created from the residue from processing of oil shale). As such, the centre contributed to the overall restructuring and diversifying of the regional economy in Ida-Viru County, Estonia, highlighting the transition from an old industrial economy to a greener hospitality and experience economy, while generating social and environmental benefits and developing the touristic potential of the area. Finished in 2013, the centre unlocked further ERDF grants during 2016 and 2017, with a view to enhance the infrastructure to accommodate more types of sports for all persons of all ages and genders.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The priorities of the future Cohesion Policy refer also to *investments in infrastructure and spatial development*. The above-mentioned examples are excellent examples of *an integrated social, economic and environmental development through sport* that invest in infrastructure in both urban and rural areas.

⁶⁹ For further information: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/spain/neighbourhood-revival-in-palencia

⁷⁰ For further information: <https://seikluskeskus.ee/en/activity/adventure/>

1.1.2. Economic development and diversification

The economic development and diversification of rural and maritime areas might also be achieved through investments in the sport sector. In fact, sport might represent a driver of economic change for those areas characterized by economies only focusing on a specific productive sector, as in the case of rural (i.e. agriculture) and maritime (i.e. tourism or fishery) areas. In rural areas, sport might contribute to the modernisation of the economic sector, while in coastal areas, the development of sport facilities might mitigate the seasonality of tourism and fishery sectors.

In this sense, the sustainable and integrated development of rural areas could also be achieved through funds activated under the ERDF, as witnessed by the number of projects aimed at fostering the economic development and diversification of rural areas through the investments in sport facilities and sport-related tourism activities. For instance, the project *Riudecanyes Adventures* represents a positive example of how sport can play an important role in rural development and revitalisation.

- **Riudecanyes Adventures**⁷¹ focuses on the creation of a sport natural park in a rural area in the province of Tarragona, Catalonia, Spain. Through this ERDF-funded project, it has been possible to establish synergies and connections between various sport clubs, associations and companies in the area to promote active tourism involving different sporting activities (i.e. hiking, climbing, biking, canoeing, kayaking, etc.). Moreover, the project also features educational programmes for students, aimed at raising awareness and respect for the environment and at the enhancement of cultural heritage and the identity of the territory. The project proved to be particularly successful, since it responded to the need for new sustainable growth of this rural area, by also contributing to the creation of jobs and to the overall economic growth of the area.

Moreover, projects aimed at regenerating rural and peripheral areas and at developing sport infrastructures can also support the social and economic inclusion of more peripheral areas and communities. In this sense, the below example shows how Structural Funds can be used for the integrated and sustainable development of such areas, while also boosting their attractiveness.

- **Conversion of an old railway track into a hiking trail to allow hikers to discover the area in Haut-de France-Region**⁷²: The construction of 22 kilometres of greenway in the Somme Department of Haut-de-France from Longpré-les-Corps-Saints to Oisemont was possible with the support of the EAFRD.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The future Cohesion Policy focus also on local integrated development, and certain priorities focus on the development of *rural and coastal areas, also through community-led local development*. The two examples above are clearly in line with such priorities.

⁷¹ For further information: <http://riudecanyesaventura.cat/>

⁷² For further information: <https://www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr/fr/projets/transformation-dune-ancienne-voie-ferree-en-chemin-de-randonnees>

1.1.3. Environmental protection

ERDF can also be used to support sport-related projects aimed at fostering environmental awareness and tackling climate change by facilitating the use of alternative transport means or by improving the energy efficiency of the sport facilities. In fact, the ERDF also supports projects aimed at preserving and protecting the environment, with a specific focus on promoting green growth and economic innovation.

In this sense, several projects focus on improving the energy efficiency of selected areas, as well as on the regeneration and conversion of brownfield sites in order to improve the urban environment. The rehabilitation of the Nakache swimming pool project represents a significant example of how ERDF funds might contribute to an increased use of renewable energies for the renovation and construction of sport facilities.

- **Rehabilitation of the Nakache swimming pool in Toulouse, France⁷³:** This project was developed under the ERDF strategic objective of the promotion of sustainable development, with a specific focus on boosting energy efficiency. As part of this project, 406m² of solar panels have been installed on the roof of the swimming pool Nakache, a famous sport facility in the city of Toulouse that was built in the 1930's. The funds were instrumental to the implementation of a renovation plan for this facility, which was part of a broader sustainable development strategy at the municipality level. This project shows how investments in sport facilities might also contribute to wider sustainable development goals, with initiatives specifically designed to lower energy spending and revitalise the urban environments. Finally, in France there have been around 30 ERDF projects supporting the installation of solar panels for sport infrastructures, and thus representing a common type of intervention that could be potentially replicated also in other countries.

In relation to the efforts aimed at supporting the sustainable development and the protection of the environment, an ERDF investment priority that might be linked to sport-related investments is aimed at developing and improving environmentally-friendly transport systems. In this regard, the Mikkeli cycling and walking help project represents a meaningful example of project funded under the ERDF supporting sport-related activities with a strong emphasis on the environment, on sustainable transport and sustainable urban development.

