



Strasbourg, 31 March 2023

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**“Mapping of sports facilities –
Meeting 3: Insights into financing of sport facilities”**

Hybrid meeting organised jointly by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)
and the Mulier Instituut

Tuesday 13 December 2022
9am – 12.30pm

Online Meeting

Draft Meeting Report

Introduction

In most countries the funding of sport facilities takes up most of the sport budget. Insight into different ways of financing sport facilities is therefore of vital relevance. The question as to how to fund and run sport facilities in a cost-effective manner is becoming even more prominent with rising costs (e.g. energy crisis). In the context of this, Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) and the Mulier Instituut hosted an online meeting on the mapping of sports facilities directly pertaining to this issue of the financing of sport facilities.

The aim of this online meeting was to:

- gain insights into different ways of financing sport facilities;
- gain insights into different modes of operations for sport facilities and its relation to the costs of running a sport facility;
- gain insights into the social return on investment or societal value of sport facilities;
- bring together researchers and national level policy-making experts to identify solutions to keep sport facilities affordable for all groups in society.

To this end, the following questions were explored during the meeting:

- To what extent and in which way are sport facilities subsidised or financed by the governments in different European countries?
- What is the social return on investment or societal value of sport facilities?
- What lessons can be learnt going forwards?

Discussion

The meeting was opened by *Francine Hetherington Raveney* (FHR), Deputy Executive Secretary of EPAS, who welcomed the participants and highlighted the interactive nature of the discussion. She recalled the first and the second meetings of the series, centred around the changing patterns in sports facility use during the COVID-19 pandemic and sustainability respectively. FHR noted that this meeting focused on financial investments and sports facilities, in particular on the various ways of financing and operating sports facilities in terms of cost, social returns on investments into sports infrastructure, and the solutions to keep sports facilities affordable for all groups in society. She stressed that equal access to sports infrastructure is the aim of the Council of Europe and EPAS' work in this area. FHR also recalled the Council of Europe [Revised European Sports Charter](#) (2021) as a key document for EPAS, in particular its Article 18, which encourages public and private financial support for sport on national, regional and local levels.

Thereafter, *Dr Remco Hoekman* (RH), Director of the Mulier Instituut and co-facilitator of the event, highlighted the urgency of the topic in view of the current energy crisis putting more pressure on sports budgets regarding the operation of sports facilities and welcomed the collaboration of policymaking experts and research community. RH outlined the structure and the format of the event, introducing the first speakers of the session on financing of sports facilities.

Dino Križnjak (DK), representing the Ministry of Agriculture of Croatia, delivered a presentation on the Rural Development Programme (RDP) as a pillar of the Common

Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the context of financing sports facilities in Croatia. The CAP helps to foster resilience in rural communities, which are facing a number of challenges, including ageing demographics, under-developed infrastructure, and the lack of services and job opportunities. Investments in sports infrastructure could contribute to the betterment of the quality of life in rural areas, which is particularly relevant to Croatia, as more than 99% of its total territory is rural.

Within the RDP, two measures are relevant to sports facilities – M7 and M19. Measure 7 is aimed at improving basic services as well as village renewal in rural areas, which includes supporting investment into sports infrastructure for settlements up to 5.000 residents (over 98% settlements in Croatia). Measure 19 is designed to support LEADER local development from the bottom up, which also involves support for investments in sports infrastructure and children's playgrounds. As local communities must set their own goals, however, sports infrastructure may not be identified as a priority.

(Re)construction of sports halls, football pitches, sport-recreation centres, locker rooms and sports stands, as well as equipping sports infrastructure are the most common projects of sports infrastructures within the RDP. In total, over €26 million were invested in 252 projects across the two measures. Among the main risks associated with the implementation of the measures, DK identified the (in)correct application of public procurement rules, legal issues (including those related to property ownership), pre-financing of operations by the beneficiary, (in)appropriate application of selection criteria, and (in)consistency of operations with the relevant local strategic/development documents.

In the 2023-2027 financial period, the Ministry of Agriculture will undertake a new programme, where needs and interventions within local development strategies will be defined based on the characteristics of each local area, enabling a wider spectrum of potential small-scale projects, including investments into (re)construction of sports infrastructure. Among other possibilities of financing sports infrastructure in the new financial period, Integrated Territorial Programme, Competitiveness and Cohesion Programme, and Recovery and Resilience Plan were mentioned.

