

Prisoners on the move

Feedback and recommendations by Sport and Citizenship

Sport and Citizenship has been committed since its very beginning to the launch of a **European civic dialogue** in the field of sport thanks to multidisciplinary approach and transverse reflections aiming at **putting European sport stakeholders in relation with each other**: governments, sport movement, as well as civil society, academics and the private sector.

Among its tasks within the “Prisoners on the Move” project, the think tank has consulted its Scientific Committee in order to bring a new overview and some recommendations for the project on the basis of the report delivered by FROS. This Scientific Committee is composed of a wide variety of profiles and gathers more than one hundred experts who allow the think tank to propose a transverse approach with opinions from different cultures and backgrounds.

Here below are the results of this consultation, hence *Sport and Citizenship’s* feedback and recommendations towards the use of sport within the prisons.

1. The project has emphasized the need of communication and ties between the different actors of sport in European prisons
 - *At a national level, an umbrella network is important*

The most important statement of the FROS report concerns the existence of different configurations of sport practices in prison and their connections with society in the countries studied. There are several configurations: actually, the relationships between the prison world and the sport movement, as well as the institutions, are more or less formal, sometimes non-existent in some countries. The main cause of that is the variety of organisations of prison and sport systems in Europe, as well as the different ways in which the public and private spheres are articulated.

An **umbrella network that would be at the top of the entire system** in each country would be relevant. This organisation could, at the very least, provide a permanent place for discussions and dedicate itself to collect feedbacks on European projects and joint experiences. Its primary goal would be to gather these various actors of sport in prison, so that they are able to share their knowledge and exchange their experiences.

This organisation would also have a role of observation and assessment of the various actions undertaken. Yet it has to be noted that it would be very difficult to evaluate the sport effects on the reintegration of prisoners because of their right to anonymity once they are released.

- *A European network on sport in prison*

For the last 18 months, the European project « Prisoners on the move. Move into sport, move through sport ! » has brought together experts, public and private actors involved in the fields of

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sport, prison and/or social inclusion. In addition, a lot of stakeholders have attended the meetings and contributed towards the achievement of the project. As a result, the implementation of a European network based on this project could be of great relevance. This network could do some **lobbying to foster the development of sports programs in prison, spread the idea that sport practices could be a relevant tool for inmates' social inclusion, organize conferences**, etc. This type of network already exists on gender equality in sport: the EWS European Women and Sport.

2. A global and strong policy is still to build

- *A theoretical reflection to build a sport policy aimed at prisoners*

The multiplication of sport practices should support a multifaceted approach of sport. The aim would be to **work on the meanings and implications of each sporting practices in order to provide tailored and adapted measures for the social reintegration of each target group**. These groups could be based on gender or age of the inmates. They could also gather some prisoners who have special issues, for example with drugs..

- *Integrating sport in global integration devices*

The sport movement should get closer to the prison authorities and other institutions responsible for the inclusion programs to encourage general inclusion. That could lead to use sport as an **additional tool for the inmates' integration**. In this case, the **sport's object logic should be given up for the benefit of a sport's subject logic**: sport should become a real mean of inclusion and not just only a way to keep inmates occupied and to preserve security in prisons. This switch of logic should lead to the development of an offer of pedagogical tools articulated with this aim.

- *The basis of this policy should be the consideration of the prisoners' demands*

The main constraint faced by prisoners is confinement and space deprivation. Their biggest need is therefore to move and be free by channelling their energy. The SWOT analysis addresses this issue under "threats" and turns it into a safe approach, where regrettably the issue concerning integration did not arise. It seems inappropriate to put a contradiction between these both aspects. This is especially true, for safety is everyone's concern in the closed world of a prison.

Obviously, it appears that the first need is to **build on prisoners' demands and requests. They ask for socialisation, and sport game is one of the major vectors of socialisation**. As a result, sport enables them **to meet people who do not belong to the prison environment**, as well as to integrate the rules and understand their benefits.

In order to overcome the fears related to security, **adapting the practice of some group sports could be relevant**, namely by imagining lighter formats, with less duals and direct opposition. Using football as an example, these adaptations could take the form of football-tennis or the use of a futsal ball.

On an individual level, inmates are also in demand. Indeed, they face problems regarding their bodies, their physical appearance and movement as an expression of freedom or escape. We can also note the success of weightlifting equipment, which show the importance of individual needs.

However, the sport activity investments continue to be limited, particularly with regard to the spaces used for practising. **Relevant authorities could therefore invest in the installation of exercise bikes, for example, in order to promote individual sport practices**, in addition to group activities.

3. Lines of inquiry for the future of sport in prison

- *A European call for proposals*

In order to identify European good practices in the fields of social inclusion through sport and collaboration between justice and sport sectors, the European Commission could launch a European call for proposals. This call could contribute to a **better knowledge** of sport programs in prison in Europe.

Following the same idea, the European Commission could implement a set of European studies, in partnership with Member States and the Ministries of Justice.

- *Importance of sport as a training medium for inmates*

Access to sport training appears to be limited in prison. Indeed, it is very difficult to entrust training or mentoring duties to people who have a criminal record. **However, sport can be used as a knowledge support, especially for the training of young prisoners.** As an example, the use of trajectories in order to learn mathematics or newspaper articles for French studies have been successfully employed among vulnerable or marginalized youth groups.

It also seems important to **consider prisoners as a target group with special needs, who might develop specific professional skills.** Therefore, it would not be required to create a specific curriculum because of the cumbersome of such a measure, but to **adapt the existing curricula** to this target group. If we take the French example, the training model provided in STAPS (University education in the field of sport) could support this kind of adaptation.

- *“Athletes as Role Models”*

The notion of sport ambassador could be extended to the prison environment, based on international federation’s model of “Athlete as Role Models” whose mission is to share their experience and advise athletes at the Youth Olympic Games.

It may be worthwhile to appoint ambassadors amongst these athletes or former athletes who have served prison sentences, while **ensuring that a territorial proximity is maintained in order to promote the sharing of experiences.**

This last recommendation was inspired by the experiences of the scientific committee and not specifically by the FROS report.

***Sport and Citizenship** is the 1st European think tank devoted to the societal impact of sport. It is a forum for reflection and a source of recommendations for future sports policies. The association aims to promote the fundamental values of sport in society to public authorities, the economic sector, civil society and the media. More than a hundred European experts pursue multidisciplinary, cross-cutting reflection.*