

# PANORAMA

Issue 1 - 2026



*Volume 1*

**SOCIAL INNOVATION  
THROUGH SPORT**





Building society through sport.

At a time when world events are dividing us and conventional solutions seem to have run their course, we are convinced that sport remains a largely untapped resource. Far beyond performance and competition, it can be a powerful tool for social transformation, a way to contribute to a more just and sustainable society, and one of the answers to the major challenges of our time.

This potential does not happen on its own. It requires clear intentions, well thought-out practices, and collective commitment: as many people as possible need to take ownership of it, beyond the boundaries of the world of sport.

This is the very raison d'être of Res Sportiva. Our stated mission is to accelerate the movement of social innovation through sport, by generating and sharing knowledge, highlighting inspiring practices, and fostering cooperation between organizations and countries. We believe that sports can make a difference—provided we truly give it the means to do so.

This study has been undertaken with the support of:



## A collective commitment to social innovation *through sport*

The very existence of Res Sportiva and this project would not be possible without the support of our **founding partners**





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# Foreword

Can sport build society? Sport<sup>1</sup> has become a given in our lives. It is credited with multiple benefits: personal fulfilment, physical and mental health, and social cohesion. It took over a century — mainly the 20th — for the sports movement to make its voice heard. Sporting practices have since become globalised, driven largely by the impetus of major international sporting events. Securing the resources needed to deliver ambitious sports policies open to all remains a struggle today.

Against this backdrop, organisations in the field are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate the tangible effects of sport on individuals and society — its social and environmental impact beyond the playing field. And beyond mere rhetoric.

Sport is clearly neither innately pacifying nor intrinsically virtuous. Moreover, significant disparities in access persist across regions and social groups. There is now a consensus in scientific research that the social, educational and health effects of physical activity depend on the conditions under which it takes place, the intentions that guide it, and the methods that structure it. The collective work involved in producing this volume of the Panorama is firmly based on such scientific evidence and the following conviction: for sport to fulfil its social and environmental promises, merely invoking its “power” is not enough.

Over the past three decades, a growing number of organisations have turned to sport as a way of addressing unmet social needs, inviting the communities concerned to participate in the design and implementation of the projects. A clear trend is emerging. The global survey conducted for this study, which is based on 936 organisations across 81 countries, clearly confirms a significant momentum in this sector. Among them, 90% of those operating at the grassroots level<sup>2</sup> use physical activity and sport as a tool for meeting social, educational, environmental or health needs. For these actors, access to participation in sports (64%) and sports

competition (32%) remain key objectives, but they are no longer the sole purpose.

This first volume of the Panorama sets out to define and map, for the first time, the worldwide movement we call social innovation through sport. The organisations that make it up differ in their geography, history, social profile and ambitions. Yet all converge on one crucial point: a different approach to sport, one that places the pursuit of societal impact at the heart of their *raison d'être*. This movement remains under-recognised and underfunded — largely because it is still so little understood. To help change this, we draw on a global survey of unprecedented scale, an analysis of case studies, and contributions from experts around the world. A second volume follows, focusing on the conditions for scaling and sustainable social change.

<sup>1</sup> The term “sport” as used in this Panorama refers to any physical activity that is practised on a regular or one-off basis, in an organised or spontaneous manner, and that is competitive or non-competitive. In its broadest sense, this includes team and individual sports, traditional and emerging disciplines, recreational activities, physical education, motor skills games, and adapted physical activity.  
<sup>2</sup> A trend based on the responses of 753 organisations that implement initiatives in direct contact with beneficiary communities, out of the total of 936 organisations that contributed to the survey; see section on the survey methodology.

# Introduction

On 6 April 2013, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace. In naming it, the UN gave the idea shape: to name something is to make it visible. Yet the concept of “sport for development and peace” is far from universally accepted. It has drawn criticism in academic circles<sup>3</sup>, and coexists with other ways of thinking and acting. In some countries, the word “development” is avoided altogether, in favour of “*social sport*”, “*socio-sport*” or even “*sport for impact*”. This diversity of terms reflects genuine differences in approach. But it also points to something deeper: the boundaries of this movement remain unsettled — even for the funding bodies whose recognition it seeks.

The “sport for development and peace” sector emerged in the 1970s and accelerated through the 1990s and 2000s, driven by the backing of major international organisations such as the United Nations, UNESCO and the IOC. It has also benefited from the consolidation of a more organised civil society, the growing involvement of corporate foundations and shifts in some national public policies. Now internationalised, professionalised and equipped with its own methodologies, it aspires to establish itself as a field of action in its own right.

This recognition of the term “sport for development and peace” should not obscure its plural genealogy. It draws on the legacy of humanitarian and religious movements, on international cooperation initiatives, and on popular education traditions. Above all, it draws on three well-established strands: those of the sports sector (socially engaged federations and clubs), those of development and international solidarity, and those of the social economy. It has yet, however, to fully engage with the role of physical education and school sport.

That said, this growing recognition of sport for development and peace should not obscure the fact that the term has a plural genealogy<sup>4</sup>. Above all, it feeds on exchange and cooperation with three other highly structured fields: those of the sports sector (socially engaged federations and clubs), of development and

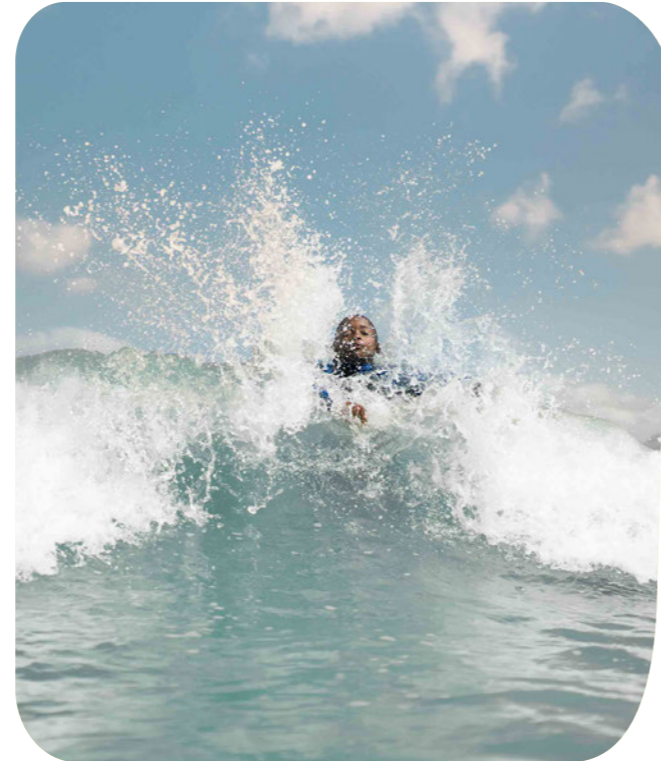
international solidarity, and of the social and solidarity economy. By contrast, it still encompasses too little of the issues surrounding the development of physical education and sport as a school subject.

The connections between these different strands remain little known. Academic research has focused mainly on «sport for development and peace», on the sports movement itself, and on public sports policy — each in isolation. Comparative research remains scarce. To the best of our knowledge, no study to date offers a global panorama combining three approaches: a large-scale quantitative survey of organisations, a qualitative study of grassroots practices, and an examination of funding and cooperation ecosystems.

This is precisely what the Res Sportiva Panorama sets out to provide. This first volume, in four chapters, offers a definition and an overview of social innovation through sport. The first chapter describes the diversity of sports played and the place of multi-sport. It explores what it means, in practical terms, to view sport as a tool rather than an end in itself. The second chapter analyses the themes, target groups and needs these organisations address: at the heart of the sector lies an educational project in the broadest sense, one that engages with schools while extending well beyond them. The third chapter examines the practical conditions for transformative action, through partnerships with schools, health stakeholders and local communities. The fourth turns to economic models and to the paradoxical resilience of a movement that gains strength precisely where the global context is weakening it — to varying degrees from one region to another. Taken together, these four chapters trace the contours of a movement in the making — and give those who engage with it the means to understand it better.

<sup>3</sup> For a systematic and critical analysis of the concept, see the recent work of Hozhabri, K., Asif, U., Pitre, L.C., et al. (2026), «Sport for Development and Peace Reviews: A Systematic Scoping Review», *Sports Med*; and Joly, F. and Le Yondre, F. (2021), «Sociologue du sport et développement: état de l'art anglo-saxon et projection en sociologie française», *STAPS*, 134/4, pp. 7-33.  
<sup>4</sup> It draws in particular on the legacy of humanitarian and religious movements, on international cooperation practices and on popular education.

# Methodology



## 01

### A collaborative methodology to address the issues at stake

The methodology was developed jointly, to address both grassroots realities and institutional concerns. A steering committee, made up of a wide range of stakeholders and experts<sup>5</sup>, helped design the questionnaire and its accompanying tools. It also validated the study's quantitative and qualitative design and contributed to the analysis of the findings. The approach combined several methods: documentary analysis, a questionnaire, and individual and group interviews. The questionnaire was divided into two parts — one for organisations working directly with communities, the other for those that fund or support these grassroots organisations<sup>6</sup>. In all, 936 organisations responded, including 753 working directly with communities, 80 sports federations and 32 foundations or endowment funds. To deepen the analysis of these quantitative findings, 35 experts were consulted through individual and group interviews.

## 02

### An inclusive survey strategy to give everyone a voice

The survey was sent to all organisations that saw themselves as helping to improve the lives of the communities they support through sport. It rested on a single guiding principle: rather than asking them to define themselves in the sector's standard terminology, it invited them to answer concrete, practical questions — so as not to exclude anyone through its choice of vocabulary. These were specific and value-free, designed to reveal whether respondents use sport as a tool for meeting non-sporting needs: educational, social, environmental or employment-related.

