

Olympism: culture and values that permeate the activities of Afro-Napoli United

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Abstract

Afro-Napoli United is a sports organization that has been operating in the metropolitan city of Naples since 2009 to promote the social inclusion of migrants and young people at risk through the organization of sports activities. Afro-Napoli pursues the values of Olympism by giving space to impeccable athletic training. The Club collects the Hellenic heritage by spreading the love of sport and humanity.

Keywords

Olympism, values, culture, social inclusion, sport, migrants.

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Naples (from the Greek *nea polis* - new city) is a city founded by Greek settlers in the fifth century BC with a strategic position in the center of the Mediterranean sea. In this polis of Magna Grecia took place in the 4th century BC the *Lampadedromia*, a relay race with torches in honor of the Parthenope Siren, city's founder according to the myth. The celebration was included during the Augustan era in the games of *Isolympia*, from the Greek "equal to Olympia", which "consist in gymnastic and horse races, whose winners were rewarded with ears of corn, and musical and theatrical competitions, which took cash prizes instead. The more traditional disciplines, in which athletes from Grecia, Asia Minor and Egypt were confronted, were joined by an acrobatic race (*apobàtes*), a boys and girls race, evidently admitted to participate in the Neapolitan games. To face the commitment of the *Sebastàs*, the city probably restructured or equipped itself with all the facilities necessary for the physical preparation of the young athletes and for the conduct of the competitions, and it is certain that one of the few stadiums found in Italy exists - privilege that Naples shared with ancient Pozzuoli - and a gymnasium that would have been one of the most gradual public buildings in the city. In the city sport and myth merged creating a very close connection between sacred and profane, reality and spirituality."

The Hellenic roots of the city are still perceptible, not only for the widespread sporting passion of the inhabitants especially for water sports and football, but also for the respect of a sacred value among the ancient Greeks: the value of hospitality. Naples is the city of peoples who have passed through it and have made it unique and spectacular. A city that beyond political proclamations will always be an open port for all human beings, since it is founded on the laws of the sea, on the sacred principles of love for others and sacrifice for the community. An example is *Santa Restituta*, a Catholic saint and an African woman who lived in the third century A.D. and arrived dying on a raft near the island of *Ischia* just like modern migrants on the coast of *Lampedusa*; She embodies the principles on which the city of Naples is based and this is also why It is important to integrate cultural aspects into sports training as they help to understand the differences and similarities on and off the playing field.

In this context, permeated by a thousand-year-old Mediterranean culture, the Afro-Neapolitan dream has its roots. Afro-Napoli is a sports organization born in 2009 from a passion for football and a strong friendship between the current President, Antonio Gargiulo, and two Senegalese citizens, Sow Hamath and Watt Samba Babaly. The goal of the multi-ethnic football team, in compliance with the principle of hospitality, is to encourage the social inclusion of migrants and young people at risk, residing in the metropolitan city area, through the organization of common sports activities.

In contemporary Southern Italy, the situation of migrants is often conditioned by the existence of local mafias, which involve and exploit these people in the agricultural sector, in the black market, in smuggling drugs and in prostitution. Whole geographical areas are becoming fertile ground for the proliferation of marginalization, degradation and ghettoization phenomena with the formation of organized crime groups among people of the same ethnic group. Sport for migrants is therefore fundamental not only to maintain their psycho-physical well-being, but also to enter new socials that are not conditioned by phenomena of degradation and exploitation and find real and new friends and ways to get out of marginality. The use of sport as a method of meeting had already been experimented by missionary fathers in Africa in the 1920s when through football they involved the local population in voluntary activities. Through the diffusion of the rules of the sports game, football has spread all over the world, facilitating the integration and inclusion of Africans and Latin Americans in Italy (Fonzo, 2019, pp.20).

