

## MANAGING DIVERSITY IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SPORTS ENGAGEMENT

**Alessandro Fabio Conti**

A.P.D. Sport University, Napoli, Italy

### **Abstract:**

*This paper argues that Diversity Management is an effective strategic approach to achieving the multifaceted objectives of sport—social, economic, and athletic. In today's globalized world, sport serves as a key platform for interaction among individuals from diverse backgrounds. As such, managing diversity within the sports context is essential for fostering inclusion, cohesion, and sustainable development. The paper advocates for the integration of Diversity Management principles—commonly applied in corporate environments—into sports organizations and activities. By doing so, it proposes that sports institutions can not only enhance team performance and social integration but also achieve broader developmental goals. Ultimately, the study highlights the potential of Diversity Management to serve as a transformative tool in sports, mirroring its success in forward-thinking business environments.*

**Keywords:** Diversity Management, Sports development, Inclusion, Sustainable strategy

### **Introduction**

The increasing diversity of today's society, both in social and cultural terms and in skills, makes it increasingly important to focus on the aspects of interculturalism, transfer and management of diversity in all those contexts that have educational tasks, such as school and sport. A constructive management of diversity, whether it is social or cultural, does not involve only the comparison with others and their differences, but also the recognition of the shared common goals and interests. Precisely sport, in fact, is one of the main sectors characterized by a plurality of relationships between individuals of different races, cultures, social statuses, physical and mental

characteristics, economic conditions, etc. As a consequence, if such diversities (of whatever kind they may be) were a critical issue on a management level, as unfortunately often happens during sport events and TV programs, there is the risk of undermining the sustainable development of sport over time, also from a socio-educational and economic point of view. A possible solution may be the adoption of the main dictates of management model used in the company context, especially that of the USA, which aims at valuing diversity. Through this approach, called Disability Management, there would be attempts to pursue socio-economic benefits which can be obtained at a company level, also in the sports sector.

### **1. Sport and the Multi-Cultural Aspects of Diversity**

The current socio-economic environment with which every individual deal everyday is now strongly influenced by the phenomenon of globalization, and by an elimination of any distance in the communication processes generated by the technological progress. As a consequence, this implies the

presence of a plurality of subjects that the individual considers different from himself for a variety of characteristics (racial, ethnic, cultural, social, physical, etc.) with whom he establishes a series of relationships of different kind, including those economic, social, , working, recreational, etc. (Alberici, 2007; Ambrosini, 2001). In this sense, for its nature, sport is a primary context where what has been described above increasingly occurs, with the aim of pursuing not only an athletic performance outcome, but also socio-educational and economic objectives (Caselli, 2003; Di Palma, 2014; Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016; Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2016). Sport shows how the conflict can be disciplined and streamlined through rules that ousted violence, define roles, and determine diversities. It is the accomplished allegory of a restricted democracy, which strives to build a set of rules and principles that can regulate the social conflict in an unbloody manner. The sport game becomes an exemplar configuration, through which the reasons for cooperation and those for the conflict are acknowledged and implemented regardless of the diversities between individuals (Altavilla, Tafuri & Raiola, 2014; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Farinelli, 2005). Sport should always make emerge the need to excel, cooperate, respect the rules and laws of the community, its role as a support for a policy of health and hygiene and, above all, the cohesive function with respect to the ethnic, religious and social diversities, which would allow it to provide a major contribution to the set up of modern nations (Houlihan & Malcolm, 2015; Isidori & Fraile, 2008). Sport understood as an institutionalized game reproduces more or less the norms, values and mechanisms of reward and sanction of the social structure. Its rules and rituals generate identification and integration processes which strengthen the dominant hierarchies and values. The culture of competition makes social distances explicit, producing sub-cultural membership circuits. It often provides the symbolic apparatuses useful to generate the illusion of the vertical mobility like the myth of the non-white champion in the USA that, in the public imagination, feeds the rhetoric of the unlimited opportunities, namely the ideological foundation of the American Dream (Porro, 2001). Moreover, through sport, it's possible to get a cross communication among all the nations, religions, ethnicities, even in the cases of physical and mental disabilities with the awareness that the comparison, knowledge and exchange are the foundations of all the projects and actions that aim at fighting against the problem of discrimination. The meeting and interweaving of relationship generates chance to get to know each other and overcome fears and prejudices which, in most cases, give rise to the phenomena of social exclusion (Isidori, 2012; Light & Dixon, 2007; Raiola & Tafuri, 2015; Di Palma & Tafuri, 2016). As pointed out before, it is clear that sport should facilitate the process of global integration, able to consider every diversity as a resource to be exploited in order to achieve positive outcomes effectively and efficiently both in economical and social terms, as well as in terms of physical performances; yet it often happens that in the stands, in the comments of the media, in the same rules governing federations up to the small amateur leagues, there are episodes of exclusion. This denotes a diversity management that is not able to exploit the enormous potential of the sports sector and that raises real barriers to the development of this sector from all the previously described standpoints. In this regard, the adoption of Diversity Management is assumed as a means to solve such management problem with economic and social consequences.

