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Intercultural Dialogue and Integration of Migrants through Sport. Experiences in the Campania Region

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Abstract

Sport is considered a tool to ease intercultural dialogue and integration of migrants in the hosting countries. Sports activities have great potentialities, but the participation of foreigners and the impact of athleticism on their integration are limited by some barriers.

In Campania some attempts to favour the integration through sport have been promoted in recent years by associations and groups of citizens. Among the most successful projects are the football teams Afro-Napoli United, Rfc Lions Ska and Atletico Brigante and the basketball club Tam Tam. These projects have largely succeeded in involving the migrants and promoting their integration, but they also met some obstacles which limited their impact.

Keywords: Intercultural dialogue, History of sport, Migrations, Integration of migrants, Campania region.

1. Immigration in Campania

In the Campania region (southern Italy), migrants are below the national average: according to the Italian statistical office (Istat), on 31 December 2017, the region hosted 258.524 foreign citizens, 4,4% of total population (the national average is about 8%). Almost half of the immigrants living in Campania (124.302 people) come from Europe, with a prevalence of Ukrainians (43.415 people) and Romanians (42.380). Other 65.071 foreigners come from Asia, mainly from Sri Lanka (17.405), China (14.077) and Bangladesh (11.128), while people arriving from Africa are 58.492, most of them from Morocco (21.399), Nigeria (7.917) and Senegal (4.600). Only 10.540 foreigners come from the Americas and 90 from Oceania¹.

¹ See the web portal www.tuttitalia.it, retrieved on 2 May 2019. See also Caritas & Migrantes, 2018; IDOS 2018, Fondazione ISMU, 2018.

Most of the newcomers live in the most populous areas of the region, mainly in the metropolitan city of Naples, which hosts some 131.757 of them, followed by the provinces of Salerno (55.061), Caserta (46.928), Avellino (14.590) and Benevento (10.188). Some areas are characterized by a massive presence of African migrants, partly irregulars, such as the area around Castel Volturno (Caserta) and the Sele Valley (Salerno).

In Campania, immigration is more recent than in the Centre-North regions. Therefore, the number of migrants of the second generation is still scarce, but their presence is growing and destined to grow further in the following years.

The immigration in Campania is also characterized by quite a high rate of instability: many migrants, mainly those coming from Africa, spend only a few years in the region and then move to other Italian places or abroad. The newcomers' level of integration depends on several variables: nationality, gender, duration of their stay in Italy, etc. However, according to the indicators established by sociologists, it is generally inferior to that registered in other regions, mainly for the high rate of unemployment and illegal work (Ammaturo, De Filippo & Strozza, 2013; De Filippo & Strozza, 2015; Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2016). Many immigrants experience social exclusion and poverty.

Since 2011, Campania has been involved in the arrival of flows of asylum seekers. Most of them come from sub-Saharan Africa and, after their arrival, spend some months in the hosting centres. The flows are mainly caused by the civil wars ignited in the Middle East and Africa after 2010. Furthermore, after the 2008 economic crisis, the Italian government strongly reduced the opportunities of legal entry in Italy, so that now claiming asylum is almost the only way of obtaining a residence permit (Colucci, 2018, pp. 165-187). However, after peaking in 2016, the landings on Italian coasts have started to drastically decline in the second half of 2018 (Caritas & Migrantes, 2018).

The arrival of refugees has led to a spike in xenophobia, which sometimes turns into true afrophobia, *i.e.*, biological racism against any black-skinned person, including the "black Italians" (dark-skinned people of Italian citizenship). Today many Italian citizens believe that migrants, mainly those of African origin, are dangerous for the country (Valeri, 2019). The Africans are the most "visible" migrants, as they arrive in a "spectacular" way through the Mediterranean and, unlike immigrants

coming from other continents, have dark skin. Many citizens identify Africans with migrants *tout court*, although they are only a minority among the foreigners living in Italy. The black people are the most targeted by xenophobic citizens, but also the most involved in the activities of anti-racist groups.

In Italy there is not the same culture of inclusion of other countries, such as France, as immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon (Bortoletto & Porrovecchio, 2018). However, not all Italian citizens are racist. Some left-wing and Catholic political groups have promoted projects and actions aimed at helping the integration of the newcomers. Among these initiatives, sport plays an important role, thanks to its potential for fostering intercultural dialogue and integration of foreigners.

Schematizing the models of participation, migrants can play sports in two ways: through ethnic teams, reserved to people coming from the same country or the same geographical area; or in multi-ethnic teams, in which local and foreign people play together. The scientific literature has highlighted advantages and limits of both models (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010; Cometti & Gasparini, 2010; Maguire & Falcon 2010; Elliot & Harris, 2014). In short, in the case of multi-ethnic teams the intercultural dialogue is eased by the continuous interchange among players. The ethnic teams can also favour integration, mainly if they are involved in competitions with local teams and players (otherwise, there is a risk that they promote ghettoization instead of inclusion), and are also a bridge that can allow players to establish a contact with local teams, because often the newcomers first come into contact with their fellow citizens and later with autochthon people. Furthermore, the ethnic teams usually strengthen the national identity and the culture of origin of the migrants, and this is not a barrier to integration: on the contrary, having a strong national identity can favour a sort of dialogue between equals instead of the assimilation of newcomers.