<sup>5</sup> A major international public organisation (UNESCO), a development bank (Agence Française de Développement), historical and pioneering funding bodies of the sector (Beyond Sport, Fondation Decathlon, Peace and Sport), and operators and stakeholders involved in supporting project developers (Sport and Dev, Scale Changer, Pro Sport Development, Sport Impact).

## 03

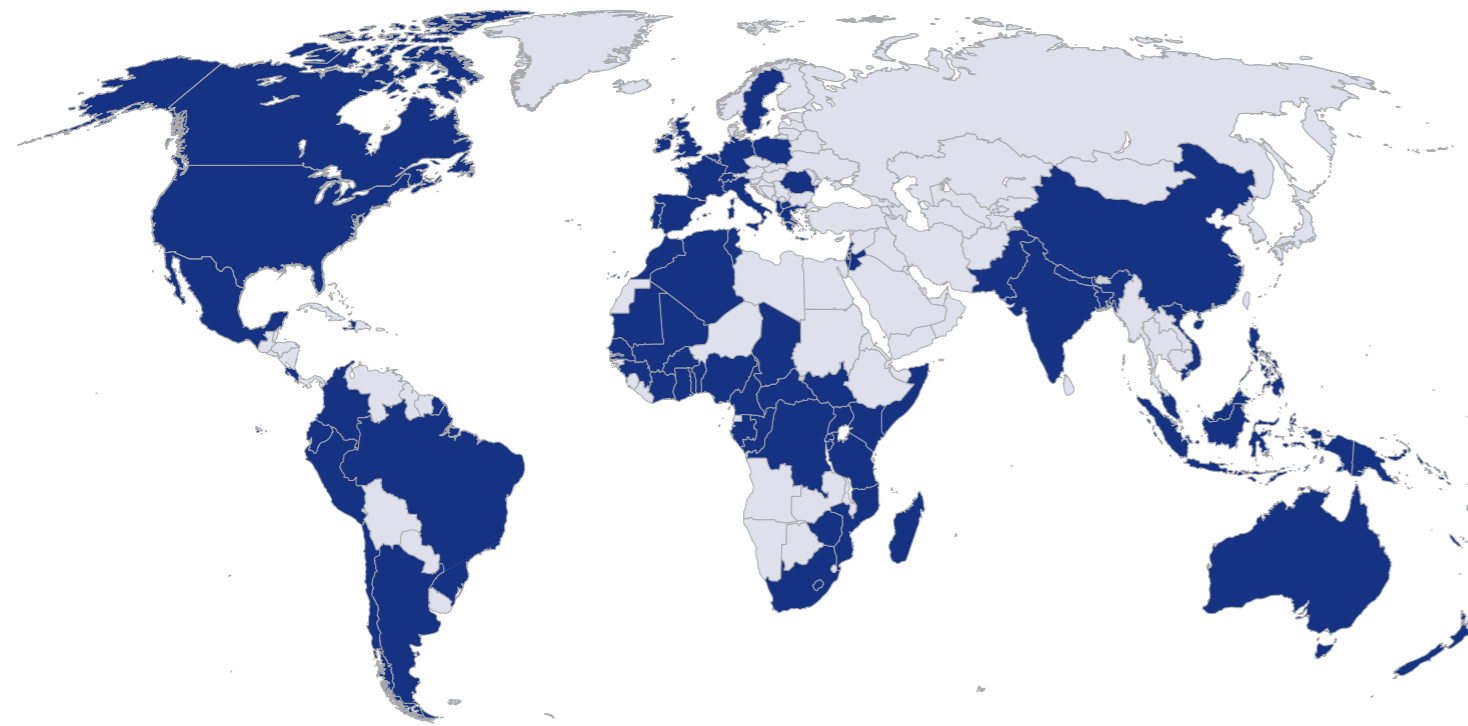
### A sufficiently diversified global sample

Given the wide range of actors worldwide, the number of associations, social enterprises, federations and sports clubs engaged in social innovation through sport is especially hard to estimate. One academic study offers a useful point of comparison: the systematic overview of the “sport for development and peace” sector, conducted in 2017, identified more than 900 organisations across 115 countries<sup>7</sup>. Our survey reached a comparable number, albeit with a broader scope: alongside “sport for development and peace”, it also took in socially engaged sports federations and generalist non-profits that use sport as part of their work. This difference in scope precludes any direct comparison. It does, however, point to a real shift: the field has expanded, grown more hybrid and drawn in new kinds of actors. Mapping the connections between them is precisely what this Panorama sets out to do. What matters most for this study, therefore, is not statistical representativeness but the coverage and diversity of the sample — geographical, organisational and thematic. In this sense, the Panorama documents a diversity never before captured on this scale, and covers a substantial share of the field under study.

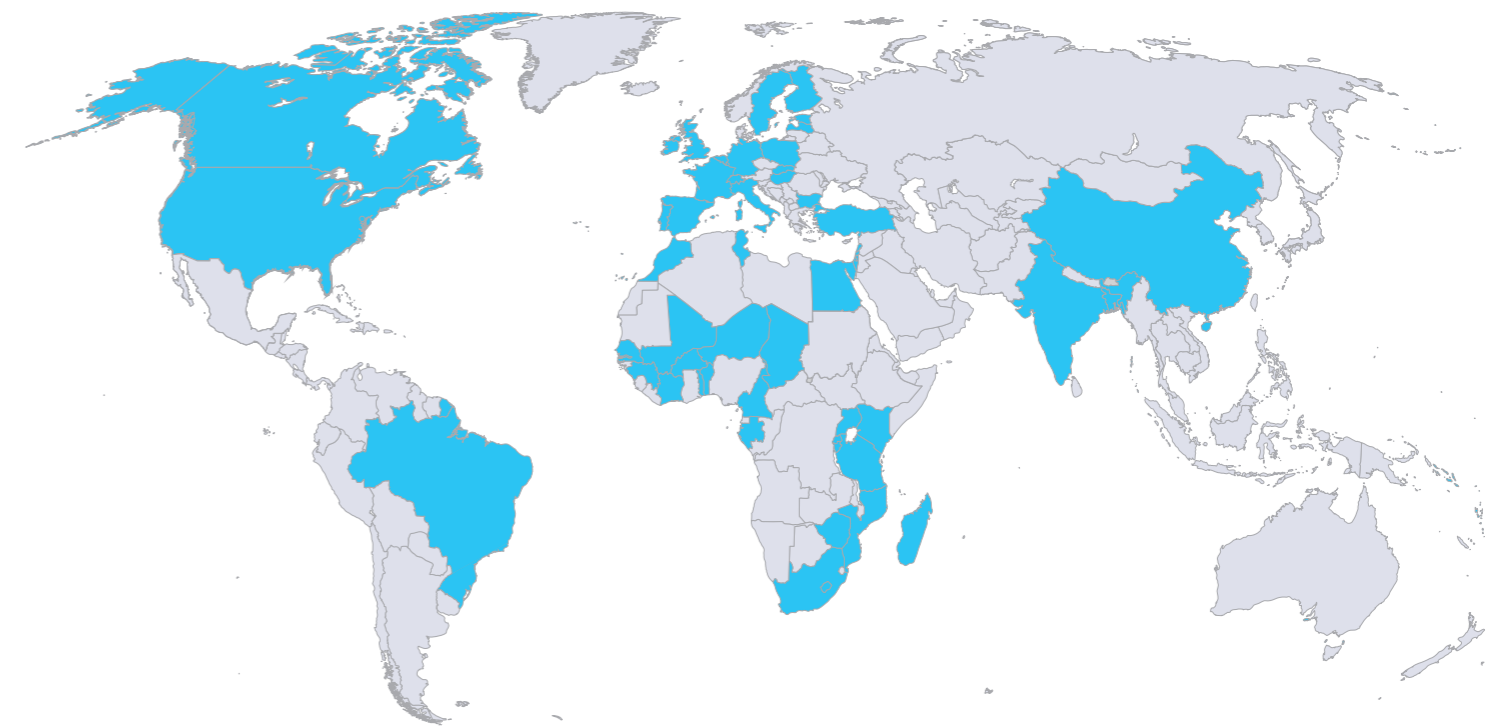
<sup>6</sup> Each structure responding to the questionnaire could start by selecting from 8 main categories: association or NGO, club, social enterprise, sports federation, foundation or endowment fund, local authority, government ministry or agency, international organisation, development bank, other.

<sup>7</sup> Svensson, P.G., Woods, H. (2017). “A systematic overview of sport for development and peace organisations”, *Journal of Sport for Development*, Volume 5, Issue 9.