## **2. Cultural phenomenon of Diversity Management**

The Diversity Management model was founded in the early 1990s, but now, more than ever before, is a winning strategy. The demographic changes in the workforce, the growing diversity of customers and markets (globalization and one-to-one marketing), new ways of working within companies (time to

market, work-by-processes, etc.) and between companies (M&A, strategic alliances, outsourcing) even in the European context, make it more and more strategic for the companies to correctly value the cultural diversities expressed by their workers (Gilbert, Stead & Ivancevich, 1999; Laurinig, 2013; Ponzellini & Riva, 2014). Diversity Management is a business process of change, which aims to enhance and make full use of the unique contributions that every employee can bring to the achievement of the company objectives, and that serves to better prepare the organization to meet the challenges and uncertainty from the external market. This contribution comes from the person's ability to develop and apply, within the organization, a broad spectrum of integrated skills and behaviors that reflect his gender, race, nationality, age, background and experience (Arredondo, 1996; Serio, 2014). The managerial, organizational and individual competence, which enables to effectively manage diversity, can develop if there is no more reference to a single paradigm of thought and behavior, and qualities and orientations are simultaneously present and acknowledged. Therefore, it is an approach to human resources management aimed at valuing the diversities that every individual brings within the organization, and that distinguishes two macrocategories of diversities: primary and secondary diversities. The first are those diversities that refer to elements such as: age, gender, ethnicity, skills/mental characteristics, which are part of an innate heritage of the individual and cannot be changed. The second, instead, refer to elements acquired over time, such as educational background, family condition, geographic location, income, religion, organizational role, and professional experience. Unlike the primary diversities, these characteristics can be changed more times or lost over time. Starting from this concept, Diversity Management developed in the United State in the early 1990s. Being this nation a racial melting pot par excellence, its companies were the first to address the issue of enhancing retaining their talents, who belong to different races, religions and backgrounds. The starting point is that a "multicultural" company is richer, in terms of human potential, than a "monocultural" one (Casettlucci et al, 2009; Silva, Lorenzo & Chavez, 2015). Especially the so-called secondary diversities are an extremely wide source of ideas and "levers". Starting ideologically from the concept of equality and diversity, Diversity Management has the enhancement of the resources in the company as its main objective, so that everyone might have the same opportunities and the final outcome is greater than the sum of its parts. By adopting this approach, in fact, the aim is to maximize the retention of talents, on the one hand, and to enhance the cultural differences in the company, on the other, in order to consolidate an environment that stimulates not only creativity, but also a sense of belonging, motivation, initiative and responsibility of persons. All this allows to make everyone able to bring a "unique" and valuable contribution to the organization' success (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016). In summary, this is about "leveraging" the mutual (mainly cultural) diversities in order to increase the chances for the whole organization to be successful.