The scientific literature, however, have also highlighted the limits of sport. Playing sports together with local people does not necessarily entail a better social-cultural integration; generally, the impact on the economic integration is indirect and scarce. Furthermore, for migrants participating in sport activities is more difficult than for local people (Jakubowska, 2018; Schwenzer, 2016; Bifulco & Sarnataro, 2017; Fonzo 2019). Obviously, the opportunity of participating and improving integration depends on some

variables: economic situation, nationality, duration of the stay in the hosting country, etc., but is lower than for local people.

Despite the barriers, the initiatives to favour integration through sport are quite numerous. Italy hosts both projects managed by the institutions and grassroots initiatives. The most “exploited” sport is football, because it is the most popular game not only in the hosting country, but also in many countries of origin of the migrants. Campania is rich in both multicultural and ethnical teams. Other initiatives, less numerous, involve other disciplines, such as basketball, rugby and cricket.

In the following pages, we will shortly recount the story of four projects promoted in Campania, differing from one another but united in the attention that they pay to the inclusion of the newcomers. The four projects are the most relevant in the region and those that can show in the best way the advantages and the limits of integration through sport.

Data and information come from previous research of the author, direct observation and newspapers (national and local, electronic and printed).

2. Afro-Napoli United (Naples-Mugnano di Napoli)

Afro-Napoli United is a football team born in Naples in 2009 and represents the only important experience of integration through sport born in Campania before the arrival of refugees in 2011. In 2009, the number of migrants living in Naples was considerable but lower than in other cities: the metropolitan city hosted 68.863 foreign citizens, 2,2% of the total population (at the same date, the foreigners in the metropolitan city of Rome amounted to 9,8% of the population; in Milan to 11,2%)². The number of foreigners, however, was growing faster than the national average (De Filippo & Strozza, 2015; Ammaturo, De Filippo & Strozza, 2013; Russo Kraus & Schmoll, 2006).

The establishment of Afro-Napoli was eased by the presence of a Senegalese community, small (426 people) but well organized thanks to the *Associazione dei senegalesi di Napoli*. In 2007 a Senegalese immigrant, Sow Hamath, joined a group of Neapolitan amateur football players not always

² See the web portal www.tuttitalia.it, retrieved on 10 Aprile 2019; Caritas & Migrantes 2010, pp. 411-418.

able to collect the twenty-two people necessary for the game; other Senegalese people joined the group in the following months. In 2009 some players, both African and local, decided to establish a multi-ethnic team to participate in the regional championships organized by the *Associazione italiana cultura e sport* (Aics). The team was named Afro-Napoli because it was composed of foreigner (mostly from Africa) and Neapolitan players.

President and coach of the team was Antonio Gargiulo, a commercialist and amateur player, who explained the establishment of Afro-Napoli thus:

In Naples, there were teams of migrants, which represented their country of origin. Therefore, if we want to highlight the “difference” and the “ghettoization”, Afro-Napoli is, on the contrary, full of integration, migrants from any place of the world and Neapolitans. It is the mirror of the city. And not only this: by going around the province of Naples, to promote our values and our antiracist ideals, we demonstrate that by now there is a multi-ethnic city able to organize, enjoy and win³.

Since its birth Afro-Napoli chose the multi-ethnic model of inclusion. The original team was composed of thirty athletes, thirteen Neapolitans and seventeen immigrants, coming from Senegal, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Tunisia. The players shared the “typical” condition of the sub-Saharan migrants in Naples: almost all of them lived in the area of the Central Station and mostly worked in difficult conditions, doing odd jobs, such as itinerant trade. Some of the immigrant players were relatively well integrated, as they had been living in Italy for many years; others were not able to speak good Italian (Fonzo, 2019, pp. 63-75).

Afro-Napoli started to play in the 2009/10 Aics championship and forged closer relationships with other teams. For example, the club met the team of the Cape Verdean migrants of Naples, Mindelo Football Club, and in 2010, when Mindelo broke up, some players passed to Afro-Napoli.

The multi-ethnic club, furthermore, met the Equipo Popular, a team established by the social centre *Laboratorio Insurgencia*, engaged in social and political activities. The meeting marked the beginning of a lasting relationship between *Laboratorio Insurgencia* and Afro-Napoli, which will contribute to shaping the team’s identity. The activists became supporters

³ “Retroonline”, 25 November 2013, <https://retroonline.it/2013/11/25/afro-napoli-united-squadra-il-razzismo>, retrieved 10 March 2019.

of Afro-Napoli and started to follow its other initiatives (Bifulco & Del Guercio, 2017).

The composition of the club was influenced by the evolution of the migratory phenomena. In 2011, after the “North-Africa emergency”, the province of Naples saw the arrival of many asylum seekers and some of them joined the team.