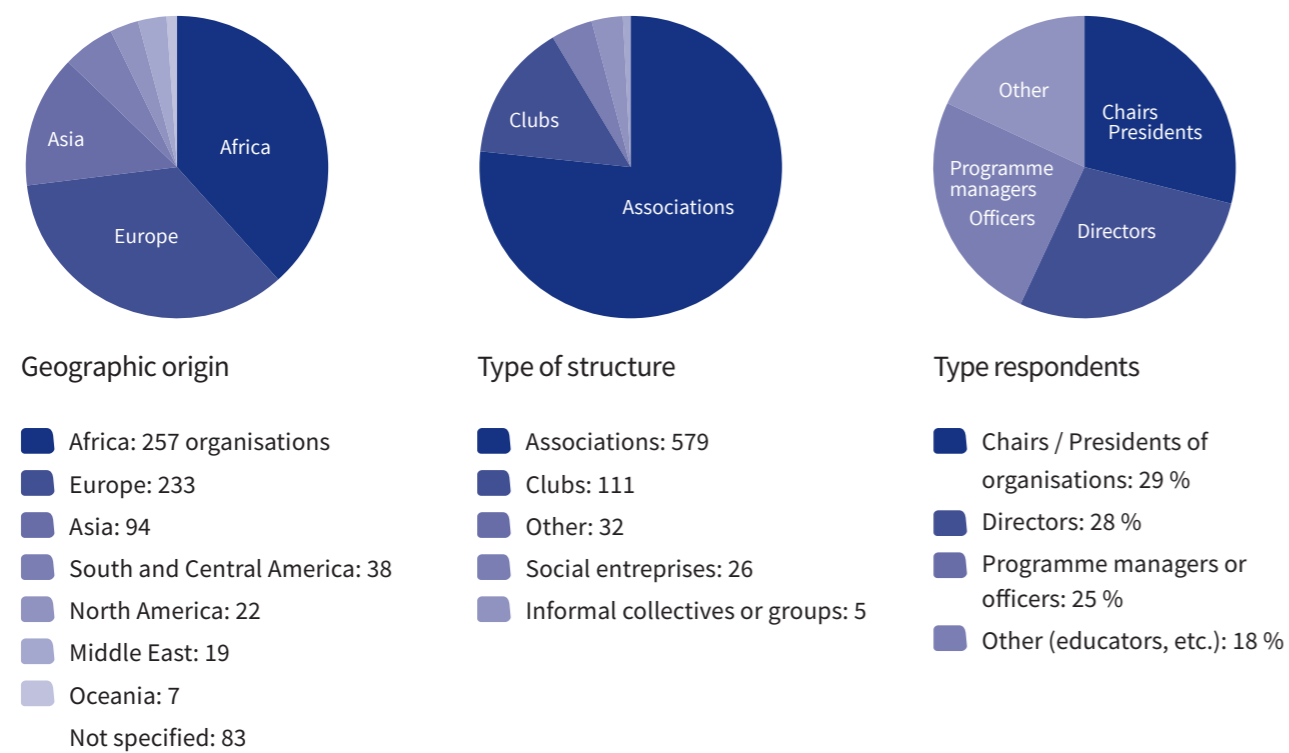
Indicative mapping of countries where organisations deliver solutions directly to communities



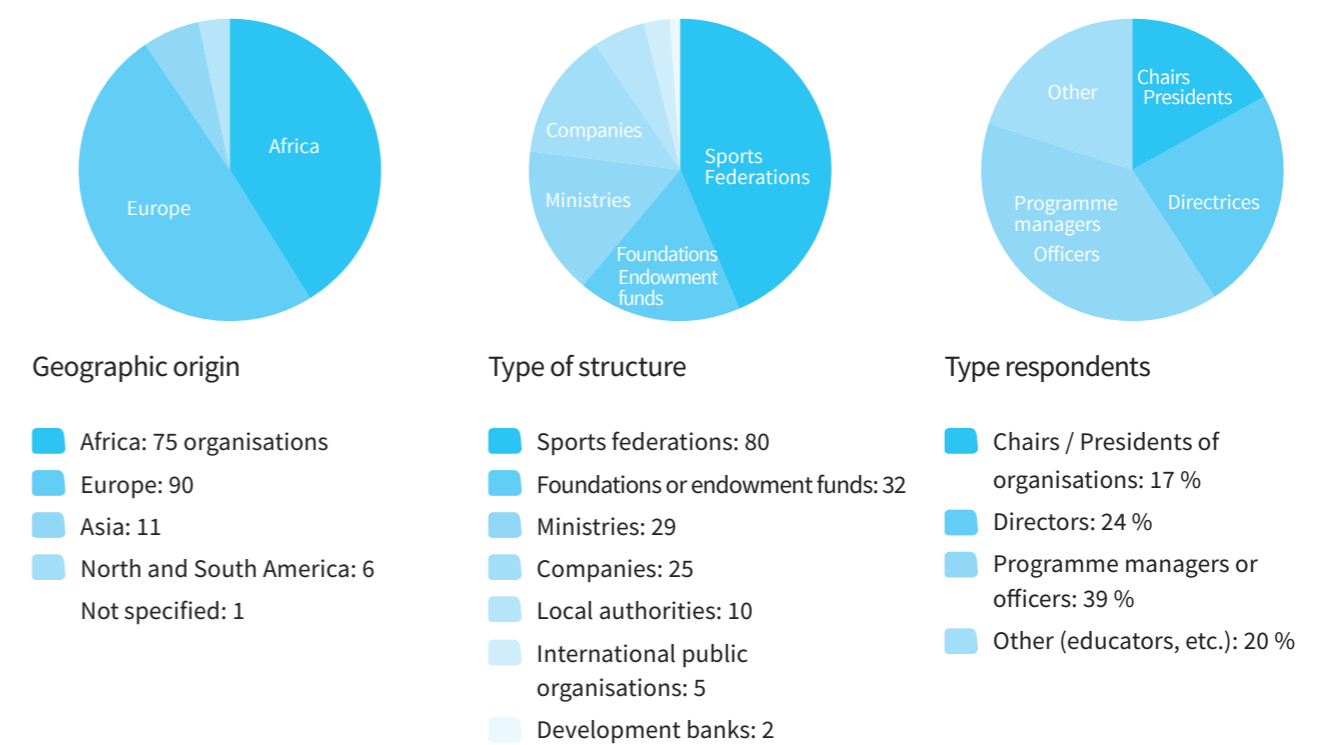
Indicative mapping of countries where organisations fund and/or support field initiatives



Description of the sample of 753 organisations



Description of the sample of 183 organisations





01

Social innovation through sport:  
trends and practices

# A movement at the heart of sport and multi-sport.

**45%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS USE FOOTBALL

**43%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS USE MULTI-SPORT APPROACHES

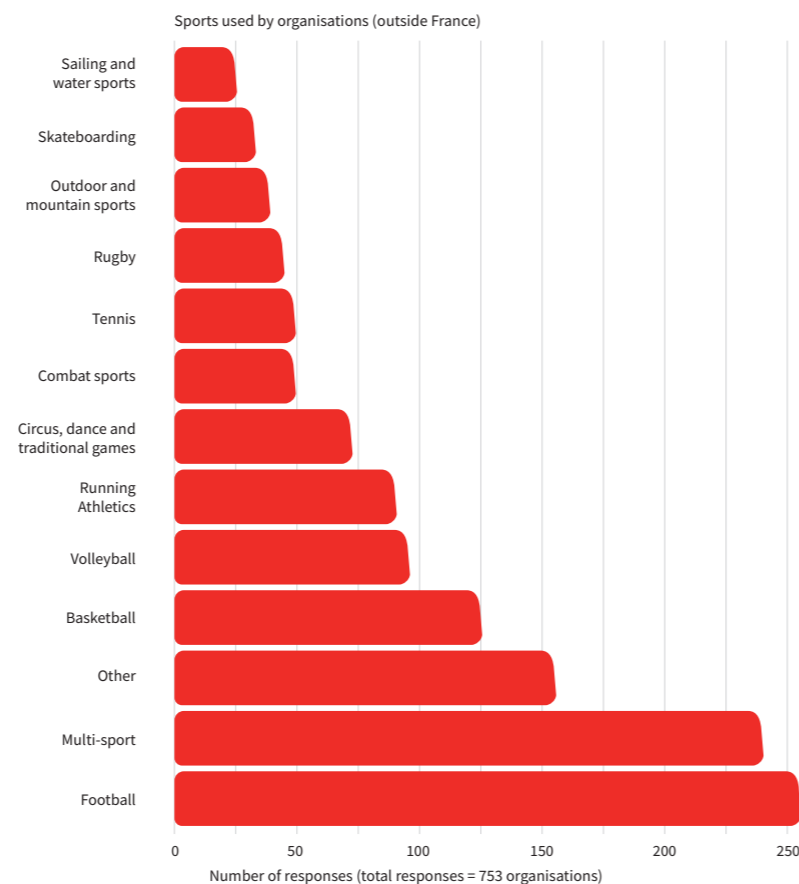


## TRENDS

An initial analysis of global trends confirms that well-established disciplines remain central to the field of social innovation through sport<sup>8</sup>. Football tops the list (45%), ahead of basketball (22%), volleyball (17%), running or athletics (16%), combat sports (9%), tennis (9%), rugby (8%), mountain sports (7%), skateboarding (6%) and outdoor sports (4%)<sup>9</sup>.

The popularity of certain sports may vary from one geographical area to another<sup>10</sup>, and it is important to note that these trends mainly concern established organisations that have been in existence for more than four years. In other words, this mapping does not take into account the multitude of informal organisations or groups emerging in certain disciplines<sup>11</sup>.

Beyond these nuances, it is clear that the structures in this survey remain deeply rooted in sport in the strictest sense of the word, that is, built on identifiable and often federated disciplines. However, the study highlights a second major trend: 43% of organisations adopt a multi-sport approach, offering several activities simultaneously to their participants<sup>12</sup>. A further 13% draw on broader physical practices (circus arts, dance, traditional games). This dual dynamic highlights the fact that the social innovation through sport movement can also broaden the scope of activities beyond codified sport.



<sup>8</sup> This data concerns global trends excluding France (162 organisations), in order to avoid a bias linked to the large number of respondents in France.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the Good Push network, which brings together organisations using skateboarding, lists over 1,000 member organisations in 115 countries, the vast majority of which are collectives or organisations with little formal structure, mainly in South America, Europe and the United States.

<sup>10</sup> Tennis remains very largely European, with a few notable exceptions in South America and Asia. Sailing and board sports are mainly offered in Europe and in some African countries (South Africa, Morocco, Senegal).

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Good Push network, which brings together organisations using skateboarding, lists over 1,000 member organisations in 115 countries, the vast majority of which are collectives or organisations with little formal structure, mainly in South America, Europe and the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Of note, in France, the use of multisport is more prevalent than the use of football.

## DISCUSSION

Several factors explain the importance of single-discipline approaches. For many organisations, the choice of a specific sport reflects a founder's passion, shared technical expertise, or a collective, unifying identity built around a well-known sport. Anchoring in a single sport is often an asset: it makes the project easier to grasp, helps it take root locally and eases relationships with sports federations and clubs. Yet it can also become a constraint when the chosen sport no longer meets participants' needs, when it limits access to activities, or when it produces counterproductive educational effects<sup>13</sup>.