### **The potential benefits of Diversity Management in Sport**

In the literature, it has been proven that the management policies of inclusion, including Diversity Management, have a positive impact on various aspects of a company, including the improvement of the overall organization and of the skills and performance in areas such as communication, human resource management, identification of objectives and planning (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Serio, 2014). More specifically, the analyzed management model can generate a number of social and economic benefits that are perfectly contextualized in the sports sector too and, therefore, can act positively on diversity understood as a critical issue in sport. The following table shows in detail its

economic and social benefits at a company level, which can be potentially transferred to a sport level (Buemi, Conte & Guazzo, 2016; Castellucci et al, 2009; Laurinig, 2013).

### **ECONOMIC BENEFITS**

- Increase in productivity;
- Encouragement to find innovative solutions;
- Ability to meet the most varied needs of consumers by increasing the customer base;
- Possibility to increase the competitiveness of the company.

### **SOCIAL BENEFITS**

- Promotion of the interaction between different ethnic groups;
- Incentive to cultural change;
- Fight against prejudices;
- Increased commitment of employees;
- Set up of a more harmonious working environment.

It seems obvious that the first type of benefits will contribute directly to the pursuit of the economic objective that, over time, has become more and more important for the sports sector. Increasing the productivity of all human resources regardless of the specific characteristics, enhancing diversity and getting new managerial and marketing solutions allows for a considerable development of the whole world of sport. In addition, the adoption of the Diversity Management principles provides the ability to identify, and therefore satisfy, a greater number of consumers' preferences; just think of the new sports goods and services for people with disabilities (Castellucci et al, 2009; Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2016). The clear consequence of the above is the increasing competitiveness of the companies and the federal sports bodies, with a subsequent benefit for the whole economy (Di Palma, 2014). However, for what concerns the social benefits, their direct contribution refers to the possibility to reach efficiently the social and educational goal that represents one of the pillars of the sports system. The items listed in the table, in fact, represent a greater possibility of guaranteeing the acceptance and inclusion of diversity in sports, no longer conceived as an obstacle or a limitation, but as a resource on which to bet for a cultural progress. The set up of a more harmonious sporting environment, able to foster collaboration between individuals different from each other for various reasons, is an incentive to behave correctly towards others without any form of prejudice. The social benefits are also the basis for the achievement of the economic ones, and the potential pursuit of a sporting goal plays an important role too. A sports reality managed through the respect for others, the social inclusion and the enhancement of the diversity of its human resources fully embodies the key principles able to go over the natural limit of the physical performances of any athlete (Altavilla, Tafuri & Raiola, 2014; Isidori, 2012). The team spirit is enhanced, because every single unit maximizes its productivity, that is, provides a valuable contribution to the final outcome; this also happens in individual sports as the concept of "team" is understood in an expression that is very close to that of "company team" and takes into consideration, in fact, the entire group made up of the management, the coaches/instructors, the athletes and all those who contribute to the functioning of the sporting activity. In addition, Diversity Management also contributes to a financial equilibrium in the long term that guarantees a structural solidity in the planning and investment over time, on which the athletes and the managers can rely for the preparation and planning of their sports and company activities.

## **Conclusions**

To date, the achievement of an athletic, individual or team performance, superior to that of an opponent, is no longer the main objective of the sport activity. In fact, it goes hand in hand with socio-educational and economic goals that become particularly important in the organization and management of sport. Starting from this assumption, it was analyzed that a non-performing management of a diversity (be it racial, sexual, physical, cultural, social, economic, etc.) in the sports sector, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, leads to a difficulty in pursuing these objectives. In this regard, the paper has pointed out that through the adoption of the Diversity Management model in the sports context it is possible to value diversities, which become resources able not only to achieve the abovementioned objectives, but also to stimulate a socioeconomic benefit and make it sustainable in the long run. In fact, the management approach of this model allows to develop many advantages both economically and socially, useful to promote a cultural development of sport which is enriched by diversity and enhances the individual characteristics of every resource in order to satisfy the general wellbeing.

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