



# PlanetGoals

*Capacity Building Course  
for Professionals*

PlanetGo

## MODULE 6: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY – PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Sports may significantly contribute to a better holistic development of one's self (Eime et al., 2013), with the benefits of sport and physical activity participation not only focusing on physical and mental well-being (Ketteridge and Boshoff, 2008) but also referring to social inclusion and cohesion (Bailey, 2006). Although the benefits of sport participation have been widely acknowledged by the academia and the practitioners, nonetheless there is a long way to go until we are sure that every person can overcome the barriers that undermine their participation. In order to achieve that, a number of strategies might be deployed in different levels of society from intervening at individual level to establishing national and European policies (Kilanowski et al, 2017).

### UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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As the society makes huge steps in the technological progress, it is believed that the people are becoming less and less physical active generation by generation, with that physical inactivity being responsible for 1 per 6 deaths according to the UK National Health System (2019).

The reasons that prevent someone from sport participation are covering a wide range such as unwillingness to participate in sports, lack of interest for physical activity or lack of knowledge about the benefits of sports and physical activity. However, a good percentage of the global population cannot participate in sports despite their willingness and interest in doing so because of the social, economic, environmental and cultural barriers that arise. These barriers are going to be discussed below.

The social barriers that undermine participation in sports and physical activity refer to any kind of social discrimination that someone might face in the social context. Although one's focus might concern more gender and racial differences,

when it comes to discrimination this might concern any social difference that makes someone feel as a minority.

1. **Gender inequality** does exist in any given social context and concerns the limited opportunities provided to the females instead of the males. In most cases, this lack of opportunities, which does not only limit in sports, refer to less accessibility in sport clubs and sports facilities (e.g. no female sport clubs in some areas), less media coverage of the female sport events, less presentation of female athletes who could act as role models for younger generations and less support from the community to female athletes for chasing their dreams (Sport England, 2019).
2. **Ethnic and racial discrimination** prevents people from different ethnic backgrounds to participate in sports. This barrier might concern not only racist behaviors but also an economic discrimination, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. Racist behaviors might come from the coaches, the teammates, other people around the team (e.g. teammates' parents) or the opponents (Theberge, 2000).
3. **Language difficulties** is also a social barrier that can arise for people from different ethnic backgrounds. In many occasions the universal language of sports is not enough to bridge the communication difficulties for newcomers in a country. This barrier becomes even stronger when the coaches or other sportspersons do not have any fluent in foreign languages and the clubs are not in the position to hire people who could work as a cultural mediator between the club and the people (Bauman et al., 2012).
4. **Age discrimination** discourages more and more people from remaining physically active. Age discrimination refers to the difficulties that someone faces to reach sport opportunities as the years go by. The older someone gets the more difficult becomes to find organized sport opportunities. What it means is that, in most cases, sport clubs are constructed in a way to promote the better ones to progress in their sport participation. As an example, it is estimated that only 0.01% of young children playing football in any football club will go on to become professional football players while the others will hear at some stage that they are not good enough to stay with the club. These players, those who are “not good enough”, are more likely to find themselves out of sports and physical activity (Brown & Potrac, 2009).
5. **Economic constraint** is an important aspect of sports and physical activity participation, and it cannot be overlooked. Doing sports and being physically

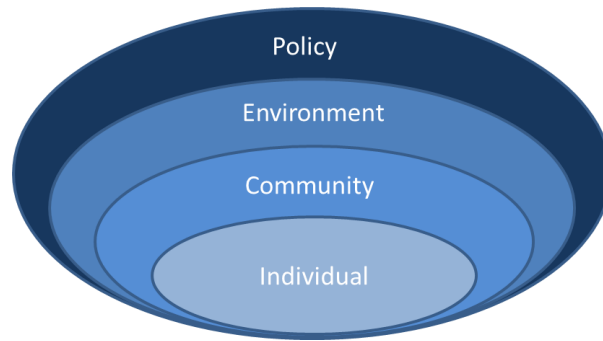
active costs much more than not doing sport and being physically inactive, therefore the economic constraint that someone faces might be a huge barrier. When it comes to sports participation, a person has to pay for the sports equipment, the membership fees, the club's uniforms and, in later stages, has to pay travel expenses for competitions or trainings. All these costs might be unbearable for individuals coming from lower-income backgrounds that will result in physical inactivity (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2010).

