

ENDURANCE: Entrepreneurial Capacity-building for Sport

Commonalities between Sport and Entrepreneurship

(ENDURANCE IO2T1 Output)

Country Notes ITALY

Introduction

This Country Note on Commonalities between Sport and Entrepreneurship in Italy has been prepared by “IDP European Consultants” as an initial output within the ENDURANCE Intellectual Output 2, Task 1 “Identify common traits and links between sports and entrepreneurship”. Its aim is to provide an informed insight within the area under investigation for the next stages of the project. In addition, its purpose is to inform project stakeholders and broader audience in sports and entrepreneurship communities about first advances of the ENDURANCE project.

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Commonalities between Sports and Entrepreneurship: ENDURANCE conceptual framework



Topic 1: Individual personality traits common for sports and entrepreneurship

The review of resources on overlaps and links between sports and entrepreneurship in Italy yielded the following list of commonalities among the individual personality traits:

- Leadership
- Sense of belonging
- Sense of challenge
- Spirit of initiative
- Goal Setting
- Resiliency and Ability to Learn from Setbacks
- Self-Discipline
- Persistence
- Understanding the importance of the moment
- Learning to accept positive criticism

Resources analysed from Italy states that athletes and sportspeople deal with multiple challenges during their career, that unknowingly prepare them for the world of entrepreneurship. There are several personality traits that link sports to entrepreneurship. First of all, we can mention the sense of challenge. The competitive variable in sporting disciplines is comparable to the confrontation that a company has to face with its competitors on a daily basis. Doing business also means having clear objectives and a solid strategy to adopt. Goals and strategies are a constant in sport: it is not only matter of talent, but also of self-discipline. There are setbacks to overcome and problems to face: learning to be resilient means understanding how to turn failures into opportunities. Of course, the theme of leadership is present in both strands together with group management dynamics. In this context, qualities such as perseverance and persistence project the sportsman into a dimension typical of the entrepreneur, who often has to endure and face numerous difficulties in order to achieve his objective. Furthermore, playing sport (in a group, but also individually) helps to develop one of the most important individual skills: the ability to achieve the desired results in the manner and within the timeframe indicated by the manager/boss/coach. The athlete can learn to be shaped by the coach's indications, just as the manager does not simply perform the task, but tries to identify the solutions that will most appropriately allow to achieve the goal. The ability to understand the importance of accepting constructive criticism is another very important factor that is absorbed during a sports career. The right criticism helps to increase one's ability to analyse, understand limits and study appropriate solutions to overcome them. The individual who accepts criticism is destined for growth in both sport and entrepreneurship.

Topic 2: Other individual-level fostering factors

The review of resources in Italy yielded the following list of fostering factors strengthening the link between sports and entrepreneurship from among the other individual-level aspects:

- Education and Family background
- Sport typology
- Organisation structure and utilities
- Financial Management
- Adaptability

Education and family background influence the entrepreneurial success opportunities and chances of athletes and former athletes. In particular, athletes coming from a family enterprise environment can easily develop an entrepreneurial mind-set. This fostering factor is linked also to education which can further develop the level of readiness for entrepreneurial activities by including tools and knowledge that contribute in enhancing business competences.

Also the quality of structures and utilities in the sporting organisations can be crucial: if the organisation is well structured this is already an important experience on how a working team should be managed, how financial and technical resources have to be invested and how to plan the forthcoming activities.

Furthermore, athletes develop great discipline, the ability to build relationships, and, particularly, adaptability: this is maybe the most important factor that will be crucial in the transition period at the end of sports career. Athletes are familiar with moving from one environment to another and this is very common also for entrepreneurs that should be familiar with travels, different kind of people and frequent challenges.