At this stage the team mainly eased social and cultural integration of migrants, creating a dialogue among cultures also outside the football field. It had little opportunity of helping migrants to find a job, also due to the high rate of unemployment in Naples.

Afro-Napoli continued to participate in the regional Aics league, doing better and better and winning the competition in the 2011/12 season. Most players, however, spent only a short time in the team and then moved from Naples, looking for a better job.

The multi-ethnic club could not join the official Italian championship, managed by the *Federazione italiana giuoco calcio* (Figc), because registering immigrants was impossible. Among other documents, the Federation required that they held a one-year residence permit, which most migrants were unable to provide. Only in 2013, after that the Figc changed its internal rules and made the registration of foreigners easier, Afro-Napoli could enrol in the official championship, joining the *Terza categoria* league (ninth and last level of the Italian championship). Some players, however, could not participate, as they lacked the necessary documents, and, to allow them to continue playing, the club decided to participate in the Aics championship as well.

Competition-wise, the results were very positive: in 2014 the “official” team achieved the promotion in *Seconda categoria*, while the amateur team won both the regional Aics championship and the national finals.

In the same year the club, who until then had played in various stadiums, found a field in Mugnano di Napoli, a town close to Naples, which would be its stadium in the following years. The team won two championships in a row, *Seconda Categoria* and *Prima Categoria*, reaching the *Promozione* league in 2016.

For Afro-Napoli, in short, integration of migrants and successes on the ground went hand in hand and the coexistence of players with diverse backgrounds is one of the strengths: as pointed out by several scholars (such as Valeri, 2005), the union of different cultures can be a way to improve the

agonistic performance. In 2015 Afro-Napoli also established a junior team, opening its participation to both Italians and young migrants. Registering foreign minors, however, was almost impossible for the bureaucratic difficulties, so that migrants were registered only after they had come of age.

In 2018 the team participated in its first championship in *Eccellenza* league, the fifth level of the Italian championship, gaining fifth place (Fonzo, 2019, pp. 125-131).

To achieve this result, the club has evolved and has changed its structure, turning into an articulated organization and establishing some junior teams and two female teams⁴. The supporters have also established a structured group, the *Brigata Spalletella*.

Afro-Napoli has also participated in many initiatives contrasting discriminations. Among these, actions aimed to remove the bureaucratic obstacles to the participation of migrants in sport, such as the campaigns *Gioco anch'io*, promoted in 2012 by the association *Sport alla rovescia*, and *We want to play. Nessuno è illegale per giocare a pallone*, launched in 2017 by the same group⁵.

Having reached semi-professional levels, the club needs to recruit talented players and cannot include migrants without considering their abilities. In the "official" team, the Italian players have become more numerous than the foreigners. The latter are generally experienced players and not migrants just arrived in Italy. However, Afro-Napoli continues to give migrants who can play football the opportunity to participate. For example, among the players who joined the team in *Promozione* league, there were two young asylum seekers from Gambia, Omar Gaye and Mbye Badare Alieu. Both reached Italy following a difficult crossing of the Mediterranean and, after a year in the Afro-Napoli, were hired by professional clubs. Furthermore, one of the key figure of the team is Ailton Dos Santos Soares, also known as Dodò, who joined the club in 2010, when he worked as a plumber, and now continues to play in the team as a professional player.

⁴ The 11-a-side football team abandoned the club in October 2018, after a diatribe related to the candidacy of a player, in a local election, within a list allied to the xenophobic party *Lega Nord*.

⁵ "Sport alla rovescia", 12 May 2017, <http://www.sportallarovescia.it/sar5/campagne/we-want-to-play/908-we-want-to-play-consegnato-alla-figc-napoli>, retrieved 20 March 2018.

In other words, for some migrants Afro-Napoli has been a sort of bridge, allowing them to play at semi-professional level. Only a minority of players, however, achieved this goal; for the others, the multi-ethnic model chosen by the club has been the tool to establish relations with local people and immigrants coming from different countries, so improving social and cultural integration.

3. *Rfc Lions Ska (Caserta)*

The football club Rfc Lions Ska was born in 2011 in Caserta, an area characterized by a significant number of African immigrants since before the “North-Africa emergency”. Although part of the Caserta population is annoyed by the presence of foreigners, some political groups, such as the social centre *Ex Canapificio*, have promoted useful initiatives in favour of migrants.

Rfc Lions Ska was established by some political activists, belonging to left-wing social movements. The name derives from the music band Rfc Ska, of which the founders of the football team were members.

The idea of establishing a team to ease the intercultural dialogue arose thanks to a meeting between the activists and a Senegalese immigrant living in Caserta and working as a window cleaner, who gave them the idea. Rfc Lions was established in October 2011 and was composed by Italian and Senegalese players. The basic idea was using sport to promote dialogue between local people and immigrants. As explained by the founders:

It is not only a football team, but an association open to anybody who shares the project – in and out the field – of pursuing a different idea of football, a bottom-up football, open to everybody and based on the ideals of anti-fascism and fight against any kind of discrimination [...] Through sport we aim at creating places of encounter, exchange and reflection, using football as a mean to create forms of socialization where belonging to a group does not matter, but what unites us is the sharing of values and intentions, creating a community and valorising diversity⁶.