- **Mikkeli cycling and walking help⁷⁴:** during the first stage of this ERDF project a feasibility study highlighted the potential contribution on social, economic and sustainable development of an alternative road transport system that would eventually favour environmentally-friendly modes of transport over car journeys. The ultimate goal was thus to encourage the local population of the Mikkeli municipality to replace car journeys with either walking or cycling trips.

From a more general perspective, recent initiatives have been increasingly developing a cross-sectoral approach around sport and physical activity, aiming to bring together regional and local actors from connected sectors such as health care, tourism, transport, ICT and gaming etc. The goal is to create regional development strategies that tackle various societal and economic challenges through sport activities and that harness technological advances and increased connectivity to develop better

⁷³ For further information: <https://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2009/04/06/588031-la-ville-rose-passe-a-l-energie-solaire.html>

⁷⁴ CSES, *op.cit.*, 2016

services for citizens in relation to a healthier and more active lifestyle. The Arctic Sport Network is a positive example of such cross-sectorial collaboration to develop and strengthen the regional sport ecosystem.

- **Arctic Sport Network⁷⁵** is a ERDF-funded initiative launched in Lapland that is based on cross-sectorial collaboration bringing together Lappish actors from different sectors including private sector, civil society, government and education and research institutions, with the aim to develop business opportunities, as well as to promote a healthy lifestyle and to strengthen the local knowledge base on sport and physical activity.

Relevance in Cohesion Policy (post 2020):

The future Cohesion Policy certainly supports *environmental-friendly urban infrastructure*. The above-mentioned projects clearly focus on *community-driven and sustainable urban development*.

1.2. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to demonstrate that sport-related investments might contribute to bring Europe closer to citizens by fostering an integrated and sustainable development in urban, rural and coastal areas through local initiatives. This is the fifth main objective of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 – a cross-cutting policy priority focusing on implementing sustainable urban development and integrated territorial investment drawing on all current ESI Funds. The categorisation of Structural Fund interventions around sport outlined how the general objectives of bringing Europe closer to citizens could be linked with a sport and physical activity perspective.

The main source of funding for sport-related projects aimed at fostering an integrated and sustainable development is the ERDF, due to the support provided to regional and local initiatives focusing on spatial and sustainable development. Moreover, the increased importance as investment priority of the environmental protection aspects also makes this funding programme particularly suitable to support sport-related projects within the broader objective of bringing Europe closer to citizens. However, all other Cohesion Policy funds could contribute to the objectives of this policy priority. The key areas of intervention related to the objectives of bringing Europe closer to citizens which are addressed through sport-led initiatives are the following:

- **Infrastructural and spatial development**

Due to the focus on the sustainable and integrated development of rural and coastal areas, it was shown that funds made available through the ERDF or EAFRD could also support sport-related projects (such is the example of the conversion of an old railroad into a hiking trail in Haut-de-France region or the Adventure-Tourism Centre in Kivioli). Additionally, these funding programmes include investment priorities aimed at promoting the social inclusion and economic development of these areas. However, our desk research has shown that these funding programmes are not widely used to support sport-related projects aimed at achieving sustainable and integrated development of coastal and rural areas.

⁷⁵ For further information: <https://arcticsmartness.eu/arcticsport-en/>

Additionally, certain projects funded under the ERDF mainly aimed at developing urban spaces arguably contribute to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (e.g. Roma people and migrants). This is particularly observable in the development of the Sports Pavilion in Palencia, where the investments in sport infrastructures contributed to the integration of these groups living in the suburban areas of the.

➤ **Economic development and diversification**

The chapter also shows that sport can be a driver of economic development and diversification in coastal and rural areas, but also in those urban areas that are affected by de-industrialisation processes. In fact, the Adventure-Tourism Centre in Kivioli, the Riudecanyes Adventures and the conversion of an old railroad in Haut-de-France into a hiking trail projects provide good practice examples showing how sport might play a key role in diversifying the economic activities of a local area, as well as in contributing to the transition process from old industrial-based economies.

➤ **Environmental protection**

It is also important to note the relevance of the environmental protection issue, and the opportunities offered by the ERDF to tackle climate change and increase energy efficiency through the development of environmentally sustainable sport facilities (as is the case with the Nakache swimming pool in Toulouse). Moreover, as shown by the Mikkeli cycling and walking help project, sport might also encourage the citizens' behavioural change, by promoting alternative means of transportation and contributing to an environmentally sustainable development of the urban areas.

Finally, this section notes that cross-sectorial approaches have started to develop in an increasing number of regions across Europe which highlight the manifold contribution sport and physical activity can bring to territorial development. These cross-sectorial approaches, such as The Arctic Sport Network in Lapland, are thus centred around sport and involve various connected economic sectors, such as tourism, new technologies, ICT, education, transport or health care in an endeavour to develop business opportunities in a sport ecosystem, while promoting a healthier and more active life style, harnessing the region's geographical, social and economic strength.