Topic 3: External supporting & triggering factors

The review of resources in Italy yielded the following list of external supporting and triggering factors that enhance the commonalities and foster pathways between sports and entrepreneurship:

- Spontaneous entrepreneurial activities
- Lack of supporting system
- Fragmentation

At current level, in Italy, there is no evidence of government policies towards sports infrastructure and support, entrepreneurship support system nor entrepreneurship support among sports authorities. The lack of data and research in this field allows us to state that the action of starting up a business by former athletes occurs mainly spontaneously, on the basis of the experience, knowledge and skills acquired during sporting careers. The phenomenon of training courses running parallel to sporting activities promoted and indicated by sports clubs has grown without any homogeneity and is still too fragmented. Sporadic initiatives have been put forward by the Italian Olympic Committee, but without sufficient follow-up and support from target groups and national policy makers. These initiatives include:

- "Sport e Imprese: play together, win together" by ICE (Italian Trade Agency), Confindustria and CONI - which highlights the contribution of the interaction of sport and business to the creation of value and growth for the country. Business and sport are two increasingly close worlds, whose integration generates economic, as well as physical and social, well-being¹.

Topic 4: Pedagogical approaches and education

The review of resources in "Italy" yielded the following main findings on pedagogical approaches and education that develop and capitalize upon the commonalities between sports and entrepreneurship:

- Lack of tailored training courses

¹ https://www.comitatoleonardo.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Report_SportImprese_2018.pdf

- Lack of skills gap assessment
- Lack of awareness

Research in Italy has not produced satisfactory results as there is no evidence of pedagogical approaches and educational paths specifically tailored for athletes. While (digital) entrepreneurship-related courses of study are present at all educational levels, there is a total absence of specific courses aimed at providing people involved in sport with adequate training in key entrepreneurial skills. Since 2016, the Italian Olympic Committee encourages educational activities to provide athletes (and former ones) with the necessary skills and knowledge to face the post-career issue and challenges. In particular, we mention the following initiative:

- “EduCare SPORT” by CONI and BNL-BNP PARIBAS - The programme includes a series of meetings on "post-career" issues, to train participants on economic, financial and motivational topics with the aim to help them make more informed financial choices and accompany them in their professional and entrepreneurial projects²
- ‘Digital & Entrepreneurship in Sports’ by LVenture Group and SKS365 which aims to stimulate entrepreneurial careers for former athletes by supporting them in the development of a business idea in the field of digital economy³.

Further initiatives concern more specifically the relationship between business opportunities arising from sport environment, which is a relevant phenomenon but is not the target of our research.

Topic 5: Connecting sports and entrepreneurship to create social impact

The review of resources in “Italy” yielded the following list of findings on how commonalities between sports and entrepreneurship have potential to create social impact:

- Sport as economic driver
- Sport as catalyst for universal values
- Social inclusion and well-being
- “Mondiali Antirazzisti” example

In Italy there are currently about 39,000 companies active in the sport economy, with a production value of 17.5 billion euro and 118 thousand employees. As stated by the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), sport is not only an economic driver, but also plays a fundamental social role, as it represents an educational means an extraordinary catalyst for positive universal values. Sport is a vehicle for inclusion, participation and social inclusion as well as an instrument of physical well-being and prevention. Since 2014 CONI promotes projects and initiatives with social and economic impact. The most successful practices in Italy, overall in terms of participation, are based on football games or small football championships. In this context, one of the most successful events in Italy is the “Mondiali antirazzisti” (Anti-Racist World Championship), an amateur event hosted in the province of Bologna, which brings together 30,000 between spectators, athletes (almost 4,000) and facilitators. The event, staged annually since 2012, is a clear example of social entrepreneurship as contributes in creating inclusion and opportunities for all the people involved in the organizational activities during the whole year.

² <https://www.coni.it/en/coni-eng/36-primo-piano/10968-progetto-%E2%80%99Ceducare-sport%E2%80%99D-con-la-bnl-gli-atleti-si-allenano-per-il-domani.html>

³ <https://www.digitalinsportstraining.com/>

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