⁶ “Calcio romantico”, <http://www.calcioromantico.com/le-interviste-possibili/intervista-alla-lions-ska-caserta/>, retrived 30 March 2019.

Also Rfc Lions chose a multi-ethnic model of integration and decided to organize activities of socialization outside of the football field.

The club belongs to the “calcio popolare” (popular football), namely the teams promoted by left-wing political groups, quite numerous in recent years throughout Italy. Rfc Lions, however, has its distinctive feature in the inclusion of migrants.

In the first years, the team did not establish a structured association, acting as an informal group, and joined the Aics Campania league. The team also participated in the *Mondiali antirazzisti*, a sporting event organized yearly in Emilia region by supporters and amateur football teams to fight racism (Stercherle & Saint-Blacat, 2015).

In 2015, Rfc Lions decided to join the *Terza categoria*, turning into an Asd (*Associazione sportiva dilettantistica*) and playing the internal matches on the field of Macerata Campana, close to Caserta. Since then, the agonistic results have not been excellent and the team has generally concluded the championships ranking among the mid-lower positions, but the project has significantly grown and new players, belonging to several nationalities, have joined the club. In 2015, furthermore, some Italian members have established a clothing brand, Rage sport, which produces uniforms for anti-racist and leftist sports teams.

The club has continued to manage a team in the amateur championship, to allow everybody to play, including migrants who do not have the documents required by Figc.⁷ The team generally enjoys good relations with its opponents, which appreciate its social engagement, above all in the amateur league. Sometimes, however, the African players have been targeted with racist insults, mainly in the Figc championship, as it happened, for example, on the 4th of February 2018 on the Castel Morrone field ⁸. In fact, racism, particularly against people of African origin, has becoming more and more present in the football fields, mainly at dilettantish level (Fonzo 2019, pp. 51-61) and, sometimes, also the multi-ethnic teams are affected.

⁷ In 2016 the Aics championship has been incorporated into the Fcs tournaments. In June 2016, the Rfc Lions amateur team received an important award, the Premio Fair Play, as the fairest club of the Fcs league. “Ondaweb Tv”, 21 June 2016, <http://www.ondawebtv.it/coppa-fair-play-gli-rtc-lions-ska-caserta-a-palazzo-chigi/>, retrieved 28 March 2019.

⁸ “Edizione Caserta”, 5 February 2018, <https://edizionecaserta.it/2018/02/05/saluti-romani-buu-razzisti-choc-un-campo-del-casertano/>, retrieved 9 March 2019.

Alongside its sports engagement, Rfc Lions actively fights discriminations by organizing social and political activities and recounting its story in the schools of the Caserta province. Political engagement has indeed always been an essential feature of the group, which, not by chance, has strengthened its relations with other teams of the “calcio popolare” and participated in the *We want to play* campaign together with Afro-Napoli and Atletico Brigante. Furthermore, through Uisp, Rfc Lions has joined the European Sport Inclusion Network⁹, participating in meetings in Rome and Dublin to discuss the integration through sport. In this way, the club has established relations with some European teams animated by the same principles, such as United Glasgow.

Today Rfc Lions manages four teams, with about 70 players, coming from Italy, Senegal, Ukraine, Peru, England, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Brazil, Gambia, Mali, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia¹⁰. Its matches and activities are followed by quite a large community, composed of migrants and social activists, and some supporters have also created a structured group, *Gradinata antirazzista*.

In short, in its eight years of life, Rfc Lions significantly contributed to the social-cultural integration of the migrants who joined the club in its various stages, and it has also spread an anti-racist message in a particularly difficult area, such as the Caserta province.

4. *Atletico Brigante (Benevento)*

Atletico Brigante is a football team born in 2014 in Benevento, a province where the rate of immigration is quite low: in 2014, immigrants represented only 2,4% of the total population. Most of the foreigners living in Benevento come from Eastern Europe, but since 2011 the territory has been involved in the arrival of asylum seekers and many hosting centres have been established, often to the discontent of part of the local population. Most asylum seekers come from West Africa and particularly from the countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria).

⁹ See the website <https://sportinclusion.net>, retrieved 26 March 2019.

¹⁰ “Calcio romantico”, <http://www.calcioromantico.com/le-interviste-possibili/intervista-alla-lions-ska-caserta/>, retrieved 30 March 2019.

The idea of establishing a football team to favour their integration was born among some activists of social centres and left-wing movements, part of whom already engaged in political activities against racism. The name is a tribute to the myth of brigandage, quite popular in the Benevento province.

The main purpose of the team is fighting discrimination:

The result of the match does not matter. We are in the championship and we want to win, we cannot deny this. But winning, for us, is mainly disseminating the values at the root of our project. We aim at spreading both in the field and in the everyday political militancy, the principles of anti-racism, anti-fascism, anti-sexism. For us, sport is aggregation, brotherhood, equality¹¹.