Given this context, the adoption of multi-sport reveals that organisations are choosing to adapt their sporting practices in response to the needs and aspirations of communities.

A defining feature of multi-sport is its emphasis on playful and cooperative activities. Less codified than organised sports, and requiring less equipment and infrastructure, multi-sport offers a twofold advantage. In terms of accessibility, it welcomes participants of varying ability levels, ages and physical conditions, without requiring a long technical learning curve. From an educational perspective, it favours play, spontaneity and creativity over performance, making it a particularly effective way to engage participants with little exposure to institutional sport<sup>14</sup>.

This diversification of activities, both in terms of specific sports and multi-sport, is also reflected in the various ways in which 'sport' intersects with 'non-sport'. This interaction, through awareness-raising initiatives, opportunities for dialogue, and the support surrounding sporting activities

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*It happened little by little. It started with some youth camps where the aim was to offer several activities, including cultural ones. Then some of our partners began asking us to offer more than just rugby. We broadened our range, focusing more on the desired outcomes than on the sport itself.*

Sanoussi Diarra, Rebonds

//

is a defining marker of social innovation through sport. More than the choice of discipline, it is this "grammar of articulation" that qualifies a sporting practice as social innovation. This will be the focus of the following section.

<sup>13</sup> The point here is not to oppose single-discipline approaches and multisport approaches: no discipline is, in itself, superior to another. Rigorous educational methods can apply to either, depending on a number of parameters: the needs of communities and the cultural rootedness of the discipline within the area; its technical and economic accessibility; the availability of qualified and committed educators; consistency with the local partner ecosystem.

<sup>14</sup> This orientation extends an academic line of thinking that questions, under the concept of *play-for-development*, the central place of codified sport in development approaches through physical activity. Sterchele, D. (2015). «De-sportizing physical activity: From sport-for-development to play-for-development», *European Journal for Sport and Society*.

# A shared principle of action within the movement: *the articulation of sport and non-sport.*

**90%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS USE SPORT AS A TOOL FOR MEETING SOCIAL NEEDS OTHER THAN SPORT

**33%**  
OF FEDERATIONS USE SPORT AS A TOOL FOR MEETING SOCIAL NEEDS OTHER THAN SPORT

## TRENDS

The survey confirms a trend already noted in the foreword and examined more closely here. 90% of the organisations surveyed use physical activity and sport first and foremost as a tool for meeting educational, social, environmental or health needs. In other words, taking part in sport is not an end in itself but a means of pursuing goals that reach beyond it. A substantial proportion of them (64%) regard access to physical activity and sport as a central objective, and nearly one-third (32%) also build in a competitive dimension.

This trend is particularly evident among the 80 sports federations that took part in the global survey. One-third of them (33%) are using sport to address educational, social, environmental or health needs. This is a significant proportion that shows that part of the institutional sports movement is engaged in the social innovation through sport movement, or seeking ways to do so.

A final trend is worth noting: the social innovation through sport movement also draws inspiration from beyond the sports world itself — from the fields of development and the social economy. Nearly 35% of the organisations surveyed see sport as one activity among others. For them, sport is neither a starting point nor an end goal but simply one of several tools used to pursue social, educational or environmental objectives.

In this context, sporting competition is not absent from the field of social innovation; instead, it is reconfigured — as the case of the Naandi Foundation in India, presented below, illustrates. Rather than an end in itself, competition becomes a tool used under certain conditions to achieve



targeted social or educational outcomes. It can also allow girls and women to occupy public space from which they are sometimes excluded. For some target groups — teenagers, young adults on the margins of mainstream programmes, people undergoing reintegration — it is the competitive dimension itself that drives lasting engagement. The challenge, the chance to improve, the prospect of a tangible shared goal (a tournament, an inter-club fixture, a public event) are all powerful drivers of participation. Finally, in educational terms, competition offers a framework for learning: learning to referee, to win without humiliating others, to work as part of a team, to lose without giving up.

For this reason, organisations engaged in social innovation through sport do not necessarily use competition as conventional, federation-based formats do. They adapt it in many ways: teams mixed by gender, age or ability; festival-style or multi-sport formats; modified rules to promote inclusion; valuing participation as much as results; group debriefs after matches; measures to prevent discriminatory behaviour. In this way, the formats and aims of competition can be reshaped to broaden the range of people it brings in and to temper the sporting hierarchies it tends to produce. This reconfiguration does not, however, remove all the tensions that competition can introduce into a project with a social purpose.

## DISCUSSION

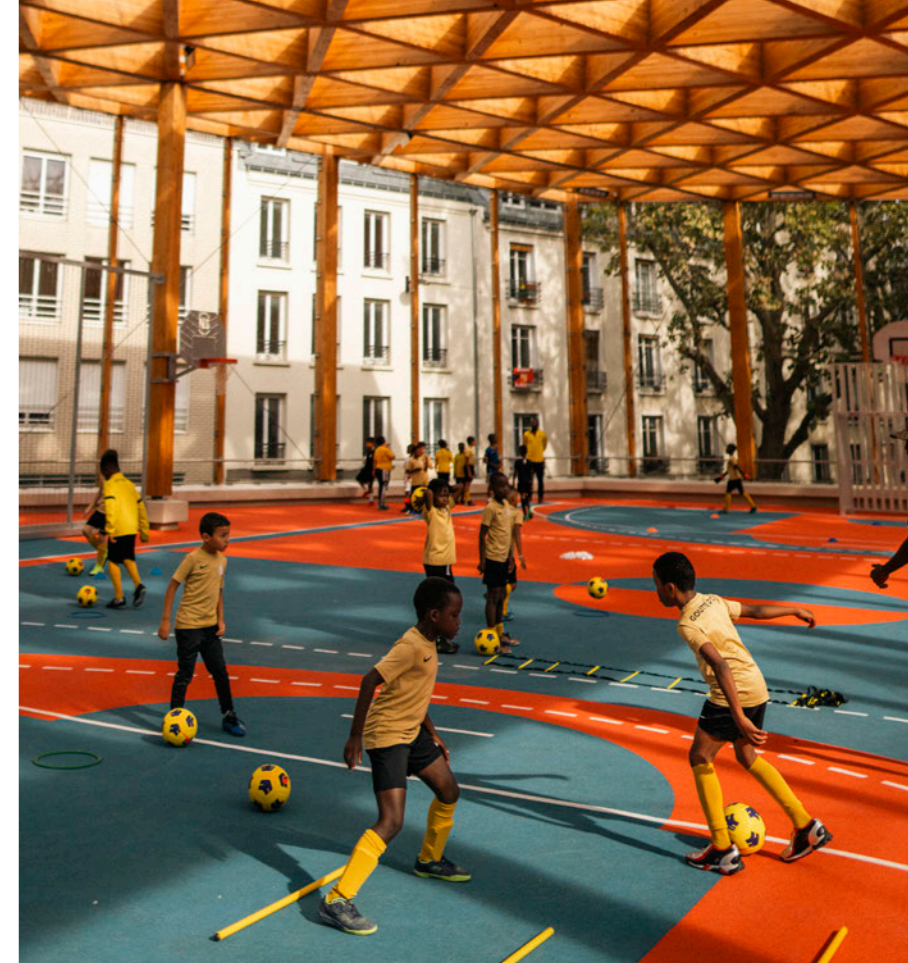
A movement can be defined in several ways. The term is often used metaphorically to describe a group of people or organisations. Here, we treat those from different sectors as part of the same movement when they share three features: the pursuit of social change around shared objectives, participation in structured networks, and convergent ways of working<sup>15</sup>.

Taken together, the trends outlined above show how the social innovation through sport movement is reshaping the framework of modern sport. Where the latter relies on a form of self-sufficiency — sporting activity justifies itself — social innovation through sport pursues objectives beyond the mere development of that activity, and also rests on a logic of articulation between sporting and non-sporting activities.

This articulation lies at the heart of the movement: it is neither incidental nor peripheral. Without it, organisations would offer sport, education, health or social integration, each in its own sphere. Social innovation through sport, by contrast, brings these hitherto separate worlds together in a new way. The novelty of the movement therefore lies not in reinventing sports such as football, basketball or rugby; it lies in constructing a grammar of articulation between sporting practice and everything that can be grafted onto it to amplify its effects<sup>16</sup>.

Within this framework, competition has not disappeared from the sector — it has been reconfigured, as the case of the Naandi Foundation in India illustrates below. Rather than an end in itself, it becomes a tool, used under certain conditions to produce targeted social or educational effects.

<sup>15</sup> We draw on three ideas from Filleulle, O. (2009). "De l'objet de la définition à la définition de l'objet. De quoi traite finalement la sociologie des mouvements sociaux?", *Politique et Sociétés*.  
<sup>16</sup> More precisely, practice is not treated as raw material, but designed with intention — structured by targeted psychosocial or educational objectives, session formats adapted to participants, a specific stance from the educator, and rituals and pacing that structure the session. This educational intentionality amplifies the positive effects of sporting activity, even before any complementary non-sporting activities are grafted onto it — whether linked to the practice (games, time for participants to speak, breathing exercises) or independent of it (tutoring, awareness-raising workshops, residential camps).



These effects take several forms. It can enable girls and women to occupy a public space from which they often remain excluded. For some participants — adolescents, young adults on the margins of mainstream pathways, people in rehabilitation — the competitive dimension itself fosters lasting engagement. The challenge, the prospect of progress and the promise of a tangible collective goal — a tournament, an inter-club match, a public event — all drive their mobilisation. Finally, in educational terms, competition offers a space in which to learn: to referee, to win without humiliating others, to work as a team, and to lose without giving up.

For this reason, organisations engaged in social innovation through sport do not necessarily rely on competition in the same way as traditional sport federations. They adapt it in numerous ways: teams mixed by gender, age or skill level; festival-style or multi-sport formats; modified rules to foster inclusion; valuing participation as much as results; collective debriefing sessions after matches; mechanisms to prevent discriminatory behaviour. The formats and aims of competition can thus be reshaped to welcome a wider range of participants and to mitigate the sporting hierarchies it produces. This reconfiguration does not, however, neutralise all the tensions that competition can bring to a project with social aims<sup>17</sup>.

