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**“Mapping of sports facilities –
Meeting 1: Insights into changing patterns in facility use during the COVID-19
pandemic”**

Organised jointly by EPAS and the Mulier Instituut

Tuesday 14 December

9am – 12.30pm CET

Venue:

Online via BlueJeans

MEETING REPORT

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the use of sports facilities across Europe as attested by numerous pieces of research including a study commissioned by EPAS entitled “The Change in Sports Activity caused by the Spring Pandemic 2020”. The consequences of this situation are believed to have been felt by sports facilities across Europe. As such, EPAS and the Mulier Instituut decided to host an online meeting to assess and discuss the situation on the mapping of sports facilities directly pertaining to this issue.

Given this, the objective of the meeting was twofold:

- 1) to gain insights into changing patterns in facility use during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- 2) to bring together researchers and national-level policy-making experts to identify solutions to explore how to minimise the negative impact in behavioural patterns by identifying the barriers to a return to normality and proposing solutions to try to ensure that such a situation did not occur in the same manner again.

To this end, a series of questions were proposed to the participants including:

- 1) How great an impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on sports facilities and what patterns of change have been identified?
- 2) Which policies/tools already exist to protect sports facilities from closure owing to reduced attendance?
- 3) What are the barriers to returning to pre-pandemic facility attendance?
- 4) Which resources do facility owners have at their disposal to maintain pre-pandemic patterns?
- 5) What lessons can be learnt going forwards?

Discussions

The event was opened by Dr Remco Hoekman, Director of the Mulier Instituut, and Ms Francine Hetherington Raveney, Deputy Executive Secretary of EPAS, who outlined the structure and format of the event, welcomed participants, and encouraged detailed participation in the event. It was noted that participation in the event included a wide range

of people from different backgrounds and brought together researchers, policy makers, experts and others in ministry positions throughout Council of Europe (CoE) member states. It was noted that this meeting was the first of three: the next one would tackle the topic of sustainability issues and sports facilities and the final meeting would relate to financing of sports facilities, which, it was noted, had also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aaron Hermann then proceeded to provide details as to the EPAS-commissioned study of the impact of COVID-19 on physical activity and sports in CoE member states. The study included respondents from 29 member states of the CoE and included responses from almost 15,000 people, with the response rate per country varying from 300 to 800 respondents per member state. Information collected in the survey related to demographic information, and the amount of time spent on sport activities in three periods: (1) the pre COVID-19 period in 2019, (2) the period during the first lockdown period (March-April 2020), and (3) post lockdown in 2020 (August-September 2020). Key findings of the research showed that during the lockdown the time spend on home workouts increased by 43%. Moreover, there was a decrease in outdoor sports activities in some member states, even though outdoor sports activities were less restricted by the lockdown than indoor sports activities. Finally, it was highlighted that indoor sports had suffered the most during the lockdown. The research also found that there was no significant difference in physical activity level for different demographic categorisations, and moreover, while some countries noted an increase in physical activity levels during the lockdown, in others there was a reduction. A concerning trend which was outlined was the rise of the number of completely inactive people in member states as a result of COVID-19, and more generally, the largest decline in activity levels was found in the most active groups. Aaron Hermann then proceeded to outline the discussions and conclusions from the 2020 EPAS webinar on COVID-19. Further details were provided on the concerns and challenges faced by the sports industry as a result of COVID-19 and also the opportunities which could arise as a result.

Michael Trinker, project manager at EPAS, then proceeded to present the revised European Sports Charter (ESC) and its relevance to sports facilities. It was highlighted that 2021 was an important year for EPAS, in large part because the ESC had been revised and adopted. It was noted that the ESC was the most important document for EPAS, as it directly impacts and

informs the activities performed by EPAS. One particular area highlighted by Michael Trinker as important for sports facilities with regard to the revised ESC related to the clauses on safety and security in sports events, as well as the aspects of sustainability and equal access. For the latter reference was made for needed attention for accessibility for sport for people with disabilities. Michael also noted that Article 15 was specifically dedicated to sport facilities and activities illustrating the importance of facilities in the revised ESC, thus underlining the importance of ongoing discussions and round tables pertaining to sport facilities. For example, when sport facilities are deemed this important how do we finance them, what is the role of the government and of the market?