In 2014 Atletico Brigante joined the *Terza categoria* league, with a team composed by both local players and migrants (almost all asylum seekers from West Africa). The team played the internal matches in the stadium of Pago Veiano, a small town close to Benevento, because the club had not the financial means to rent a field in the main town. For migrants, most of whom lived in Benevento, reaching Pago Veiano was not easy and the Italian players were forced to organize their transfer for practice and matches. Furthermore, playing far from the main town hindered the participation of migrants as supporters.

Sports-wise, their results were not excellent, as Brigante concluded its first championship ranking last. The club however, created a friendly environment for dozens of asylum seekers, who played in the team or followed it as supporters. Furthermore, it expanded its activities, organizing a school of Italian language and participating in social and political actions against racism and promoting migrants' rights. For example, they organized several events and multi-cultural parties at the social centre *Depistaggio* in Benevento, involving its players. The political engagement and the anti-racist approach allowed the team to collect a significant number of supporters, mainly among left-wing activists.

¹¹ "Benevento Zon", 14 December 2014, <https://benevento.zon.it/asd-atletico-brigante-una-storia-di-calcio-popolare/>, retrieved 10 April 2019.

Atletico Brigante joined again the *Terza categoria* in the 2015/16 season, using the Pietrelcina field. The results were better: the club conquered 18 points and reached the eleventh place, out of thirteen teams¹².

The club was generally welcomed by its opponents, but the players have sometimes experienced racist actions and language. The worst event happened on the 7th of May 2016, when a player from Mali was violently kicked and punched by two opponents during a match in the small town of Castelfranco in Miscano¹³.

Racism did not interrupt the team's activities, which however found impossible to join the Figc again after the 2015/16 championship for economic and bureaucratic reasons: the barriers that usually limits the participation of migrants also affected the activities of Atletico Brigante. The club, therefore, decided to participate in the tournaments of the *Unione italiana sport per tutti* (Uisp), an amateur league very active in favouring the participation of migrants, and to continue its other activities. Part of the founders left the group, but Brigante found the support of the *Unione sindacale di base* (Usb), a leftist trade union, starting a lasting cooperation. The team, furthermore, began to cooperate with other left-wing movements in Campania and actively participated in the *We want to play* campaign.

Over the years, the principles of the club have not changed, as shown by a press release from August 2018:

We began with the sport because it is an effective tool to approach people, intending to transmit our ideas of sympathy, freedom, equality, against any racism, fascism, sexism. Against the logic of business-football, we have wanted to practice the heresy of bottom-up football. [...] In these years, the exigencies and needs of those who have joined our project have spurred us to expand our action radius. Thus, we have created a school of Italian language, a help desk, and a permanent assembly of migrants and activists from Benevento, open to the contribution of all, excepted those whose ideas go against our basic principles¹⁴.

¹² See the Facebook page of Atletico Brigante, <https://www.facebook.com/atleticobrigante/> and the portal Tuttocampo.it, <https://www.tuttocampo.it>, both retrieved 10 April 2019.

¹³ "Sannio sport", 8 May 2016, <https://www.sanniosport.it/la-nota-dellatletico-brigante-fatti-castelfranco/>, retrieved 9 March 2019.

¹⁴ The release was published by several local papers. For example, see "Il Vaglio", 7 August 2018, <http://www.ilvaglio.it/comunicato-stampa/23790/1039atletico-brigante-una-realta-da-sostenere.html>, retrieved 18 April 2019.

In short, the club aims to promote the fights against any kind of discrimination, on the basis of its inclusive approach.

In 2018, after the Figc modified its rules and made the registration of migrants easier, Atletico Brigante joined again the *Terza categoria* league. Finally, the club found a field in Benevento, allowing more migrants to participate as players or supporters. The composition of the public has changed: in the first years, nearly all supporters were Italian political activists, while since 2018 the stands are mainly occupied by migrants. The agonistic performance improved and in the 2018/19 championship, the team reached the tenth position, with 25 points in 24 matches.

Integration has been made easier by the organization of other activities alongside football. As pointed out by some studies (for example, Borgognoni & Di Gennaro, 2015), the best results in integration are achieved when the clubs also organize activities such as courses of local languages, multi-ethnic initiatives, etc., as in the case of Brigante.

The club, in fact, understands sport not as an end, but as a mean to favour the political integration of migrants. In other words, the football matches are part of the political militancy against racism and discriminations; one of the aims of the club is fostering the development of the foreigners' political awareness. Compared to other experiences, such as that of Afro-Napoli, Brigante gives less importance to competition and sports results. Furthermore, its fight against discriminations extends to sexism, as highlighted by the fact that its presidency is currently held by a woman, a rare occurrence among football clubs.

The migrants attracted by the team are almost exclusively West-African asylum seekers, as in Benevento there are no other significant communities of sub-Saharan foreigners. Immigrants coming from other continents, such as Eastern Europe, are less attracted by this kind of teams.