The survey thus brings to light numerous organisations around the world working to improve the living conditions of socially and economically vulnerable communities. They reach out to the participants who need it most, combine sporting and non-sporting activities, and seek to empower these participants to be more than mere recipients.

<sup>17</sup> Firstly, competition can reproduce the very social hierarchies that the project aims to reduce: the highest performers, those most physically able, tend to win — thereby reinforcing initial inequalities rather than mitigating them. Secondly, it can exclude beginners and the most vulnerable participants, who are reluctant to take part in settings where failure becomes public. Finally, it can redirect the very purpose of the organisation: competitive success tends to become the central indicator of achievement, to the point of overriding the project's social aims.

# CASE STUDY 01

IN COLLABORATION WITH PEACE AND SPORT

# NAANDI FOUNDATION INDIA



7 STATES | 17 DISTRICTS

1,051,037

GIRLS AGED 11 TO 15 WHO HAVE BENEFITED SINCE THE START OF THE SPORTS COMPONENT OF THE PROGRAMME IN 2018



## THE ACTIVITIES

The activities are spread throughout the school year. At school, the Women Skill Associates form groups of at least 80 girls and run two 90-minute sessions per week. Each session draws on a playful and multidisciplinary approach (sporting games, frisbee, dodgeball, motricity courses, cooperative games), fostering the development of motor and psychosocial skills.

In the extracurricular programme, the Women Game Changers select 20 to 25 girls from each school group and introduce them to competitive sport, focusing on athletics and football. Two-hour training sessions are held six days a week — with Thursdays set aside for rest; weekends are dedicated to Naandi Super League matches.

All Women Game Changers hold a grassroots football certification issued by the AIFF (All India Football Federation); five are also certified state-level referees. All mentors also receive quarterly in-person training across the 17 districts where the programme operates.

The Foundation provides equipment to the participants. Each girl receives a personal kit comprising two jerseys, two pairs of football socks, a pair of sports shoes, a Sports Diary, two pens, and a dignity kit containing sanitary products for the year. The mentors also receive personal equipment and a sports kit bag.

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*When we launched the programme, I knew little about sport, and I saw that as a limitation.*

*Looking back, I realise it was actually an asset: the dialogue between experts in development and in sport allowed us to learn from one another and build a stronger approach.*

*Rohini Mukherjee, Naandi Foundation*

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## BACKGROUND

Founded in 1998, the Naandi Foundation works to promote the schooling of girls, particularly in rural areas where patriarchal social norms persist. As schooling expanded, the Foundation broadened its work, first to academic learning, and then to the development of girls' psychosocial skills in order to foster empowerment and reduce inequalities.

## TARGET GROUPS

*Sports for Life* targets girls aged 11 to 15, who live mainly in rural areas, who are subject to social norms restricting their freedoms, and whose access to schooling remains precarious. On a voluntary basis, they take part in sporting, school and extracurricular activities, led by women aged 20 to 40 who have been trained by the Foundation. These guides also act as mediators with the participants' parents.

## THE PROJECT

Launched in 2018, *Sports for Life* is part of the Nanhi Kali ("The Little Buds") educational programme, which aims to provide quality education for girls from disadvantaged rural backgrounds. It seeks to enable them to take part in sport in order to develop skills such as problem-solving, taking initiative and self-confidence.

## THE ECOSYSTEM

*Sports for Life*, funded by the KC Mahindra Education Trust, covers 7 Indian states and 17 districts, in partnership with 1,935 volunteer public schools. These schools benefit from sports equipment and exclusively female teams, organised around two complementary roles: the *Women Skill Associates* run activities within the school, while the *Women Game Changers* — 27 in total — lead the extracurricular competitive programme. To date, 1,754 women have been trained, all recruited from the same communities and villages as the young girls taking part.

## THE INNOVATION

At the organisational level, the innovation lies in introducing and integrating sport into an educational programme that previously had none, as a complementary means of developing psychosocial skills. The choice of an all-female team, which brings women and girls into public space, marks a significant departure in the context of rural India.

At the pedagogical level, the innovation extends further with SportStar, a mobile app developed by the Foundation to support the supervisors' work. Used daily, the app provides videos, tutorials and method sheets to help them run sessions. Its uniqueness lies in its design, which is entirely centred on women and girls: all visual content, graphics and icons feature the girls and the mentors of the project, which overturns the conventional representations of sports apps.

## PROGRAMME OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

*Sports for Life* currently benefits 181,037 girls and has reached a total of 1,051,037 girls since its launch in 2018<sup>18</sup>.

The project strengthens school attendance and retention, particularly among at-risk girls. The mentors also work to prevent school dropout by acting as mediators with families. Participants and their mentors highlight the project's role in strengthening girls' autonomy and empowerment, including beyond sport itself.

The project also benefits the 1,754 women who lead the activities. They are strengthening their economic autonomy, in a context where women's participation in India's labour market remains low<sup>19</sup>. They are also gaining local recognition within their communities and greater autonomy, particularly in terms of greater freedom of movement.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with representatives of the Naandi Foundation on 20 March 2026; Rohini Mukherjee, Vice-President & Head — Global Partnerships and Strategy; Radha Varadarajan, Head of Project Nanhi Kali; Lisa Murawski, Sports Director.  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Also see Peace Makers, 5 years to build peace through sport, Peace and Sport, 2026



A movement mobilised across multiple themes and target groups.

# A movement built on a plurality of educational approaches

OVER **12** MILLION  
BENEFICIARIES WORLDWIDE IN 2024

**76%**  
OF THE ORGANISATIONS  
WORK IN THE FIELD  
OF PHYSICAL HEALTH

**75%**  
OF THE ORGANISATIONS  
WORK IN THE FIELD  
OF EDUCATION

## TRENDS

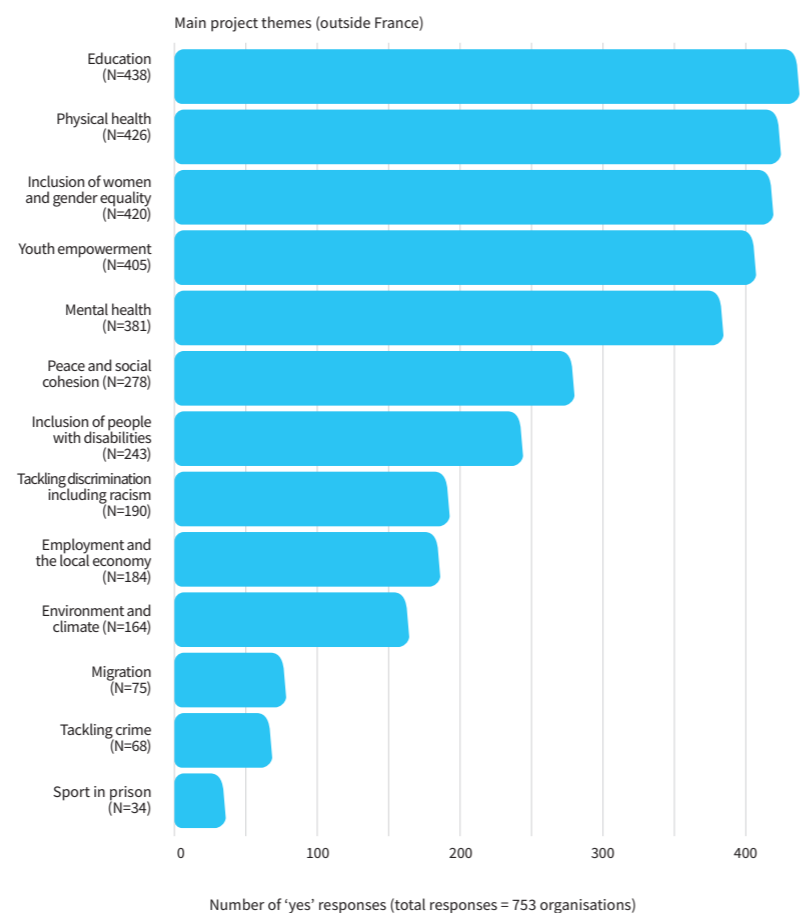
In 2024, the social innovation through sport movement directly reached more than 12 million people through its activities worldwide<sup>20</sup>. This overall figure conceals very significant disparities. An estimated 9.5 million people are reached by just seven major organisations, headquartered in India, the United States, the United Kingdom or Canada. All the others combined around the world reach an estimated 2.5 million people — an average of 3,324 beneficiaries each.

The social innovation through sport movement addresses a remarkable wealth and diversity of themes, ranging from education to health, from inclusion to environment, and from employment to migration. Globally, five themes emerge as central for the majority of organisations surveyed regardless of the geographical areas concerned: physical health (76%), education (75%), women's inclusion and gender equality (72%), mental health (68%) and youth empowerment (66%)<sup>21</sup>.

Also prominent, and featured in the second tier, these being: peace and social cohesion, the inclusion of people with disabilities, the fight against discrimination (including racism), employment and the local economy, the environment and climate, migration, and the fight against crime. This second group is more strongly influenced by regional specificities and national contexts.

<sup>20</sup> This picture can be put into perspective alongside other figures from the sector. The AFD reports 10 million beneficiaries since 2016, a total that includes people who use sports facilities. The Laureus Foundation, meanwhile, notes that it has reached 6 million people over more than 20 years.

<sup>21</sup> This data is relatively consistent with trends identified in more regional, national or thematic studies. See, in the case of South and South-East Asia: FICCI, Pro Sport Development, PRIA, Understanding the Sport for Development Sector in South and South East Asia, 2020.



## DISCUSSION

The five dominant themes — physical health, education, inclusion of women, mental health, youth empowerment — share a common foundation: an educational project in the broadest sense, one that extends beyond school-based education. Our central hypothesis is this: this overarching educational dimension is a defining feature of the social innovation through sport movement<sup>22</sup>.

