



Sport Diplomacy: Identifying good practices

A final report executive summary to the European Commission

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written by



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Executive Summary

The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission commissioned Ecorys in October 2017 to undertake a rapid review of good practice projects in the context of the European Commission's Sport Diplomacy priority.

Background

The concept of sport diplomacy at the EU level was introduced by the European Commission in 2015. The High Level Group on Sport Diplomacy, which was created in 2015 at the request of Commissioner Navracsics, delivered a Report with several recommendations in June 2016. Following this work, Council Conclusions on Sport Diplomacy were adopted by all the EU Ministers responsible for sport in November 2016. The European Union Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020) acknowledges the need to cooperate with third countries, in particular candidate countries and potential candidates to the EU, to promote European values through sport diplomacy¹ and invites the European Commission to carry out the present study. The EU's sport diplomacy agenda has also raised specific questions regarding the ways in which the EU could support the use of sport as a tool to support external relations.

Aims and methodology

The key objective of the study has been to identify good practices, supported at national, European and international level in sport projects having an international dimension, namely involving non-EU Member States as well as projects which contributed to building a stronger position of a country on the international scene.

The good practices research has comprised two main elements. The first has used a systematic search approach to identify the good practice case studies. The desk-based review to identify relevant projects has incorporated a rapid review of relevant websites including websites of national sport agencies, national sport federations and NGOs. The searches have also covered national development agencies and other non-sport organisations that might support such projects. Examination of the above sources was supported by rapid web searches in various European languages focused on various countries using relevant key word search terms to identify additional information. Over 50 projects and initiatives were identified in the searches. From this list, a final shorter list of good practice case studies was agreed to ensure a good spread of sport for development themes. In order to complete the case studies, short telephone interviews were completed with relevant organisational contacts in order to fill in any gaps in project information and obtain qualitative perspectives on project outcomes. The telephone discussions also provided additional perspectives on the best practice features of the interventions and lessons for wider application (including transferability).

A secondary element of the research was to conduct a mapping exercise to identify EU funding sources that could potentially to support external relations.

¹ The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020). Available at: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42017Y0615\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:42017Y0615(01))

Key findings

The case study research has highlighted particular projects where the skills, knowledge and expertise of Member States' sports federations and NGOs have been applied successfully in countries outside of the EU. The good practice projects cover a range of themes including disadvantaged young people, disability, gender, health, refugees, and major events.

The evidence demonstrates the potential for international sport projects to have a positive effect on the relationships between the countries involved. From the limited number of case studies a number of particular features can be highlighted with regard to the political and diplomatic aspects of the projects:

- High level political engagement between the Member State and the third country partners has been used to generate interest and engagement in the project at the local level.
- Some projects align directly with the emerging priorities of the Member States' international development objectives and therefore support the funding country's wider international development and diplomacy efforts.
- Some projects have a strong focus on engagement with high-level stakeholders (for example, sport and education ministries) which enables the projects to support the development of sustainable structures that meet the longer-term objectives of the partner countries. This approach is highly valued by stakeholders in third countries.

The more detailed case study research has also highlighted a number of key lessons in the delivery of international sport for development projects that could be relevant to the funding, design and implementation of ongoing and future programmes. Broadly, these particular lessons include:

- It is important to understand how the knowledge and skills of the EU Member States in the area of sport can be applied to meet the particular strategic objectives of the third countries and the challenges they face.
- The most successful projects have a strong focus on the capacity-building and upskilling of organisations in third countries, helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project approaches.
- Major events can be used to harness interest and engagement in international sport for development initiatives.

Through a review of relevant EU funding sources, it is evident that there is potential for EU funding programmes to support sport for development projects that involve partnerships between EU Member States and third countries. A mapping exercise has identified a number of relevant EU funding sources.

Recommendations

This short research exercise provides evidence and insights in understanding the types of sport for development projects that could be supported by the EU in helping to achieve its external relations objectives. This section sets out a number of recommended actions that could be taken to further promote the EU's sport diplomacy agenda.

It is recommended that **capacity building workshops** are held that aim to develop knowledge on the potential for sport for development to be used as a tool to enhance the EU's external relationships. The first workshop could focus on developing knowledge on the specific barriers sport organisations interested in development and diplomacy might face in accessing relevant funding at the EU level and how these can be overcome. The workshop could be attended by representatives of leading sport for development organisations. In order to develop mutual understanding, the target audience for the second workshop could be non-sport organisations including European Commission DGs responsible for programmes with third countries.

Building on the capacity-building workshops, it should be ensured that sport for development is identified as an **explicit priority in relevant EU funding instruments**. This should be supported by an accompanying guidance document that contains detailed information on relevant programmes such as application process, eligibility criteria, etc. linked to good practice projects.

Building on the approach adopted for this study, it is recommended that **larger scale research is undertaken on the current state of play** in the EU with regard to international sport for development practices and best practice projects (drawing on systematic evaluation of evidence and also primary research with stakeholders). The research could focus on understanding the political and diplomatic benefits of sport for development interventions supported by the Member States and the EU and how benefits can be maximised by building upon best practice success factors.

It is also recommended that actions are developed to **support dissemination of and knowledge sharing** on good practice projects. This could include European level conferences held on an annual or biannual basis that allow projects to present their approaches and good practice features. International sport for development could also be included as a regular topic in events such as the annual European Week of Sport or EU Sport Forum. The potential for sport for development could also be promoted through regular newsletters and publications targeted at the development sector.

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