6. **Accessibility issues** might keep people out of sports and physical activity contexts. This matter is twofold. On the one hand, the accessibility issue might refer to people with disabilities who encounter physical and logistical barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in sports. These barriers concern inadequate facilities, a lack of adaptive equipment, or limited coaching expertise. On the other hand, this accessibility issue might concern the lack of reachable facilities in a reasonable timeframe for any interested individual because of the lack of means of transportation, the limited time slots for many individuals, and the lack of sports facilities per se in some rural areas (Darcy & Dowse, 2013).
7. **Lack of information** is, also, a twofold barrier. Lack of information might refer to the lack of information about the offered sports and physical activity opportunities provided in the area. This lack of information might keep an interested individual away from an activity that could be enjoyable and useful. Also, lack of information concerns the lack of knowledge about the benefits of a physically active lifestyle. These benefits, as discussed in the first paragraph, concern physical and mental well-being as well as social inclusion and holistic personal development (Eime et al., 2013).

## STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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In order to encounter all the aforementioned barriers to one's sport and physical activity participation, there is a good number of strategies that could be employed in different levels. These levels concern from the individual ones to the community and national levels such as policies for enhancing physical activity levels.



**Socio-ecological model; Kilanowski et al., 2017**

We are going to discuss in the following paragraphs the different levels of strategies and interventions that could foster participation and engagement in football and physical activity.

1. **Individual level:** The strategies structured on an individual level concern addressing the barriers and the reasons that make an individual to not have adequate levels of physical activity.

- *Focus on the individual:* Except for the strategies that concern mass outreach to the community, it is useful to examine the different reasons that keep someone out of sports and physical activity. It is said that every person likes some kind of physical activity, if this is true then a focus on the reasons keeping someone away from physical activity might be an efficient intervention. These reasons might concern economic constraints, unwillingness to participate, lack of available time, other duties during the day (work, family etc.) or any other reason that makes the individual not to prioritize sports and physical activity (Baumann et al., 2012).

2. **Community level:** These strategies concern the actions and the interventions that can be made at the community level to foster participation and engage the community citizens, including youth, elderly, women, and any minority group, in structured sports and physical activity programs. The community level might concern a municipality, a school, a sport club, a non-profit organization, or any other entity operating at a local level. In the principle of offering more inclusive activities, an effective strategy is to offer sport activities that are adapted to the needs of the target group and that might enable potential participants to engage and become more active (Casey et al., 2009).

- *Activities for different age groups or different sports/physical activity levels:* An intervention that takes into consideration the different needs of each age group might offer the opportunity to people who cannot find an organized sports activity to do so. For instance, popular sports (e.g. football or basketball) are offered only in a competitive way rather than an inclusive

- one that could allow people from different age or different sport level to take part (Bailey, 2006).
- *Activities designed for women:* A strategy that could promote female participation would concern creating “safe” environments for women to participate in sports and physical activity. Offering childcare during the sessions or offering exclusive women sport activities might contribute to the increase of women’s participation (Theberge, 2000).
  - *Activities designed for people with disabilities:* A strategy that offers sport programs for people with different kinds of disabilities might create an inclusive environment for people who are often overseen in the community, and which have the lowest levels of physical activity in EU level (Darcy & Dowse, 2013).
  - *Creation of partnerships:* Local sponsors could facilitate the engagement of the community in sports and physical activity by providing financial support to the organizations offering the activities or by covering financial expenses (e.g. sport equipment or membership fees) for people who cannot afford those expenses (Green, 2005).
  - *Raise awareness activities:* Raise awareness activities could work twofold. On one hand, a raise awareness activity can inform the community about the benefits of sports and physical activity, which can foster sport participation. On the other hand, a raise awareness activity could concern bringing the community closer to the sports activities by providing some open days where interested individuals could join and get to meet different sports or discuss with the club’s sportspersons about their potential involvement (Eime et al., 2013).
  - *Use of technology:* Technology can be a useful ally towards engaging people in sports and physical activity. Again, it can work in a twofold way. Technology (e.g. social media, website banners) can promote the sport programs and make the potential participants more prone to participate in sports. Also, technology can work in a way to promote physical activity remotely either because of unprecedented reasons (e.g. pandemic) or personal reasons (e.g. difficulties in transportation, not available time) (Foster et al., 2010).
3. **Environment level:** The strategies regarding the environment concern the creation of facilities that are accessible, affordable, and open to every person interested in taking part in sports and physical activities. The creation of such infrastructure could provide space for people who live in overcrowded or rural areas to gain access to sport activities. Except for the sport infrastructure, providing an environment for sports and physical activity means that there are free open spaces, parks, or any other kind of environment where people could meet and practice (Biddle et al., 2011).