The club contributed to the social-cultural integration of its members, also thanks to its other activities. However, it cannot prevent that most immigrants living in Benevento only spend a short time in the province and then move in other regions or abroad, which demonstrates once again that the anti-racist clubs can give a limited contribution to the economic integration.

Furthermore, Brigante has brought a different narrative on migration in a peripheral province that has recently experienced a growth in xenophobia¹⁵.

5. *Tam Tam (Castel Volturno)*

Most projects aimed at favouring the integration of migrants through sports concern football. However, other disciplines have also been “exploited” for the same goal, as in the case of the basketball club Tam Tam.

The club was established in 2016 in Castel Volturno, an area characterized by an ethnic composition without equal in Campania: the municipal territory hosts 35.000 people and about 20.000 of them are immigrants from Africa, most of whom irregulars. The neighbouring towns, such as Villa Literno, Baia Domitia and Mondragone, also host a significant number of foreigners. The settlement of migrants began in the ‘80s and has always been characterized by poverty and social exclusion. Most migrants do odd jobs, often in agriculture and constructions, and face the criminal gangs active in the area. Over the years, several occurrences have highlighted how dangerous the situation is, such as the murder of a South-African asylum seeker, Jerry Essan Masslo, in 1989 in Villa Literno; the 1990 massacre of Pescopagano (municipality of Mondragone), in which the Camorra killed five people; the 2008 massacre of Castel Volturno, in which the victims were seven (Mosca, 2012; Caruso, 2015, pp. 51-90; Petrarca, 2016).

Given that the first foreign settlements date back to thirty years ago, Castel Volturno and its environs are today home of second-generation migrants. The Italian law does not grant them citizenship: they are considered foreigner until they come of age when they can finally apply for naturalization (Codini, 2014). Due to the difficult social-economic situation, immigrants and their children rarely have the opportunity to play sports.

In this context, in 2016 a former professional basketball player, Massimo Antonelli, already engaged in social projects, decided to establish a club to allow young boys of foreign origin to play along with their Italian peers. Antonelli found the support of other former professional players and

¹⁵ In last European elections, held on 26 May 2019, the xenophobic *Lega Salvini Premier* (Southern version of the *Lega Nord*) was the most voted party in the province, with 27,86%.

founded the club, named Tam Tam as a tribute to the typical African wooden drums. Around thirty teenagers, both Italians and second-generation migrants, joined the club in the first months and started their practice. The white players, however, soon left the group due to the difficulties in reaching the field and only black teenagers continued to play. Therefore Tam Tam, unlike the other mentioned experiences, has become a sort of ethnic club.

Antonelli thus recounted the creation of the group and the involvement of the boys of African descent:

In a territory with a high rate of immigration, a majority of black boys and few Italian people respond [to our call]. The motivation of the sons of the foreigners is so strong that, after school, they walk for hours under the bad weather to arrive at practice. The Italians, on the contrary, soon stopped from attending the courses for logistic difficulties. Barefoot or with pierced shoes or, even worse, with fur boots in high summer, the sons of immigrants, with their burden of problems, arrive with constancy on foot and want to practice. They are joyful, little concentrated, but they are there and ask for attention: the sports project immediately turns in a real project of social inclusion¹⁶

In January 2017 the club enrolled two teams in the Uisp basketball league: under-14 and under-12; in the following months, the players restored an abandoned sport palace, thus finding a permanent location for playing¹⁷.

However, bureaucracy posed a problem: the sons of migrants could not be registered in the official championships, managed by the *Federazione italiana pallacanestro* (Fip). Tam Tam complained about this absurd situation, as its players were born in Italy, spoke Italian and did not know any country but Italy. The minister for sport, Luca Lotti, accepted their proposal and in October 2017 the Parliament add an amendment to the 2018 budget law, allowing minors of foreign origin, even those not complying with the rules on entry and stay, to be registered in sport clubs, provided that they had been attending school in Italy for at least one year¹⁸. The measure is

¹⁶ "Segni dei tempi", March 2009.

¹⁷ See the website of the club, <https://tamtambasketball.org/it/chi-siamo/>, retrieved 10 April 2019.

¹⁸ Law 27 December 2017, art. 1, paragraph 369, letter f. The text is published in "Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica italiana" n. 302, 29 December 2017, ordinary supplement n. 62. See also "La Repubblica", 17 October 2017.

known as “Tam Tam amendment” and it facilitates the participation in sports activities for hundreds of thousands of teenagers throughout Italy, who find themselves in the same condition as the Tam Tam players.

The difficulties faced by Tam Tam are not rare: the scientific literature (for example, Schwentzer, 2016) has highlighted that bureaucracy is one of the greatest barriers that limit the participation of migrants in sport activities. However, the examples coming from useful experiences of integration and dialogue can help to overcome these barriers and persuade the political authorities to ease the registration of foreign citizens in sports clubs.

After the amendment, Tam Tam could finally register its players in the Fip junior leagues, and, thanks to crowdfunding campaigns and sponsorships, could also provide them with uniforms and other equipment. The club even succeeded in buying a minivan for the athletes’ transfer ¹⁹.