Therefore the choice of football has been vital for the sustainability of the project both because the project develops in a city where this sport is a religion, and Maradona its God, and because it is a sport spread all over the world. As the Olympic Refugees Foundation underlines, it's necessary to create safe, basic and accessible sports facilities in areas where there are refugees, a displaced migrant population or internally displaced people, where all children and young people can play sport and take advantage of sport's multiple benefits. Sports practice encourages the encounter with the others. A concept already present since ancient times in the thinking of many culture. For the ancient Greeks, the Olympics were in fact a moment of encounter between all the athletes of the different poleis of Ellade. A sacred moment

protected by Ekecheria, the Olympic truce, which required the interruption of fighting between cities, to allow athletes to safely cross the territories to reach Olympia. Sports have taken on a strong connotation increasingly linked to respect for others and the spirit of brotherhood, sharing and peace between peoples. Principles that have taken on various meanings over time, but which still represent the basis on which modern democracies are built and on which modern Olympism is based. Pierre de Coubertin himself, in the IX section of his Praise for Sport on the value of sport for all human races, stated that with sport “all the young worldwide learn self-respect, and thus the diversity of national qualities becomes the source of a generous and friendly rivalry” (Georges Hohrod et M.Eschbach 1912).

And it is the value of friendship at the basis of the Afro-Napoli project that have made it so different from other traditional football experiences and made it a winning one both in terms of sport and the solidity of the group. Volunteering has been the lifeblood for the stability and growth of the intercultural inclusion project, feeding it on dreams, passions, skills, ideals, strength and will to change. The feelings of friendship behind the project characterized and distinguished him from traditional football experiences, and made him successful, both in terms of sporting results and the group’s solidity. Fonzo (2019, pp.161), in his book writes: “in the statements made by the players the word that recurs most frequently is” family “: the team for many of them, is a sort of second home”.

The Olympic principles are followed implicitly by the company since its foundation with an activity focused above all on respect for Art. 6 of the Olympic Charter. And if the ancient Olympics were the sporting synthesis of Hellenic culture, the modern Olympics the synthesis of pacifist and internationalist thought of the 1900s, Afro-Napoli Unites, in its small way, is a sporting synthesis of our ancient and modern culture, which it derives directly from the Hellenic culture.

Our city, Naples, was founded in the 6th century. B.C. precisely from the Greek colonists and together with the other polis of Southern Italy it formed Magna Grecia. For the ancient Greeks the value of hospitality was sacred and we still intend to respect this form of thought that has shaped our identity over time, welcoming migrants and people in difficulty and including them in various activities, thus contributing to a greater social and individual well-being. It is therefore almost normal or rather natural, that the

Club reflects the values on which Olympism is based and born, even in its modern guise.

But Olympism, in its contemporary guise, is a complex summation of values and objectives, difficult to pursue, if the sporting direction does not aim to achieve high results, keeping its integrity intact and giving space to impeccable technical and athletic preparation. Then Afro-Napoli on the one hand continues to invest resources in the amateur sector, which represent the place where the social inclusion project begins and the point of contact with the streets, where we face the needs of young people and migrants, especially those who are unable to cope with socio-economic or bureaucratic difficulties; on the other hands, it aims to win the top professional regional series of Excellence continuing its efforts to guarantee the right to sport for all human beings.

Since the founding of the first amateur team, the organization has created other sectors such as women and youth in order to focus on the future, and has invested in the sector of welcoming migrants, to follow the life of these people under all aspect and strengthen the integration processes. It aims at an international exchange of best practices on the social inclusion of migrants in sport and to this end in 2019 participated in the call of the Erasmus + Sport Program, winning as a partner with the “MiSport” project co-financed by the European Commission. In addition, since January 2020 Afro-Napoli United has participated in the “CapaCity Metro” Project involved by the Department of Architecture of the Federico II University of Naples, as an expert organization at local level and a case study of the project, as best practices recognized nationally by the CONI and Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2015), co-financed with Fami funds and managed by the leader of the Unesco Chair SSIIM, IUAV University of Venice.

Today, the First team of the sports club disputes in the top regional championship, Excellence, despite considerable difficulties in the registration of foreign citizens, especially if they are minors. Obstacle of the Italian bureaucracy which prevents the full enjoyment of rights especially for second generation migrants. The arrival and departure flows of migrants respond to the crises that suddenly break out in the sub-Saharan area and the club welcomes victims of trafficking, asylum seekers and refugees over the age of 18 and minors. The integration process is obviously subjective, but can be facilitated with language teaching and other forms of support. In order to strengthen the processes of real inclusion the Club

has participated in numerous campaigns, such as “Iocisto” for the promotion of the principle of non-discrimination with important results obtained thanks to networking with other associations, with federations and with bodies and institutions at regional and national level. The organization is the result of a valorisation of the Neapolitan cultural and identity roots and precisely as such it promotes respect for multiple identities and encourages their formation thanks to the intercultural exchange that takes place both inside and outside the field. Through constant work, a network has also been built with prosecutors aimed at combating the trafficking of migrant players. Athletes must be free to choose their future. Moreover, for clubs it is always necessary to learn to understand the “meaning that sport has for other cultures” as underlined by the scholar Micheal Byarunhanga (1998), to facilitate inclusion processes on the field.