By education in the broad sense — or holistic education — we mean an approach that considers the individual in all their dimensions: cognitive, emotional, social, physical and so on. It goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge. Schools and the sports movement can take this broader approach too, and sometimes do — but it is not always their central focus<sup>23</sup>. As John Dewey argued as early as the dawn of the 20th century, the deepest learning does not occur through discourse, but through lived experience<sup>24</sup>. The richness of this approach lies in its ability to bring together what traditional educational institutions tend to separate, that is, knowledge and action, the mental and the physical, and the individual and the collective. In this regard, participation in a sport offers a particularly fertile ground for this approach to flourish<sup>25</sup>.



*When we set up the Naandi Foundation in 1998, we focused on academic support for girls in traditional school subjects. Then we worked on digital skills, before focusing on life skills. That is why we developed the sports programme.*

Rohini Mukherjee, Naandi Foundation

More recently, this pedagogical tradition of learning through experience has been complemented by the conceptual framework of psychosocial skills, which was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as early as 1993<sup>26</sup>. This framework, continually refined by research, identifies three categories of skills that participation in sport can help develop<sup>27</sup>:

- **cognitive** (self-awareness, self-control, making informed decisions),
- **emotional** (awareness of one's emotions and stress, regulating one's emotions, managing one's stress),
- **social** (communicating constructively, developing healthy relationships, resolving conflicts).

This convergence does not, however, shield the movement from two recurring criticisms. First, organisations tend to target too many objectives at once, at the risk of diluting the impact of the desired outcomes and making rigorous evaluation impossible<sup>28</sup>. By contrast, the most effective programmes are often those that focus on a small set of target skills, which are developed in depth using specifically tailored methods. Furthermore, the focus on participant autonomy only tends to place the burden on individuals to adapt to frameworks that are sometimes unequal, while not always questioning those frameworks themselves<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Hermens, N., Super, S., Verkooijen, K. T., & Koelen, M. A. (2017). "A Systematic Review of Life Skill Development Through Sports Programs Serving Socially Vulnerable Youth". *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88(4), 408-424.

<sup>23</sup> This notion is not new: it runs through modern educational thought, from the Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi to the Brazilian Paulo Freire, by way of the American philosopher John Dewey and the popular education movements.

<sup>24</sup> Dewey, J. (2022). "Démocratie et Éducation", suivi de "Expérience et Éducation", Armand Colin.

<sup>25</sup> The sports session is a space and a time for putting all these dimensions into play. This experiential and emotional density, articulated with non-sporting moments, gives it a singular educational potential.

<sup>26</sup> WHO (1993). *Life Skills Education in Schools*. WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7A.Rev.2. Geneva: World Health Organization, Division of Mental Health.

<sup>27</sup> Lamboy, B. (2021). *Développement des compétences psychosociales des enfants et des jeunes, un référentiel pour favoriser un déploiement national*, Santé Publique France.

<sup>28</sup> Coalter, F. (2010). "The politics of sport-for-development: Limited focus programmes and broad gauge problems?". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45(3), 295-314. Coalter, F. (2010). "The politics of sport-for-development: Limited focus programmes and broad gauge problems?". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45(3), 295-314.

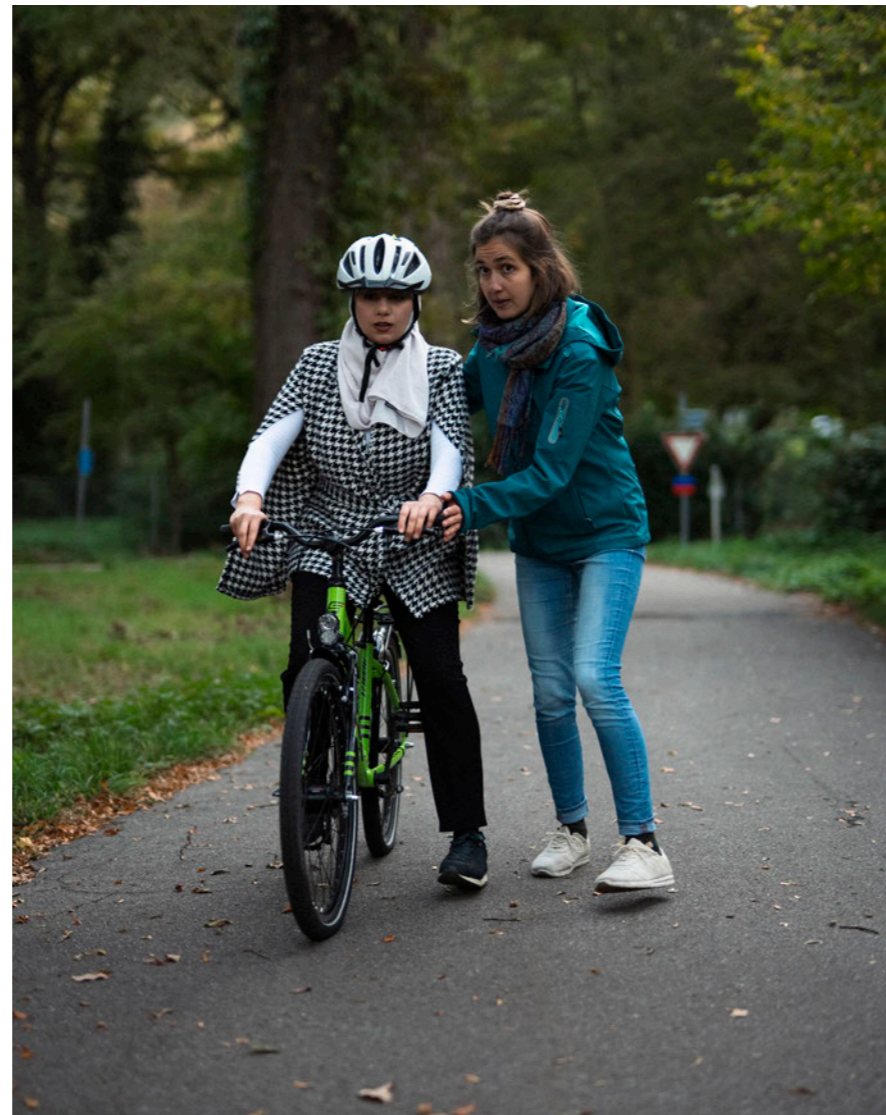
<sup>29</sup> Verschuur, C. (2017). "Une histoire du développement au prisme du genre", dans Verschuur, C., Guérin, I., Guéat-Bernard, I. *Sous le développement, le genre*, Editions IRD.

# Emerging themes: signs of a movement in expansion.

**26%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
ARE ACTIVE IN THE FIELD OF  
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

**14%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
ARE ACTIVE ON  
MIGRATION ISSUES

**11%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
FOCUS ON  
THE FIGHT AGAINST CRIME



## TRENDS

In the survey, four themes stand out and deserve particular attention: the environment and climate (around 26% of organisations), migration (14%), the fight against crime (11%) and sport in prison (7%). While these themes have been addressed for over a decade in certain regions<sup>30</sup>, they are considered in this Panorama as “emerging” on a global scale. Their rise in prominence reflects the gradual diversification of the movement’s objectives, albeit based on substantially different mechanisms.

At one end of the spectrum, environmental and climate issues appear to be the fastest-growing theme. Almost one in four organisations surveyed list them among their core objectives, reflecting the gradual integration of environmental concerns into the sector’s practices. This trend is unfolding within a relatively favourable international context, marked by the adoption in 2018 of the Sports for Climate Action Framework, signed to date by over 280 sporting bodies, by the integration of sustainability into Olympic policy, and by the growing commitments of major international federations<sup>31</sup>. This momentum has also given rise to dedicated funding: the Adidas Foundation,

for instance, has developed a Sport for Planet programme that uses sport to raise community awareness of climate change and support the most vulnerable, combining these efforts with environmental education.

Migration occupies an intermediate position. Its presence in the movement remains strongly tied to regional geopolitical contexts, (crises in the Middle East, Mediterranean routes, displacement in Central America, the refugee situations in East Asia) and mainly involves organisations based in host or transit countries. However, it is no longer limited to an ad hoc response to humanitarian emergencies. Several European organisations, such as Bike Bridge in Germany or Kabubu in France, have structured long-term programmes specifically dedicated to the inclusion of migrants and refugees through sport. These associations are developing their own methodologies, forging stable partnerships with local and institutional stakeholders, and gradually consolidating their economic models. This professionalisation suggests that the theme is likely becoming a more structured sub-field in its own right.

At the other end of the spectrum, the fight against crime and sport in prisons are more closely linked to specific institutional frameworks: urban security policies, the prison administration, and partnerships with ministries of justice. A transnational dynamic is nevertheless emerging, as illustrated by the Twinning Project, launched in the United Kingdom in 2018 to bring together professional football clubs and prisons<sup>32</sup>. The organisation is now expanding to several countries beyond the United Kingdom, showing the capacity of such initiatives to extend beyond their original national context, provided that a key stakeholder ensures their spread. Sport in prison remains, however, a specialised theme, the implementation of which depends largely on national prison policies and commitment, but also on the openness of institutional stakeholders with respect to civil society actors.

The fact that some themes appear to be becoming internationalised whereas others seem more firmly rooted in national frameworks, raises a specific question: what drives a theme to “emerge” and take shape?

## DISCUSSION

The emergence of new global themes could be read as a sign of a broader shift in organisations’ ambitions<sup>33</sup>. As Per Svensson and Adam Cohen point out, by adopting “new ways of addressing a problem to better promote social change”, the sport and development sector, has evolved from “niche” status to that of a “global field tackling global issues<sup>34</sup>.” This analysis applies equally to organisations that use sport as a tool for social innovation.