Tam Tam was more and more known for its social engagement and caught the attention of some important media outlets, thus allowing for an anti-racist message to be conveyed a wide public.

Today Tam Tam manages three teams, under-18, under-15, and under-13, all playing in the Fip official junior leagues. Among its future objectives are collecting other players and establishing a women’s team.

The most interesting elements of this story, besides the legislative amendment promoted in 2017, are the area where the club was born and the involvement of second generations. The very difficult condition of the migrants living in Castel Volturno proves that, although the economic barriers seriously limit the participation of foreigners in sports, they can be overcome with the commitment of both migrants and local actors. Very interesting is also the involvement of second-generation migrants. Generally they have better opportunities to “use” sport for improving their social-cultural integration, as it had been, for example, for Italian emigrants in the United States (Ross Mormino, 1982; Gems 2012; Gems 2013). Generally, the sons of immigrants have to face difficult challenges in the territory where they live, as they are considered foreigners by the law and part of the population, but they can give an essential contribution to the

¹⁹ See “Il Sole 24ore”, online edition, 26 January 2019, <https://alleyoop.ilsole24ore.com/2019/01/26/tam-tam-basket-lintegrazione-dei-migranti-passa-lo-sport/>; “Il Meridiano news”, 14 February 2019, <http://www.ilmeridianonews.it/2019/02/pallacanestro-per-i-meno-fortunati-ecco-il-tam-tam-basketball-a-castel-volturno>, both retrieved 10 April 2019

social, economic and cultural growth of the country (El Hariri, 2010). Therefore, easing their integration is an indispensable challenge and it is desirable that other groups could take Tam Tam as a model.

Finally, the history of the club shows that, as highlighted by several studies (for example, Gasperini & Cometti, 2010), the ethnic clubs can be a useful tool of dialogue, if they participate in competitions with local teams and are managed in the correct way.

Conclusions

Alongside the four projects shortly described in the previous pages, many other sports experiences have involved migrants and refugees living in Campania. For example, in Naples the Aics has organized some cricket tournaments, involving the immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent, where the game is very popular; in Salerno, the rugby team Zona Orientale also includes migrants and asylum seekers; in Caserta, the basketball team Stella del Sud, connected to the social centre *Ex Canapificio* and mainly composed by asylum seekers and refugees, participated in the Uisp championships between 2015 and 2017. Other sports activities are organized by Catholic groups, such as the *Centro sportivo italiano*, which in Naples has promoted the five-a-side football team Tressse Pro.Te.Neo; some teams established for migrants, such as Africa Sporting Napoli and Ostello Guys Fc, play (or have played) in the Fcs football tournaments. Furthermore, several ethnic football teams have been created and some of them have led to their players being hired by non-ethnic clubs. Many teams, besides those established with the deliberate intention to ease integration, include migrants among their players, mainly in football.

Most of the migrants participating in sports activities come from sub-Saharan Africa. This prevalence has several reasons. Generally, the Africans are the foreigners most eager to interact with local people; furthermore, they live in the worst condition and often experience poverty and social exclusion, earning the attention of anti-racist associations. Football being the most popular sport in Africa, playing it professionally is a lifetime dream for most African boys, as is for young Italians.

Migrants from other continents also play sports, but they are usually less numerous in the anti-racist clubs. In Campania, the biggest foreign

communities are those from Eastern Europe. Many of their members practice sports keenly, but they seldom join the projects specifically established to favour integration, not least to distinguish themselves from African migrants. Furthermore, most migrants from Eastern Europe are women and for them playing sports is more difficult.

Migrants from the Indian Subcontinent and the Far East are little involved. Generally, the Indians prefer playing cricket and, apart from some experiences, such as the mentioned tournaments organized in Naples, the game is little known in Italy. Migrants from China generally tend to gather around ethnically based networks and communities, interacting with Italians only for work purposes (Ponzini, 2018; Riccardi, 2017).

As for migrant women, the participation in sports activities is scarce. Some clubs have tried to involve female athletes, such as Afro-Napoli, which has established two women's teams, but with limited results. Women are hindered by both their gender (sport is less popular also among European women than among men) and migrant condition (Agergaard & Tiesler, 2014; Schwenger, 2016; Jakubowska, 2018). Moreover, the culture and traditions of some of their countries of origin, such as those from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, give little room to female sport and the economic condition rarely allow women to play sports. Finally, the most popular game, and the most "exploited" to ease integration, is football and, in Italy, women's involvement in the game is still scarce (Bifulco & Pirono, 2014, pp. 201-205; Gherpelli, 2018, pp. 219-224), although the participation of the Italian team in the 2019 World Cup has drawn the attention of the public.