The discussions proceeded to outline the various conventions and recommendations relevant to sports facilities and the differences between them. It was noted that, in all, the revision of the ESC had taken a total of 2 years, indicating the importance and complexity of the process. It was also noted that Michael Trinker was personally happy that the right to sport was included in the revised ESC and he expressed hope that more countries would implement it. Finally, Michael Trinker highlighted the importance of equal access to sport facilities as being an issue of some importance at the present time.

Following the presentation, a question was received from Amiran Vardoshvili of Georgia. The question related to how sports facilities would be displayed on maps? It was noted that the mapping related to studies, and not specifically to the creation of maps. Remco Hoekman, however, pointed out that there were several maps available from some member states including the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, France etc., showing the sports facilities in the countries concerned.

The next talk was given by Kairis Ulp, policy officer from the Sport Unit at the European Commission. Kairis Ulp presented the role of the European Commission and the link between sport and strengthening recovery and resilience in the sport sector in the aftermath of COVID-19. The EU Work Plan in Sport 2021-2024 was outlined, and it was pointed out that recovery of the sport industry was an important element of the Work Plan. It was further outlined that an Expert Group for Sport Recovery had been established. The Expert Group had thus far met three times, and agreed on deliverables. The main objectives were: 1) information exchange, situational analysis, identifying challenges, and creating recommendations for recovery options, and 2) the exchange of best practice. The Council conclusions on the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector, the mapping study measuring the economic impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector, and the EU funding opportunities in sport were mentioned. Some highlights from the last meeting of the Expert Group included noting the recovery from COVID-19 in the sport sector, which had demonstrated signs of resilience, but Kairis Ulp noted that the situation could be improved. It was also pointed out that organised sport in particular still suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic. She also stated that it was important to use the current momentum to enhance the situation and recovery. Finally, she outlined that there needed to be a focus on avoiding more closures, that there had been a revenue decline in the sports industry, and that sharing of good practice was essential. Kairis Ulp concluded that it was amazing how quickly the fitness industry had been able to adapt to the COVID-19 situation.

Luka Živić, from the Permanent Representation of Slovenia to the EU, presented the state of play regarding COVID-19 in the sport sector in EU member states. He discussed the compiling of measures taken by member states during the COVID-19 pandemic and presented survey results from the second cycle of the COVID-19 exchange of information. It was noted that the situation with regard to COVID-19 had improved somewhat in recent months especially with regard to training and competitions, but that the new wave of COVID-19 and return of restrictions could impact this. It was outlined that 20 countries had participated in the questionnaire, answering 11 questions. It was reported that sport had resumed in most member states, and also that most sports facilities were open again. Some member states, however, noted that only about 30% of facilities had reopened. Almost all member states required RVT conditions (recovered/vaccinated/tested) to be met by anyone using sports facilities. Most respondents also pointed out that professional athletes were bound by different requirements and looser restrictions as opposed to recreational sport participants. It was mentioned that some member states had reopened sporting events to spectators but with the same RVT and COVID-19 conditions. The survey also asked about negative or positive effects of COVID-19 on sport. The most common negative effects that were highlighted included financial losses, a fall in membership levels and a reduction in sport participation. A few member states also reported no foreseen long term negative impacts.

Following the contributions from speakers, a series of questions and comments were received from participants. Michael Trinker asked if it was known what young people who normally participated in sport had been doing as an alternative, and furthermore what strategies were in place for getting people back into sport and whether these included any innovative approaches to returning people to an active lifestyle? Aaron Hermann highlighted the move to online training and the new emphasis placed on outdoor and non-structured activities. He also highlighted the need for a culture change in the sport industry to emphasise the importance of healthy lifestyles and to make physical activity an inherent part of everyday life, not just pre-planned sporting sessions.

