

## **How can sport be a catalyst for regional development? in the outermost regions of the European Union?**

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From the "Adonnino Report" by the Committee for a "Citizens' Europe" in 1985, to the adoption of sport as an integral part of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the European Union has gradually recognized the importance of sport in society. The Lisbon Treaty establishes sport as an area in which member states remain fully competent, but in which the EU can take supporting or coordinating action. As a result, EU public policies on sport target multiple dimensions, supporting the role of sport in society and social inclusion (Cicchelli, 2021), assessing the economic impact of sporting events and the management of sports organizations (Downward & Dawson, 2000; Preuss, 2006), or examining issues of athlete regulation or transnational cooperation (García & Meier, 2017).

In the specific context of the EU's outermost regions, which are characterized by distinct geographical, economic and environmental challenges, the question of whether sport can truly contribute to sustainable development takes on particular importance. These regions, often remote from the European mainland, face unique challenges linked to geographical isolation, environmental vulnerability and socio-economic disparities. This question raises crucial considerations as to the capacity of sport to act as a vector of economic, social and environmental development in these peripheral territories of the EU.

Following the contributions of Barget & de Gougnet (2000), (see also Houlihan & White, 2003; Tifiti, 2021), it has been widely recognized that sport is no longer just about performance, but can influence regional development by playing a significant role in the economic growth of many countries (Bouchet & Sobry, 2019; Fourneyron, 2014; Gásquez & Royuela, 2014). The European Commission's White Paper on Sport estimated the weight of the sports industry at around 3.7% of total GDP and 5.4% of jobs (European Union, 2007). These knock-on effects depend on a number of factors, including the way in which sports initiatives are planned, implemented and integrated into the local context. Success stories are often linked to a holistic approach to development that integrates sport into a comprehensive vision of sustainable development.

Several studies suggest that sport in general has an influence on regional development. Among the major contributions on sport and regional development, we can highlight the following:

- Some authors find local economic growth effects through support for the sports tourism industry, via sporting events, which can attract tourists, thus stimulating the local economy through tourist spending, investment in infrastructure or job creation.
- Some authors show the effects of investment in recreational facilities, as territories can benefit from investment in recreational spaces that contribute to the well-being of the population.

- Some also point to the effects of strengthening social ties, as sporting activities encourage cooperation, camaraderie and the reinforcement of social bonds within the community.
- others maintain that sport encourages physical activity, thus helping to promote a healthy lifestyle and reduce health problems linked to a sedentary lifestyle.
- Finally, some argue that promoting sustainable sports tourism can encourage environmental preservation and raise awareness of natural resource conservation.

Moreover, there is a recent and growing interest in the role of sport in promoting sustainable development, which is increasingly recognized worldwide. The symbiosis between sport and sustainable development is emerging as a promising area for research and action, offering innovative perspectives on how sport can function as a catalyst for sustainable development in specific island contexts.

This analysis will explore this dynamic, looking at the potential role of sport as a driver of sustainable development in singular territories designated as the EU's outermost regions. These regions, characterized by their geographical remoteness and distinct socio-economic challenges, raise crucial questions about the ability of sport to positively influence their development trajectories.

Our questioning on this subject is all the more acute given that the literature has not addressed this dimension in the ORs, as the studies carried out have proved too global in view of their specific situations.

## **Issues**

This study aims to explore the different facets of sport as an enabler of sustainable development, focusing on how it can be mobilized to mitigate particular challenges and stimulate sustainable change in these island territories. Through this exploration, we seek to unveil the opportunities and challenges inherent in integrating sport into a sustainable development strategy for the EU's outermost regions.

## **Methodology**

To answer these questions, we begin with a review of the state of the art, outlining the relevance of sport to the development of the EU's outermost regions, and describing the characteristics, challenges and limitations they face.

Next, we will use an empirical approach, based on an econometric study of the situation in the outermost regions, to measure the influence of sport on the economic growth dynamics of these remote territories. We have selected 6 key areas in which sport seems to influence the development of these remote territories, such as the economy, health, education, social cohesion and tourism. The creation of a global sport index to measure the influence of sport on the development of ORs will then require a holistic approach that takes into account various aspects of sport and its impact. We will also draw on qualitative data from research with various stakeholders, such as academics, members of Ministries of Sport or public authorities in ORs

(Naria, 2013), whose aim was to gather the representations of different stakeholders in terms of sports, territories and development in ORs.

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