- *Infrastructure development*: The creation of suitable infrastructures could give the opportunity to individuals to practice sports in an organized and proper way. Providing different kinds of infrastructure (e.g. gym, football field, basketball or tennis court) could give the chance to the interested ones to get to know each different sport and find what could engage them more (Spaaij, 2009).
  - *Accessibility*: The created infrastructure should be easily accessible by the individuals. The issue of accessibility is a matter that might keep people out of sports and physical activity. The accessibility might concern building the infrastructure at some central point or providing transportation (e.g. bus or tickets for public transportation) to those who cannot reach the infrastructure otherwise (Foster et al., 2010).
  - *Creation of open spaces and parks*: Physical activity and sports cannot only be practiced in sports infrastructure. The creation of open spaces and parks could better promote and engage individuals who would like to practice. Such areas allow individuals or groups of friends to practice out of the specific timeslots of an organized sport activity (Bauman et al., 2012).
4. **Policy level**: The strategies at policy level concern the actions that can be taken at a regional, national or international level in order to better promote sport participation and engagement in physical activity. These strategies refer to the creation of policies that might encourage people to become more physically active not only by participating more in sport activities but also by adapting to a healthier and more physical active lifestyle (Craig et al., 2009).
- *Coaching and mentoring programs*: A very important aspect of sports participation is the person delivering the session. It is a matter of a policy strategy to ensure that the coaches or any other sportspersons have the capacity and the knowledge to efficiently deliver the sessions not only in terms of technique and teaching the drill but also in terms of communicating with the participants, being aware of the individual differences and promoting an inclusive environment (Green, 2005).
  - *Campaigns for healthier lifestyles*: A campaign that focuses on how an individual could adapt an in-total healthier lifestyle can be much more efficient than different campaigns focusing on different matters such as being physical active or quitting smoking or targeting obesity (Craig et al., 2009).

# THE ROLE OF FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES IN CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS. PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL BY INTRODUCING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION POLICIES

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Football-related entities can have a crucial role to play when the conversation comes to the promotion of social inclusion (Kassimeris, 2008). Football is the most popular sport in the EU as well as in the most parts of the world (European Commission, 2018). Having said that, football-related entities are in a position to influence their fans, followers, spectators, and any other person keen on football activities (Poulton & Durell, 2014). Major football events organized by UEFA (e.g. Euro, Champions League etc.) are capturing the eyes of millions of people around Europe, creating a scene where inclusivity, diversity and acceptance can be fostered (UEFA, 2020). Added to that, when talking about football in smaller scales like community level, it can be seen as an arena where clubs, schools, municipalities, non-profit organizations, governing bodies and any other football-related entity can promote the aforementioned values in an everyday setting (FIFA, 2019). The ways to do so are numerous as discussed below.

- 1. Football clubs:** The role of a football club is of high importance as it is an entity with direct influence and impact on multiple audiences (Giulianotti, 2005). A football club that brings the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in its core philosophy can shape the values of players, coaches, staff and, of course, fans and followers (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The fans' connection with a football club, called team identification in the literature, indicates that a football fan is prone to adopt values and principles fostered by the football club (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). A football club can take different initiatives as presented below.
  - a. Inclusive policies:** A football club can establish policies to ensure the equal treatment of its all members including players, staff and fans coming from diverse backgrounds and the promotion of acceptance of diversity (Bradbury, 2013).
  - b. Anti-discrimination initiatives:** The initiatives focusing on anti-discrimination might refer to raising awareness campaigns for the fans or training for the staff (Hylton, 2015).