Alice C Boyd of Norway mentioned the national situation in Norway, to which Remco Hoekman noted that it would be interesting to see to what extent it was possible to bounce back to the pre-COVID-19 sport levels. He also noted that the Mulier Institute would be paying attention to the situation in the following months.

Alyona Mikheeva from the Russia Sport Facilities Association remarked on an increase in the use of outdoor facilities. She also made mention of a recent seminar held in Russia relating to work with parents who brought children to sport facilities and what to do with them whilst they waited for their children to finish. It was noted that the findings included using a combination of social and sports facilities together to help. A mapping study had also been carried out in Russia as to how sport facilities had been used. The study had resulted in a series of recommendations separating results by regions, city size etc. Alyona Mikheeva noted that the recommendations could be helpful to member states to help determine what could be done in the future, in response to which Amiran Vardoshvili of Georgia asked whether sport facilities were actually physically mapped in Russia. This was responded to by stating that Russia was in the process of creating a platform indicating the location of facilities, but at the moment there were only statistics by region.

The meeting then proceeded to the second part of the event, concerning national case studies. A series of presenters talked about the situation in their respective member states. Remco Hoekman began with an outline of the situation in the Netherlands. It was noted that participation levels had not returned to the levels before COVID-19 but that the impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector had been somewhat limited. The question was how to increase participation in sport again after lockdown. A particular concern noted by the research was

the increase in inequality in sport participation, e.g. people from lower socio-economic backgrounds had lower physical activity levels. It was also noted that indoor sport had been the most impacted whereas sport outdoors, in public spaces and at home had actually increased. Concern was expressed as to the extent to which sports facilities would be used again, as well as regarding issues in funding difficulties and loss of membership. On a more positive note, it was stated that the impact of COVID-19 on voluntary sport clubs and municipalities had been somewhat more limited than on commercial sport.

Nick Rowe from the Observatory for Sport Scotland presented the situation regarding the impact of COVID-19 in Scotland and England. It was noted that there had been quite a large impact felt, with a significant reduction in physical activity, particularly among youth populations. It was also noted that initial signs indicated that the pandemic had/could have a big impact on mental health; specifically, the inability to participate in sport had had a big impact. The largest negative impacts had been felt by swimming and team sports, and a number of public facilities in England and Scotland were at risk of closure. Finally, it was highlighted that there was a need to look at new models of delivery of sport participation and as with the Netherlands, people from lower socio-economic groups had been more severely impacted by COVID-19 in sport.

Karin Book from Malmö University presented the situation in Sweden. It was noted that the situation in Sweden was considerably less severe than in other member states, partially due to the minimal restrictions in place during COVID-19. Recommendations had been made available to the sports facilities which had decided to remain open. Despite the fact that minimal restrictions had been placed on daily life in Sweden, it was still also possible for anyone negatively impacted by COVID-19 to apply for compensation. It was also noted that a survey had been conducted among sport clubs in Sweden to determine how they had been affected by COVID-19. Findings showed that whilst some events had been cancelled or there had been a decrease in participation, not many facilities had closed completely or changed location. The survey showed that whilst the venues of more common sports had seen a reduction in usage, the facilities of some less common sports had actually seen an increase in usage, e.g. golf. Similarly to the findings of other member states, self-organised activities had increased, and it was found that exercise in public spaces had become more accepted. Yet

again, as in other member states, youth participation in sport had reduced. It was noted in particular that the private sports industry had become more adaptable. Karin Book concluded by highlighting opportunities, innovations and the possibilities of digital solutions as being key in replacing some on-site physical activities.

Jens Høyer-Kruse from the University of Southern Denmark then presented the situation in Denmark. The COVID-19 study on physical movement and facilities in Denmark was presented. It had included around 140,000 participants who had completed a questionnaire. The results mirrored those of other member states in noting the increase in at-home fitness. It was noted that the study had not found a reduction in overall physical activity in Denmark but that indoor activities had been more impacted and self-organised sport had seen a lesser impact as opposed to commercial sport activities. It was noted that there was fear amongst Danish citizens that they would become much less active, but this had not been demonstrated in the study. The survey also noted that in Denmark there had not been many permanent closures of sport facilities. The intervention concluded by highlighting the rise in interest in outdoor facilities, home training, online training, and that old habits with regard to fitness were slowly returning.