Next, *Alice Boyd* (AB) from Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality shared insights on financing of sports facilities in Norway using lottery money. To start with, she presented the current economic situation, impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, global energy issues and inflation, causing sports facilities to struggle. AB noted that government grants for sports clubs and voluntary organisations are available, sourced from the national lottery funds. In addition, the new Gambling Act will come in force on 1 January 2023, strengthening focus on combating gambling issues (e.g. compulsive gambling) and prohibiting the distribution of the revenue for commercial gain.

AB indicated that the revenue from the state-owned lottery company Norsk Tipping distributed to the sports sector more than doubled between 2011 and 2021 (approx. from €150 million to €320 million). In 2022, over 3 billion kr (approx. €300 million) were spent on sport; sports facilities and national facilities received more than half of that budget (approx. €180 million). Trails and overnight cabins in mountains/coast as well as equipment for sports facilities are also financed. Similarly to Croatia, Norway employs a bottom-up approach, where clubs and municipalities apply for funding based on a local plan of their municipality; while the

government sets the rules, it is the counties that manage the applications, allowing the state to examine any potential complaints.

In Norway, the lottery revenue distribution as well as regulations for applications are regulated by law (the Gambling Act), based on which the revenue must be spent on the development of sports facilities that have the main target groups of children and young people aged 6-19 and people with disabilities as well as a non-profit-based form of ownership. Moreover, a needs-based assessment must be submitted alongside the application. Regulations for various sports facilities and the grant amounts are revised annually (published in June). Each year, the counties handle about 3.500 applications from all over the country. For the counties, the money is distributed in the following way: 50% based on the applications sum, 25% based on the number of inhabitants in the county, 25% on the facility coverage (e.g. larger cities have low facility coverage). Applications are possible for new builds, renovations, and for improving accessibility, which are typically adaptations for people with disabilities.

AB emphasised that the government does not fully finance sports facilities; regular facilities and local small facilities can apply for 1/3 or 1/2 of approved costs, respectively. Instead, it is local municipalities and sports clubs that provide the major share of income. AB underlined the focus on facilities for self-organised sports and activities. She suggested that while the commitment to the life expectancy of small local sports facilities was reduced from 20 to 10 years, regular facilities are still expected to function for at least 30 years, risking a (partial) reimbursement of government funds in case of their substandard quality. In 2022, the Ministry began a review of grant scheme for sport facilities to address the issues of access for all, variety of facilities, and division of responsibilities inter alia. In addition, there were efforts to ensure that every facility has access to some government funding to ensure that facilities are built not only in economically strong municipalities but also in the areas of the country with less local funding. AB presented the timeline of the review and announced that the new regulations will take effect in 2025.

Maximilian Schubiger (MS) followed with the presentation on the National Sports Facilities Concept (NASCO), a programme of the Swiss Confederation that serves to plan and co-ordinate the construction of sport facilities in line with the principles of the national sports policy. NASCO was initiated according to the Federal Act on Spatial Planning and is currently requested by the Federal Act on the Promotion of Sport and Exercise. The aim of the programme is to provide good infrastructure for national sports federations (NFs). MS pointed out that the state acts only on a subsidiary basis, while municipalities, clubs and other sponsors take on the larger share of the investments.

In the framework of NASCO, sports infrastructure is developed for education, training and competition; and while the target group is exclusively high performance sport, other sports sectors (such as sport for all, club sport etc.) do benefit from these facilities even if they do not classify as “sport activities of national importance”. MS noted that since establishment of NASCO in the early 1990s nearly CHF 265 million (approx. €268 million) have been made available for the promotion of the construction of sports facilities. Following the needs assessment of the national federations conducted in 2017/2018, CHF 750-1500 million (approx. €758-1516 million) were necessitated to meet these needs.

MS then elaborated on the legal bases criteria, which include: 1) national importance, further substantiated by the proven and documented need of a NF, missing alternatives, conformity to

the standards and convenience, and accessibility to people with disabilities; 2) spatial planning, encompassing protection of the environment and landscape, service via public transport, system of settlement, energy, and construction. Funding criteria encompass the following: 1) the fulfilment of national importance measure; 2) a contract between the Confederation and the responsible institution (including private actors); 3) a contract between the NF and the responsible institution on the facility utilisation; 4) assured financing of the investment and the long-term operation of the facility. Shares of the subsidy on total investment are assessed according to legal regulations; MS highlighted the intended use for events of national importance as the most important criterion for defining the amount of contribution by the state.