In practice, two main dynamics are at work. The first is top-down. It describes how the sector integrates structural issues that were not part of its historical core. This shift is driven by international frameworks (Sustainable Development Goals, multilateral conventions), as well as by institutional stakeholders that legitimise, fund and standardise these new themes: major sports federations, foundations and corporate funders, and multilateral organisations.

The second is bottom-up. Attuned to urgent issues that international frameworks do not always immediately prioritise, grassroots stakeholders detect, address and reconfigure the relationships that shape their local ecosystems. Jessica Brake and Katie Misener’s study of a programme in an Ontario municipality illustrates this mechanism<sup>35</sup>. The innovations they document succeed only when those involved have a thorough understanding of local needs. In some cases, this mobilisation becomes truly ecosystemic: these stakeholders no longer merely seek to solve a problem, but to transform the cooperative relationships between partners<sup>36</sup>.

The main challenge facing organisations working on emerging themes today is to demonstrate the added value of their work. The environmental theme is driven by two forces: local stakeholders experiment with and consolidate their methods, while international frameworks legitimise, structure and fund initiatives. By contrast, those working on migration, crime or prison issues



remain heavily dependent on national policy frameworks dominated by restrictive approaches. Their scope for experimentation therefore remains more local, and opportunities for transnational collaboration more limited.

<sup>30</sup> As is the case of sport in prison in Europe, see Sempé, G. et al. (2013). *Le sport en prison*. Council of Europe.

<sup>31</sup> Even though the organisational arrangements of major international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup raise questions about the degree of prioritisation of the issue and the sincerity of the commitments made.

<sup>32</sup> Rivat, E. (2025). *Res Sportiva Insight, Donner une chance aux détenus par le sport pour favoriser l’insertion et diminuer la récidive*, Res Sportiva Insight n°1.

<sup>33</sup> Svensson, P. G. & Cohen, A. (2020). « Innovation in sport for development and peace », *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 25(3), 138-145.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Brake, J. et Misener, J. (2019). « It’s a ripple effect’: The role of intergroup contact within an inner-city youth sport-for-development and peace program », *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 25(3).

<sup>36</sup> Besançon, E. et Chochoy, N. (2019). « Mesurer l’impact de l’innovation sociale : quelles perspectives en dehors de la théorie du changement ? » RECMA, 352(2), 42-57.



# 03

The conditions for relevant and effective social change.

# Strong local cooperation with schools, the sports sector and the health stakeholders.

**71%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
ENGAGE IN COOPERATION WITH  
SCHOOLS

**70%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
WORK WITH  
SPORTS CLUBS

MORE THAN  
**54%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS  
COOPERATE WITH  
HEALTH SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

## TRENDS

Social innovation through sport does not operate in isolation. It is built on cooperation with schools and sports clubs, as well as with stakeholders in the fields of health, social action, environment and employment. Three key areas warrant particular attention<sup>37</sup>.

Schools emerge as a major area of cooperation. 71% of the structures surveyed engage with them in three main ways. According to the interviews, extracurricular involvement is the most widespread: after-school activities, holiday programmes, and so on. In-school involvement, where respondents work within the formal curriculum, remains less common. Lastly, some produce educational resources (session content, training courses) for education professionals, most often at the local or project level, and without long-term support.

Cooperation with the sports movement is just as important. 70% of those surveyed report working with clubs. Behind this figure lies a wide variety of arrangements. In some countries, sport for development and peace organisations work to mobilise established federations and their clubs to address societal issues, as with ChildFund Rugby and the Laos Rugby Federation. In other cases, the federations themselves take the initiative to support local associations: the Brazilian Skateboarding Confederation (CBSK), for instance, works with nearly 150 grassroots project leaders, notably through a training programme<sup>38</sup>.

Finally, just over half of the organisations surveyed are forming partnerships with the health sector (54%). The stakes are high. As sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity rise worldwide, sport is emerging as a key driver of health

<sup>37</sup> This focus on these three types of partnerships rests on two criteria. It is first and foremost a methodological choice: the aim was to build a relatively short questionnaire (less than 18 questions). Given this constraint, we opted to study partnerships that are identified across the planet. Partnerships in the employment sector, for example, are strongly found in France, but are not necessarily as formalised in other geographical areas.

<sup>38</sup> Interview conducted by David Blough with Aline Dantas and Cibele Garcia, Confederação Brasileira de Skateboarding, 2026



in its own right. According to the World Health Organization, only 11% of girls and 25% of boys aged 11 do the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. A study of 1.6 million adolescents across 146 countries found that 80% of them were not meeting these recommendations<sup>39</sup>.

Organisations amplify the effects of sport on health in three main ways. The first is direct intervention — within or near schools, clubs or health centres, where the people they serve already are. This reaches people who would not otherwise set foot in a sports facility, and uses sport to strengthen continuity of care. The second, less common, is the co-design of hybrid solutions:

here, associations take part in shaping the project itself — selecting target groups, adapting activities and measuring effects. The third, still emerging, is referral by health professionals to initiatives based on social innovation through sport. Hospitals, healthcare networks and sport-health centres then prescribe, formally or informally, tailored interventions for their patients. This is the approach taken by Waves for Change, whose Take 5 model features as a case study in the second volume of this Panorama. The combination of these intervention methods often underpins the success of the most impactful projects<sup>40</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

Building these forms of cooperation relies on the work of educators with communities at the local level. They are particularly on the front line whenever it comes to ensuring that sport delivers educational, social or health benefits through sport.

The profession, however, remains characterised by a low level of professionalism: job insecurity, poorly structured initial and continuing training, a marginal position in public budgets, limited career prospects. This deficit contrasts with the wide range of skills required: educational, relational and social skills, and increasingly attuned to questions of gender and inclusion. Strengthening the social innovation through sport movement therefore requires investing in the professionalisation of educators, the recognition of the profession, training tailored to cross-cutting issues, and secure employment conditions.

<sup>39</sup> Santi, P. and Minet, P. (2019). « Le manque d'activité physique, un mal chez les adolescents », *Le Monde*.

<sup>40</sup> Panorama Res Sportiva, issue 1, volume 2, 2026.

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***Since 2020, the Federation has been developing a project to use our sport as a tool for social transformation. We started by mapping all the 'social skate' projects, which led us to identify nearly 150 of them.***

*Cibele Garcia,  
Brazilian Skateboarding Confederation*

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# The challenges and structural barriers to cooperation.

## TRENDS

Almost all these partnerships face a common challenge: the imbalance in legitimacy between organisations promoting social innovation through sport and their institutional partners. This imbalance is compounded by another, one that weakens the partners themselves: physical education within the school system, and the sports movement vis-à-vis public authorities. Both weigh on their capacity to pursue an educational or social ambition.

## SCHOOLS AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION — PERCEIVED AS OUTSIDERS

When it comes to cooperation with schools, qualitative interviews show that organisations involved in the social innovation through sport movement struggle to implement their solutions directly into the classroom. As such, two models have therefore emerged: extracurricular activities and the production of educational resources for teachers. This difficulty is compounded by a broader vulnerability: that of the very position of physical education and sport in schools. Although 97% of countries have made physical education compulsory, UNESCO data significantly qualifies this picture: globally, only 53% of primary schools have teachers specifically trained in physical education<sup>41</sup>.

These global averages mask very contrasting realities. In some contexts, the figures reflect a gradual decline: physical education is losing ground in lesson plans, squeezed out by subjects deemed more crucial for academic success. In others, they reflect structural constraints: limited sports infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, budgetary decisions that disadvantage subjects seen as secondary. Elsewhere still, they reveal disparities between schools depending on the region or student population they serve.

It is precisely this context that opens up a space for collaboration between physical education (PE) and social innovation through sport. PE brings the institutional framework, the curriculum and educational legitimacy; above all, it offers long-standing teaching expertise whose methods can enrich the practice of the movement. Organisations in the sector, in turn, bring fresh



teaching methods and access to groups that formal schooling sometimes struggles to reach. They also enjoy a flexibility schools cannot match: combining approaches, drawing on a wide range of partners, and adapting quickly to different groups and settings.

This synergy has yet to be fully developed in order to meet all the educational needs associated with physical activity, as well as addressing the challenges posed by a sedentary lifestyle and inactivity. It requires moving beyond a symbolic rivalry over educational legitimacy and recognising a common interest: strengthening the role of educational sport in schools and ensuring continuity between school hours, extracurricular and after-school activities.

## THE TRADITIONAL SPORTS MOVEMENT — CONVERGENT EVOLUTIONS TO BE AMPLIFIED

The pioneers of the social innovation through sport movement have built much of their identity in contrast to the competitive aspect of sport, by positioning themselves as an alternative or focusing on specific groups. This positioning has enabled the establishment of a distinctive field of its own, characterised by original practices. This has not, however, closed the gap yet that remains between educating in sport and educating through sport<sup>42</sup>.

Several converging dynamics are nevertheless at work in this scene. The sports movement is increasingly being called upon to justify its contribution to society. In contexts where federation structures are well-established, clubs are facing rapidly shifting public expectations. Several federations are now incorporating social objectives, as illustrated by the French Football Federation, featured as a case study in the second volume of this Panorama.

In other countries, the sports movement is still taking shape: consolidated federations are still rare, long-established clubs are few, and associations often struggle to last due to a lack of resources. This situation presents a unique opportunity: building from the outset sustainable sports organisations that aim to maximise the social benefits of sport, as illustrated by the development of the Laos Rugby Federation (see case study below).

These developments vary from country to country. Yet they all point towards the same space of potential cooperation. The social innovation

## A KEY CHALLENGE: BREAKING DOWN SILOS IN PUBLIC POLICY

Organisations using sport as a driver of social innovation run up against this administrative fragmentation: they must multiply contact points, duplicate procedures, and conform to different evaluation frameworks. The siloed structure of public policy hampers cross-sectoral partnerships by design.