Michael Trinker of EPAS, summed up by saying that most member states had noted a reduction in youth physical activity participation and highlighted the worrying trend in Austria, where this drop had been as much as 25%.

A brief intervention from Janne Pyykonen of Finland presented the situation in two suburbs in Finland, which had reported no major change in physical activity levels.

A series of comments were then received from the participants. Remco Hoekman noted that they would be watching how the situation would be in one year's time, whether it would return to normal and what hope there was. He also appealed to participants to talk more about what could be done in the future, and called for an exchange about what could be done with policy makers and researchers in the member states. Alice C Boyd of Norway proposed that it was worth asking what would happen in the long term, and what would be the new normal, to which Remco Hoekman pledged to monitor the situation and the hope of returning to the old norm. Aaron Hermann proposed the notion that perhaps the sport industry should not be seeking a return to the situation before as a decline in physical activity levels had

already being perceptible, but rather efforts should perhaps be made to improve the situation and strive for a better future for physical activity and society. This was met with agreement from numerous participants. Remco Hoekman agreed and noted that getting people back to being physically active helped with health and immunity in fighting COVID-19. For this it was relevant to study sports facilities in combination with physically active environments to paint a full picture of the physical opportunity structure for an active lifestyle.

Conclusions

The meeting concluded with an outline of the next meetings. Remco Hoekman called for the continued discussion and involvement of decision makers. He furthermore called on people to get in touch with him to express an interest in giving presentations at the next meetings and sharing information.

Francine Hetherington Raveney concluded the meeting by expressing her thanks to the participants and presenters and noted that it was particularly positive to see such a diverse range of people.

Appendix 1: Agenda

<i>9-9.10am</i>	<i>Opening words (Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)</i>
<i>9.10am-10.10am</i>	<i>European angle</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ EPAS-commissioned report on COVID and sports facilities findings (Aaron Herman, Consultant) ○ Presentation of the revised European Sports Charter and its relevance to the subject matter (Michael Trinker, Project manager, EPAS) ○ Pan-European overview researcher representing sports organisations (TBC) ○ Presentation from the European Union prepared under the Slovenian Presidency (TBC)
<i>10.10-10.30am</i>	<i>Questions and answers</i>
<i>10.30-10.50am</i>	<i>Break</i>
<i>10.50am-11.50am</i>	<i>National case studies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NL expert (TBC) ○ UK expert (TBC) ○ DK expert (TBC) ○ Swedish expert (TBC)
<i>11.50am-12.10pm</i>	<i>Questions and answers</i>
<i>12.10pm-12.30pm</i>	<i>Conclusions and information about follow-on work and the next two online meetings in 2022 on sustainability and channels of investment in sports facilities (Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)</i>

Appendix 2: List of Participants

NATIONAL EXPERTS

Andorra/Andorre

M. Lluís ORONA SANZ, Chef des services généraux, installations sportives et promotion sportive, Secrétariat d'Etat aux Sports, Ministère de la Culture et des Sports, 500 Andorra la Vella

M. Antonio Manuel ZAMORA RODRIQUEZ, technicien sportif, Secrétariat d'Etat aux Sports Ministère de la Culture et des Sports, 500 Andorra la Vella

Armenia/Arménie

Ms Gohar HIGHATYAN, Chief Specialist of Highest Sport Achievements Division of the Sport Policy Department, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, 0010 Yerevan

Belgium/Belgique

Ms Sarah DENYS, Expert for international policy; Sport Vlaanderen / Flemish Sports Agency, 1000 Brussel

Bulgaria/Bulgarie

Ms Hristina GROZEVA, Director for Investment policy and Public procurements of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 1040 Sofia