- c. *Inclusive programs:*** Football clubs can implement programs focusing on including different minorities in their activities. There are examples of football clubs creating teams with players with intellectual disabilities or financing activities through their foundations for minorities such as refugee populations and the LGBTQ+ community (Stone, 2007).
  - d. *Accessible infrastructure:*** Football stadiums are the arena where fans can enjoy watching their favorite team compete or even compete themselves. Thus, it is important for any interested individual to be in a position of having access in the facilities without any kind of impairments keeping them out of the field (Thomas & Smith, 2009).
- 2. Football associations and organizations:** The role of a football association, such as a national federation of UEFA, should be to set the tone of promoting the values of equality, diversity and diversity in its associated members like football clubs and players' associations or the fans themselves (Bromberger, 1995). These associations can initiate collective actions that could make an impact on local, national and international level (Haynes, 1999).
- a. *Educational activities:*** Football associations can promote educational activities to foster knowledge and awareness in their members by bridging the gap between football clubs, academia and organizations working on diversity and equality matters (Levermore & Beacom, 2009).
  - b. *Advocacy initiatives:*** Due to their wide impact at the national or EU level, football associations might make the voice of the unheard ones to be heard by bringing to the table matters that might be overlooked. Group minorities could find a powerful ally to such an association for putting in-the-spot matters of equality and diversity (Cleland & Cashmore, 2016).
  - c. *Partnerships and collaborations:*** Football associations can bridge different stakeholders to better achieve a creation of inclusive sport and football environments. Different stakeholders can make different contributions by adding value through knowledge, resources, impact and outreach when and if their powers are working together (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002).
- 3. Football governing bodies and leagues:** These entities are responsible for setting the scene for regulations and establishment of a code of conduct among the associations, the football clubs and the players. These entities are the ones that can employ the policies and oversee the actions of the other entities such as federations and clubs (Holt, 2009).

- a. Regulations and code of conduct:** The football governing bodies can establish rules, measurements and punishments that enhance the promotion of diversity, equality and inclusion. Each league is responsible for taking action when its rules are violated. A monitoring of the rules can ensure that the values are respected (García & Welford, 2015).

**Public campaigns:** The football governing bodies and the leagues can use their competition as a platform to promote campaigns and messages for inclusion, diversity and equality. These campaigns might refer to actions taken as part of the main football events or as events (e.g. festivals, tournaments) that are taking place alone. Also, the campaigns might have a digital form through social media and other communication channels (Harris, 2010).

## EXAMPLES

### 1. Barcelona – Barca Foundation

FC Barcelona has been a predominant football club in terms of promoting initiatives focusing on the promotion of diversity, inclusion and equality through the activities taken mainly action through its foundation, called Barca Foundation.

*The Refugee Program:* Barca Foundation has invested many resources on promoting sport for all activities focusing on marginalized populations, namely refugee populations in EU but also worldwide. Barca Foundation is collaborating with numerous partners globally in order to promote inclusion, equality and diversity through its educational sport programs.

*Anti-discrimination Activities:* FC Barcelona is implementing a number of campaigns focusing on the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of diversity through its members and its community with the main activities implemented under the campaign "We Play Together".

### 2. FARE Network

FARE Network is an umbrella organization of entities focusing on using sport for inclusion, with the support of several football clubs and sportspersons. FARE network's main purpose is to promote equality, diversity and inclusion policies through Europe by partnering and supporting entities doing so.

*Raise awareness campaigns:* FARE network implements numerous campaigns in order to promote inclusion and diversity around the EU. Their main annual campaign is called "Football People" week with its main purpose being to engage football entities around Europe to promote inclusion and diversity through their activities such as festivals, panels and tournaments.

*Community engagement and grassroots programs:* FARE network supports and funds grassroots and community programs in an attempt to promote football activities for marginalized populations such as refugees and people with disabilities.

### 3. Real Betis Balompié

Real Betis Balompié is a football club from Spain that is taking numerous actions in order to promote an inclusive environment at their community, mainly through their foundation called Real Betis Foundation. Their activities are mainly based at their region with their activities focusing on using football as a tool for inclusion.

*Inclusive policies and initiatives:* Real Betis Balompié is implementing numerous social programs within their community that aim to promote equal opportunities to their members. The club implements the "Forever Green" program that focuses on sustainability.

*Accessible infrastructure:* Real Betis Balompié is offering equal accessibility to all individuals by providing accessible infrastructure for spectators in first team's football matches. Their stadium, , the Estadio Benito Villamarín, offers accessibility to every individual including people with physical impairment.