MS suggested that NASCO funding has been identified as a quality label and/or a trigger, as public funding might mobilise further investors. He emphasised the importance of spatial planning for sport and exercise on federal as well as regional/local levels. MS concluded that NASCO has proven to be an appropriate funding instrument, generating impact even with modest contributions. He indicated that maintenance and expansion of sports facilities, which is not subsidised by the state, remains a permanent task.

Following the three presentations on the financing of sports facilities, the discussion ensued. In reply to the question on the organisation of operational cost of sports facilities, DK explained that in Croatia the government only funds the building and the re-construction of the facilities, and it is usually local authorities that finance the operational expenditures. He added that sports facilities could use other types of operation (e.g. solar panels) to improve their sustainability. The question on the social return on investments in sport, such as increased levels of participation or the improvement of public health, was later raised. All speakers agreed on the challenging nature of measuring social effects of financial investments in sport. AB recalled the report published by the Norwegian Confederation of Sport in 2022, attempting to examine the financial gain of investment into sports facilities in Norway, and concluded that €1 of investment returned €3 through the lower cost in the health sector, revenue from tourism etc. She also suggested that partial governmental funding throughout the country ensured that every child had some access to sport regardless of the socio-economic background and had a beneficial effect on public health and elite level performance.

In addition, AB elaborated on the needs assessment procedure within the application for state funding in Norway. She noted that the Ministry is seeking solutions to enable counties to prioritise between the needs of local municipalities and their own. Currently, all facilities with the cost exceeding €40.000 have to be included in a municipal area plan, which rotates every 4 years. In addition, a basic form on needs-based assessment must be filled out; the form would provide information on the number of children and sports clubs in the specific area, existing facilities in the area, owner and mode of operation of the future facility, how many different disciplines would gain access to the facility etc. The applications for funding and the supporting documentation, including financial information, are submitted through the database, accessible to municipalities and counties (concerning their respective areas) as well as the Ministry, which has access to all applications in the country. The database retains all applications irrespective of their award status, level of funding awarded, or completion of the facility.

The meeting then proceeded to the second part of the event concerning the operation of sports facilities. *Nils Olof Zethrin* (NOZ) from Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), which seeks to promote and strengthen local self-government and the development

of regional and local democracy, provided insights into financing and operation of sports facilities in Sweden from the municipal perspective. The Swedish model for sport policy is characterised by strong local self-government, largely autonomous from the state which steers the law and the funding of the Swedish Sports Confederation (€200 million per year). While no funding is given at the state level for construction and operation of sports facilities, municipalities provide €300 million towards clubs and their activities as well as €1300.5 million for the operation of sports facilities.

NOZ highlighted the difference between sports and exercise activities funded by municipalities and the activities most practiced by the population (e.g. walking, jogging, biking etc.). He pointed out that the proportion of young people in Sweden engaged in organised sports on a weekly basis has been steadily decreasing over the last 15 years, while the proportion of those practicing sports outside of clubs or associations is double that number (over 60%). Regarding the operation of sports facilities, municipalities have a primary responsibility over sport halls and the biggest role in operating and financing facilities where football activities take place, while clubs assume greater responsibility over football pitches with natural grass, mostly used for competitions in Sweden. In contrast to Norway where more expensive sports facilities are owned and run by municipalities, in Sweden both clubs and municipalities operate costly infrastructure such as ice hockey rinks.

The operation costs of sports facilities in municipalities have been rising over the years, more than doubling from 2001 to 2021 (approx. from €490 million to €1206 million). NOZ stressed the need for the further research into the factors of the operation costs increase. He also underlined the importance of understanding whether investment in sports facilities has an impact on sports participation, and noted that based on 2019 analysis of the link between the participation rates and the facility cost in Sweden no significant relation was found. NOZ concluded that a large proportion of population practices sports outside the traditional framework of state sports policy; many individuals engage in physical activity outside sports associations and do not use traditional sports facilities. He added that there is a limited knowledge regarding the cost of establishment and operation of sports facilities in relation to the number of activities and participants (e.g. at which facilities are activities practiced, what kind of facilities are needed for different groups, which groups choose not to use sports facilities and why etc.).