Despite many obstacles, the four projects here described, together with other initiatives, strongly contributed to the integration of migrants. A significant part of the foreigners who have participated are asylum seekers or other people recently arrived in Italy (mainly in the cases of Rfc Lions, Brigante and Afro-Napoli its first years), and the matches often provide their first opportunity to meet local people. This has allowed them not to gather around ethnically based networks, as often happens among newcomers. By playing in multi-ethnic teams, migrants have established relations, overcoming the barriers between foreigners and Italian and, sometimes, between foreigners belonging to different countries. However, as stated above integration and dialogue are not automatic processes: playing with local people is not enough to promote real integration and

often the football field offers the only shared experiences; the best results for social-cultural integration are achieved when other activities are organized alongside sport (socialization, teaching of Italian language, etc.). In this respect, the contribution of the four above-described projects has been significant, as most of them also organize other activities. Furthermore, the teams have fostered relations among players, although it does not follow that all players have become friends: establishing relations among people coming from a different background is easier if they share other features (age, interests, etc.) (Talleu, 2010, pp. 151-157), so that not always the players of the anti-racist teams have established relations outside the sports field.

Of little significance has been the contribution of the anti-racist clubs to the economic integration: generally, playing in anti-racist teams does not lead to employment, also due to the high unemployment rate in Campania. Among the mentioned clubs, the only exceptions are some players from Afro-Napoli who have reached semi-professional levels and receive wages for playing. Sometimes, players coming from anti-racist teams have begun a career in professional sport, but it happens very rarely. However, even if in the great majority of the cases there is not a direct impact on economic integration, playing sports is useful to develop transversal skills (first and foremost the ability to speak Italian) that are necessary also in the working environment. Therefore, the migrants' participation in the clubs' activities affected also their economic integration, although in an indirect way.

A common feature of the anti-racist teams is represented by their political engagement: the clubs are often established by political groups and sometimes mingle with the teams of the "calcio popolare". Political militancy, understood as a fight against racism and defence of the rights of migrants, has often provided the push for the establishment of the teams (mainly in the cases of Rfc Lions Ska and Atletico Brigante) and has forged the identity of the clubs. However, political engagement also engenders some limits: for examples, sometimes it creates problems in participating in activities with groups not sharing the same view and, furthermore, the diatribes among left-wing groups can hinder the involvement of players and supporters.

In any case, all the four mentioned projects have spread an anti-racist message against the mounting xenophobia. They have shown, also thanks to their agonistic performance, that the cultural exchanges and the union of

diversity are not a burden, but, on the contrary, a mean to achieve important successes. This message is implicitly brought in any match that they play.

The engagement for integration has raised significant attention by the media, higher than that dedicated to the other teams playing in the same leagues. The clubs have also collected a relevant number of supporters, who are in large part political activists, whose identity is not created by the belonging to a territory, but by the sharing of ideas and political projects. An Afro-Napoli supporter has stated:

We are political activists first and football fans second, we are involved in politics and insurgent groups, we are activists, we do more than anti-racism work, anything that is a 'social' issue [...]

Afro Napoli is not the team of the local area, it's a team that expresses a certain type of thinking. We are a group from different parts of Naples, and we are involved in politics. Fundamentally, we are a group who support Afro Napoli not because we are from a certain area, but because of the ideas behind it²⁰.

The same is true for the supporters of all anti-racist teams.

At present, the clubs' work is jeopardized by the growing xenophobia and by a government explicitly opposed to the immigration and integration of foreigners. In June 2018 Matteo Salvini, leader of the *Lega Nord*, became the head of the Ministry of the Interior. His well-known xenophobic ideas have further spiked the existing afrophobia. Racism has always been present in sport, mainly in football (Valeri, 2005; Valeri, 2010, Gherpelli, 2018), but after the 90s, also thanks to the engagement of the federations, some progress in the fight against racial discriminations had been made, at least in the professional sport. In the last years, the progress is jeopardized by the pervasive xenophobia, which mainly affects dilettantish leagues. The intolerant climate has increased racism on the stalls and often the racist supporters and players invoke the governmental repression against immigrants ("now Salvini will send you all back home", "the fun is over", etc.). Racism hinders integration, because it prevents the foreigners from feeling at home in Italy. Furthermore, some political decisions risk limiting the participation of migrants in sports. In the last years, the political and

²⁰ "Huck. Stories from the sideline", 20 June 2018, <https://www.huckmag.com/outdoor/sport-outdoor/italian-football-club-fighting-racism-pitch/>, retrieved 10 March 2019.

sportive institutions have eased the participation of migrants and, with measures such as the mentioned “Tam Tam amendment”, have removed a part of the bureaucratic obstacles to their registration. Today, the government has chosen the opposite way. The most dangerous measure is the *Decreto sicurezza* (security decree), issued in November 2018²¹, which, among other things, forbids the civil registration of asylum seekers. Given that many sporting federations, such as the Figc, require a certification of residence for registering players, the asylum seekers risk being excluded.

More in general, the political climate does not favour the migrants and the Italian citizens who support their integration. For this reason, the anti-racist clubs find some obstacles but, at the same time, they are more and more necessary to fight afrophobia and contrast the measures that make difficult the participation of migrants in sports.

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²¹ Law n. 132 of 1st December 2018, art. 13. See the text in the “Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana”, 281, 3 December 2018.

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