Cyprus/Chypre

Ms Paschalina ACHILLEOS MAGNITI, Architect, Head of the Management and Maintenance Department, Cyprus Sports Organisation, 1304 Nicosia

Georgia/Géorgie

Mr Amiran VARDOSHVILI, Senior Specialist of Administration, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth, 0105 Tbilisi

Israel/Israël

Mr Nitzan BEN-NATAN, Director of Sport Facilities Department, Israel Sport Authority, Ministry of Culture and Sport, 61575 Tel Aviv

Mr Daniel ERETZ-KDOSHA, National Expert, Israel Sport Authority, Ministry of Culture and Sport, 61575 Tel Aviv

Lithuania/Lithuanie

Mr Laurynas ZIBOLIS, Chief Officer, Sport Unit, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 01124 Vilnius

Maroc/Morocco

M. Adile SEMMAR, Chef de division des équipements et infrastructures sportives, Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports, Rabat

Norway/Norvège

Ms Alice BOYD, National Expert, Senior Adviser in the Ministry of Culture, 0030 Oslo

Switzerland/Suisse

M. Maximilian SCHUBIGER, responsable à l'OFSPPO pour le concept pour les installations sportives d'importance nationale - Département fédéral de la défense, de la protection de la population et des sports DDPS, Office fédéral du sport OFSPPO, 2532 Macolin

Russian Federation/Fédération de la Russie

Ms Ekaterina STYOPKINA, representative of the Russian Association of Sports Facilities as national expert for the series of meeting on Mapping of sports facilities, Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation, 105064 Moscow

Ms Alyona MIKHEEVA, Russian Sport Facilities Association
Head of Public Relations Department of the Russian Association of Sports Facilities

Slovenia/Slovénie

Ms Petra TRAMTE, Undersecretary at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Relations, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 1000 Ljubljana

Mr Zoran VEROVNIK, Secretary for International Affairs, Sport Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 1000 Ljubljana

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Mr Mustafa Barış ÖZTÜRK, Head of Department, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 06590 Ankara

Mr Bulut ALTUN, Youth and Sport Expert, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 06590 Ankara

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Mr Alper YORULMAZ, Unit Head, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 06590 Ankara

Ms Nesrin PERKTAŞ, Public Official, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 06590 Ankara

Mr Fahrettin Kerim KADIOĞLU, Youth and Sport Expert, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 06590 Ankara

Ukraine

Mr Volodymyr MANIN, Head of Division of Investment and Development of Sports Infrastructure, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 01601 Kyiv

SPEAKERS

Dr. R.H.A Remco HOEKMAN, Director of the Mulier Instituut, Professor at the Department of Sociology, Radboud University Nijmegen, Past-President of the European Association for Sociology of Sport, Co-editor 'European Journal for Sport and Society', 3508 AK Utrecht, The Netherlands

Prof. Mr Nick ROWE, Chair, Research Advisory Group for the Observatory for Sport in Scotland, former Head of Strategy and Research Sport England, United Kingdom

Prof. Ms Karin BOOK, Senior Lecturer, Department of Sport Sciences, Malmö University, Sweden

Prof. Mr Jens HØYER-KRUSE, Assistant Professor at University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Mr Janne PYYKONEN, Project Researcher, Master of Sport Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Ms Kairis ULP, Policy Officer, Sport Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, 1049 Brussels

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Mr Aaron HERMANN, Consultant

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

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Mr Remco KLAASMAN, Policy maker, Physical activity & sustainable sport infrastructure at Ministry of health. KU Leuven, Belgium

Ms Anna-Katrina SALMIKANGAS, Senior researcher at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Ms Jutta KATTHAGE, Analyst, Federal Institute for Sports Science (Bundesinstitut für Sportwissenschaft - BISp), Bonn, Germany

Ms Liz CLARKE, Journalist/sportswriter The Washington Post

EPAS SECRETARIAT

Ms Francine RAVENEY
EPAS Deputy Executive Secretary
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Mr Michael TRINKER
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