Oliver Vanges (OV) representing the Danish Foundation for Culture and Sport Facilities (the Foundation) followed with the presentation on a systematic approach to innovation in sports facility funding. He suggested that despite an interest in refining and optimising sports facilities for high performance sport and spectator experience in Denmark, no relation between elite sport success and mass participation was found. OV pointed out that over the last 60 years community sports facilities have been optimised in terms of cost and buildability whilst failing to reflect and adapt to the current activity and participation patterns. As a significant part of recreational sport is detached from competitive sport focus, the design of sports facilities should move away from the image of elite sports in order to adapt to the varied forms of the population's current sport and physical activity practices.

OV summarised the financing system for sport in Denmark. At the national level, the Ministry of Culture funds federations, independent governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the national lottery money. At the local level, 98 municipal councils

are the main financers of local sports facilities. In absence of the governmental sports policy, NGOs have defined sports policy for Denmark for many years. The current vision of sport participation defined by this sector is represented by the “25 – 50 – 75” formula: in 2025, 50% of the population should be members of a sports club and 75% of the population should be regularly physically active (including outside of organised sports). The Foundation in particular financially supports the most innovative facilities for sports-, culture- and outdoor activities, working with the projects of exemplary value in collaboration with local authorities, who are the main contributors to the cost of building a facility; the Foundation covers 12-25% of the cost, based on the annual national lottery contribution of €12 million.

Sustainability is another fundamental principle of the Foundation’s work; it seeks to minimise the damage, advising against building the facilities not strictly needed, and to adopt the sustainable paradigm in the long term. Specific sustainable strategies include optimised operation, which seeks to ensure that the existing sports facilities are used to their full capacity and potential, transformation of existing facilities in municipalities for new purposes, and plural functionality, which aims to ensure that the usage and operation of the facility are optimised for all user groups even before it is built. The Foundation contributes to the early stages of the development process, providing consultations to local authorities. It strives to improve decision-making related to the facilities based on the needs assessment as well as national and local knowledge and help develop sports facilities that reflect the current participation patterns in Denmark.

The last speaker of the session, *Liam McGroarty* (LM) from UEFA, delivered a presentation on social impact investment in sport. Social impact investment is an outcome-based contract that incorporates the use of private funding from investors as the upfront capital required for a provider to set up and deliver a service or a social programme. LM indicated that social impact investment must be intentional (i.e. an investor has the intent to have a positive social impact, such as linked to Sustainable Development Goals), is expected to generate a financial return on capital, can fall under different models of financing (e.g. cash equivalent, fixed income, private equity etc.), and most importantly must have a clear measurement of the effectiveness of the investment. He stressed that social impact investment is based on outcomes rather than inputs and that the approach to impact should be focused on evidence and return of investment. Currently, there are 269 impact investment contracts globally, generating \$240 million, and while most of them target education, employment and child welfare sectors, only a few focus on sports.

The need for social impact investment in sport is multi-faceted. At the public service level, a number of challenges, such as fragmented delivery and “siloes” budgets of every government department as well as short-term political and financial focus, impede positive changes in this area. In turn, fragmented public services lead to inadequate communication, duplications and gaps; at the same time, poor performing services are neither identified nor addressed, thus remaining unchanged and ultimately failing to respond to the needs of individuals in due time. LM indicated that an impact investment model requires a collaboration of all levels (from local to the top) and different sectors across government. He emphasised the advantages of this approach, including its preventative nature, the cut in expenditures in the long term, dual functionality (generating income and creating societal benefits simultaneously), innovation (with the associated risks transferred to the private sector), and the focus on performance as opposed to replication of the past actions.