Sport is eventually a need for survival, a challenge that arises from the desire to overcome personal, physical and mental limits, to cross borders. And it is from overcoming the boundaries that arises the encounter with the other, in a cycle that includes the challenge, confrontation, understanding, valorisation and recognition of the other as similar. Here comes the birth of friendship, the teamwork, the exchange of experience and even the foul play, to be attributed to the dark inside each of us, which can be illuminated with a fair sports education. In fact, what is sport if not a challenge for constant improvement that can transform weaknesses into strengths, fears in courage, irrationality in reflection, confusion in concentration, imbalance in balance. In an alternation of emotions and reflections that returns our whole human and animal dimension. And it is through the understanding of these elements common to every human being that *humanitas* develops, a concept expressed by the Circolo degli Scipioni, or *Pietas Virgiliana*. And this is also how the beauty of diversity is valued, as an element that implies a constant challenge, which stimulates knowledge and curiosity, which generates the wonder of surprise concept expressed by Socrates. It is also through the recognition of the other that I recognize myself, according to the Hegelian dialectic, I love the other and myself.

It is with this approach that the concept of homeland also moves, as a protective home and cradle, but also the home of the other and a refuge for those who need it. The love for the homeland is transmuted into love for humanity, as then depicted by Pierre de Coubertin with the symbol of the Olympics with the circles

representing the five continents of the earth. Worldwide, the development of sports education has allowed the emergence of numerous Olympic talents and champions in different disciplines. Thanks to the implementation of sports programs, 64% of Ghanaian students perceived the future as better, as reported by Micheal Agyei of the University of Capo-Co in Ghana (2009) in a research on the impact of the Olympic ideals on the teaching and organization of physical education and sports in Ghanaian schools. Keeping the Olympic flame alive has the value of hope. For the ancients, fire was a sacred element. The flame represents knowledge and binds man to the divine, the tangible to the intangible. The lighting of the flame unites people and keeps them alive, curious and ingenious, just as sport is development for the territories as it creates connections. The same connections that Afro-Naples aims to develop, consolidate and replicate with its work. The Club has promoted the re-edition of the Lampadedromia in collaboration with Amartea Isolympia association and i Sedili di Napoli Onlus with the aim of consolidating also the link between sport and the historical-cultural and environmental aspects. In 2019 the IV Edition of the race took place as a preliminary event of the XXX Edition of the Universiade, held in Naples. The organizers of the race include Mauro Brancaccio, Olympic basketball champion, while the testimonial of the event was Sandro Cuomo, Olympic fencing champion.

The relay race route starts from the Archaeological Park and the Cuma forest and arrives near the Castel dell'Ovo in Via Parthenope, crossing important historical and naturalistic sites. In this way, we intend to convey the legacy of places and sporting activity to new generations through sport with a methodology that combines cognitive approach, experience oriented approach and life-oriented approaches. The race was created to primarily promote a healthy lifestyle and has joined the European #beactive campaign of the European Sports Week. In 2019, the event was attended by Artemis Ignatiou, official choreographer of the Olympic Flame Ignition Ceremony, and head of the dance body Art Dance Theater. The dancers had three performances in cultural sites and the last one was a gift to the city of Naples and preceded the inauguration of the Greek exhibition "Paideia" at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. In the exhibition, an earthenware discovery was exhibited with men depicting running with torches on it, testimony to the Lampshade and the value of sport since ancient times. Sports education the paideia

was a fundamental part for the growth of the individual because it allowed the development of the virtues that enable the person to participate in social life and create political and community life, with a view to respect and integrity. We can combine sport with art, culture and research to be able to improve the offer of sports services and events, as well as its educational value. Only in this way we can also keep alive the legacy of the founder of the modern Olympics: “In Coubertin’s educational thinking sport played a major role. He became interested in the promotion of athletic activities as a useful educational means to support the maturation of the whole personality. He valued sport not only as a leisure pursuit but as a vehicle to develop moral and social virtues, including fair-play, team spirit, democratic behavior, self-discipline and regulated achievement orientation”.

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