The role of sport in relation to social returns is mentioned in the 2021-2024 EU Work Plan for Sport, which endorses sport as a tool for social cohesion and active citizenship, cross-sectorial co-operation, awareness-raising amongst other policy domains, and achieving SDGs. However, sport also needs to be challenged: despite significant public investments into sport and physical education in schools, physical activity and literacy levels for key demographics have not changed in the last 20 years; the same groups remain physically inactive. In addition, most sports clubs are designed for competition delivery and athlete development rather than to effect social outcomes, leaving the majority of children on the bench. Similarly, public funding is skewed towards elite performance, while funding for grassroots is community led. As a potential measure, LM presented a Social Return on Investment (SROI) system, which assigns a value on the impact of amateur club football on individual level by gender and by age. Currently, the SROI model measures impact on economy, society and health across 40 countries by identifying factors driving sport (demand activators, supply infrastructure, socio-demographic context) and examining football participation (gender, age and other background of participants).

Following the last presentation, the panellists made additional remarks. In reply to the question on the relevance and the potential of the sport referral system, LM suggested that a combination of a private (or commercial) approach to the target audience as well as the product/services being offered and the cross-sectorial co-operation (whereby such areas as health, education and justice are designed to effectively use referral to sport) is needed to facilitate sport for development. DK pointed out the financial burden of building multi-sport facilities, particularly in rural areas. LM proposed emphasising financial value of increasing participation in sport for the state (e.g. decline of type 2 diabetes, resulting in savings in the health sector); he noted that private sector is willing to contribute to the development of the facilities if the public sector pays for the proportion of the benefits. While DK agreed that children dropping out of sports if not competing is a major issue, LM indicated that improving adult participation could have a greater effect on maintaining children in sport, based on evidence illustrating that parent(s) being active in sport increases the likelihood of their child being active as well.

DK identified low energy cost as one of the main characteristics of a sustainable facility, given the rising energy prices. NOZ reiterated the need for and the intention to conduct research into the operation costs of sports facilities in Sweden. He noted the relationship between the annually increasing operation costs and the (rising) quality standards for facilities as well as internal distribution of different costs within municipal budgets. Regarding the research on impact evaluation by public bodies, RH indicated that while such studies are not common on the local level, the Netherlands is working on both reducing operational cost of existing sports facilities and the societal value of such infrastructure. He stressed the challenges associated with monitoring social benefits of sport but noted the growing need to do so. MS highlighted the role of sports federations in providing regulations for and demands towards the facilities as well as the issues with adapting sports facilities for current needs.

Conclusion

Lastly, RH provided a brief overview of the sessions. He highlighted the common call for more knowledge on how sports facilities are financed and operated as well as its link to the changing patterns of facility use. RH welcomed the use of databases on sports facilities for

policy purposes and pointed out the various changes in the recent years affecting the way the facilities are operated and encouraged further discussions on this topic. FHR thanked the policymakers and the researchers for their valuable exchanges. She noted the follow-on work on mapping of sports facilities in relation to sport for all, which underpins the work of EPAS and the Council of Europe, and equal access to sports infrastructure, particularly relevant in the context of sustainability issues. FHR announced a future deliverable in the form of handbook or guidelines supporting stakeholders at the European level, to be potentially presented at the meeting in September 2023.

Appendix 1: Agenda

9-9:10am	<i>Opening words</i> (Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)
9:10-10:10am	<p><i>Financing sport facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation by Ivana Ozretić and Dino Križnjak (Croatia), Ministry of Agriculture: <i>Financing of sport facilities in Croatia</i> ○ Presentation by Alice Boyd (NO), Ministry of Culture and Equality, Department of Civil Society and Sports: <i>Financing of sport facilities in Norway using lottery money</i> ○ Presentation by Max Schubiger (Switzerland), Federal office of sport: <i>National Sports Facilities Concept (NASCO)</i>
10:10-10:30am	<i>Questions and answers</i>
10:30-10:50am	<i>Break</i>
10:50-11:50am	<p><i>Operation of sport facilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Presentation by Nils Olof Zethrin (Sweden), Swedish association of local authorities and regions: <i>Operation of sport facilities, insights from IAKS and Sweden</i> ○ Presentation by Oliver Vanges (Denmark), The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sport Facilities: <i>Funding programme for multipurpose sport facilities in Denmark</i> ○ Presentation by Liam McGroarty, UEFA: <i>New financing model for community sport</i>
11:50am-12:10pm	<i>Questions and answers</i>
12:10-12:30pm	<p><i>Conclusions and information about follow-on work and the next online meetings in 2023 on equal access to sports facilities</i></p> <p>(Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)</p>

Appendix 2: List of Participants

SPEAKERS

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