A few public policies stand out. New Zealand provides an example of a particularly well-developed framework<sup>43</sup>. Since the launch of its “Well-being Budget” in 2019, the government has allocated public resources according to 12 outcome categories, including social connection, cultural identity, knowledge and skills, subjective well-being, among others, all aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. This framework now structures the work of all government departments until 2032. Within this framework, the contribution of sport has been explicitly identified and mobilised on two fronts: the population’s social capital on the one hand and improving educational achievement and physical and mental health on the other. strengthening social capital across the population and improving



through sport movement offers tried-and-tested methods, as well as a focus on psychosocial skills and inequalities. The traditional sports sector brings resources, infrastructure and public recognition. The analysis of both fields points to the same conclusion. What at first glance appears to be an imbalance to the sector’s disadvantage can, on closer inspection, be seen as a configuration of shared tensions. Each stakeholder faces its own limits. Everyone stands to gain from cooperation, that is provided that this cooperation is consciously constructed, rather than imposed by circumstance.

educational achievement and physical and mental health. This approach has enabled ambitious interministerial initiatives, such as Healthy Active Learning, co-led by the Ministries of Health and Education.

Such approaches remain rare, however. They require explicit inter-ministerial governance, shared funding and a unified evaluation system capable of capturing the cross-sectoral effects of sport. This raises a final question, explored in the following chapter: how does social innovation through sport build on economic models that are inspiring yet fragile? économiques inspirants, mais aussi fragiles ?

<sup>41</sup> Source UNESCO: [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233111\\_fre](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233111_fre)

<sup>42</sup> Coignet, B., Vieille Marchiset, G. (2015). *Clubs sportifs en banlieue. Des innovations sociales à l'épreuve du terrain*. etc. Voir notamment <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/physical-activity>.  
<sup>43</sup> *The Healthy Active Learning initiative*, co-led by the Ministries of Health and Education, is one of its concrete expressions; it has catalysed an interministerial working group bringing together 15 government bodies.

# CASE STUDY 02

IN COLLABORATION WITH CHILDFUND RUGBY

# LAO RUGBY LAOS

# 2426

YOUNG BENEFICIARIES  
IN 2024

# 67%

OF THEM IMPROVED  
THEIR LIFE SKILLS



## BACKGROUND

From the outset, the Laos Rugby Federation has been committed to social development, particularly in rural areas marked by strong ethnic diversity, and by social norms that can sometimes be restrictive, particularly for girls. From 2015 onwards, the Federation took a new step by developing an approach that combines sport and education, with the goal of making rugby a catalyst for social transformation.

## TARGET GROUPS

The programme targets two main groups. Firstly, young players aged 11 to 16, who take part in sporting and educational activities within their communities. Secondly, young coaches, aged 16 to 25, trained by the Federation to teach both sporting skills and educational content. These coaches are central to the programme, supervising activities and acting as educational links within their local communities.

## THE PROJECT

Launched in 2015 following a pilot project in a northern province of Laos, the Pass It Back programme is now one of the pillars of the Federation's development strategy. Initially designed to test several sporting disciplines in local communities, the programme has gradually put rugby at the heart of its work because it was quickly embraced by young people, particularly girls. In partnership with ChildFund Rugby, the Federation has developed a programme that combines sport with the teaching of life skills, focusing on themes such as gender equality, health, safety and life planning.

## THE ECOSYSTEM

The Laos Rugby Federation draws on a network of institutional and technical partners. Launched with funding from ChildFund Rugby, this network now brings together a wider range of stakeholders: the Laos Ministry of Health and Sports, Asia Rugby, the Hong Kong Rugby Club, and organisations involved in child protection and gender equality. The Federation is also funded by World Rugby, of which it became a full member in 2020 — a recognition driven in large part by the results of the Pass It Back programme.

## THE ACTIVITIES

The programme's activities are organised into two annual seasons, each lasting roughly five months, with two weekly sessions of an hour and a half. They are based on an educational curriculum called Pass It Back, which develops both sporting ability and psychosocial skills (emotional management, empathy, responsible decision-making, and the development of positive interpersonal relationships). Each session combines sport (45 minutes) and educational modules (45 minutes).

In this approach, the educator acts as a facilitator rather than a coach in the narrow sense, guiding young people through game situations that serve as a framework for learning life skills. Their role is essentially one of educational assistance: seeking to create a safe environment that is sensitive to gender dynamics, while encouraging active participation and collective reflection.

## THE INNOVATION

The innovation directed by the Laos Rugby Federation is based primarily on the systematic integration of rugby into a structured educational programme. It draws on educational content that is formalised and regularly evaluated, in which the development of life skills goes hand in hand with that of sporting skills.

At an organisational level, this approach has opened up new sources of funding for the Federation by linking it to broader educational and social goals. It has made new partnerships possible and contributed to the Federation's professionalisation.

From an operational perspective, the recruitment of educators is central to the model. They are selected less for their sporting skills alone than for their leadership qualities, their engagement with young people and their ability to work as part of a team. The process includes selection days that focus on social interaction and the motivation to learn, followed by intensive training led by the Federation.

<sup>43</sup> Impact Report Pass It Back-Being Healthy January-June 2024.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## PROGRAMME OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

In 2024, the programme reached 2,426 young people (50% of them girls) across 3 provinces of Laos<sup>44</sup>. Its 110 educators (58 of them women) delivered 2,588 sessions and 8 competitions. According to a pre-test/post-test survey carried out with a sample of 63% of the players, the impact on participants went well beyond learning rugby skills<sup>45</sup>:

- 78% of players improved their knowledge and attitudes on the main themes covered in the «Being Healthy» module.
- 67% of players improved their psychosocial skills.
- 90% of players felt that the friends they made through the programme genuinely cared about them.
- 81% of players reported good relationships with their coaches, feeling supported and valued in both training and competition.
- 71% of parents observed significant improvements in their child's learning, which they attributed to the programme.





# 04

Economic models: inspiring yet fragile.

# Funding social innovation through sport: *stakeholders and trends.*

**82%**  
OF THE FUNDERS SURVEYED SUPPORT SPORT FOR WHAT IT ACHIEVES BEYOND THE PLAYING FIELD

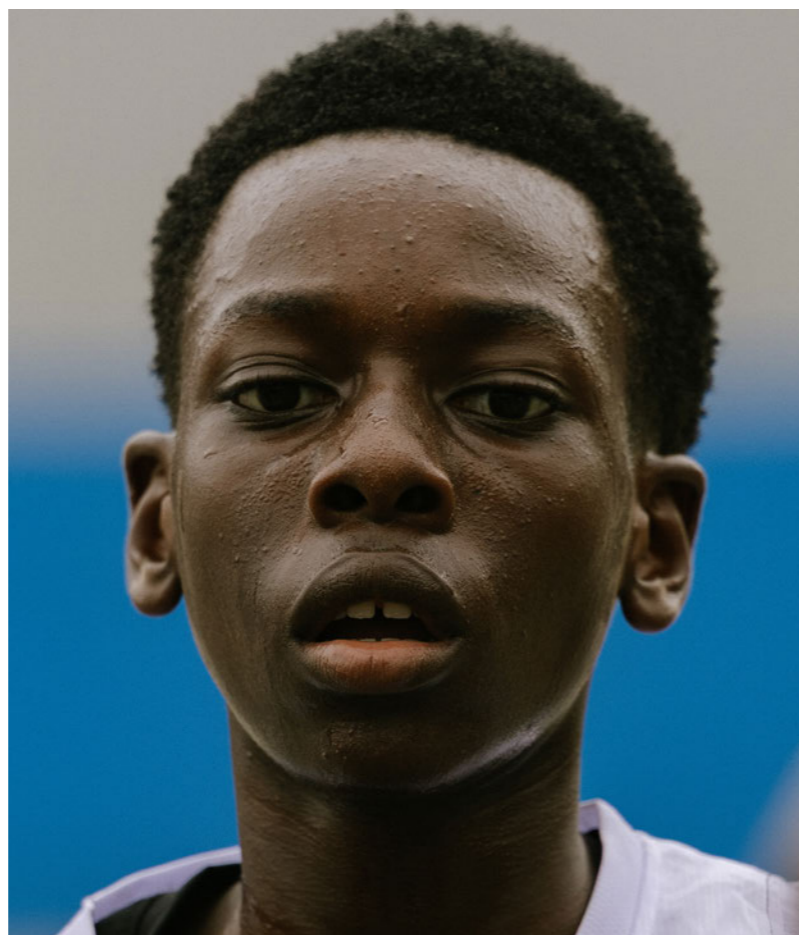
**21%**  
HAVE A BUDGET OF OVER €1 MILLION

## A SECTOR SHAPED BY THE DIVERSITY OF ITS FUNDERS

The funders of social innovation through sport are highly diverse (foundations and endowment funds, public-sector actors, sports federations, businesses, development banks, and so on). Several trends are worth noting:

- Grassroots organisations report annual budgets that, taken together across the field, are estimated at between €170 million and €300 million for 2024.
- The movement also draws on substantial financial backing. 21% of the funders surveyed have a budget of over €1 million, and 68% of these devote more than half of it to sports projects, representing 14% of all the funders surveyed.
- Indeed, 82% of the funding bodies that took part in the survey support sport for meeting educational, social or environmental needs, and attach equal importance on access to physical activity and sport (78%), while support for access to competition (47%) and for the construction or renovation of infrastructure (20%) lags behind<sup>46</sup>. Our survey also provides a relatively diverse overview of funding sources.

The sector's funding presents a sharply contrasting picture. Having historically relied on official development assistance (ODA), the "sport for development and peace" sector is now facing a major crisis. The drop in ODA (down 23.1% between 2024 and 2025, according to the OECD)<sup>47</sup>, shrinking cooperation budgets and growing competition between causes for funding are combining to weaken the organisations that depend on this funding. At first glance, the movement looks unlikely to escape unscathed. A closer look at the sector's own financial dynamics, however, calls for a more nuanced assessment. Indeed, for the period of 2024–2025, 45% of



<sup>46</sup> These trends concern all structures that support or fund organisations worldwide, without excluding the case of France.  
<sup>47</sup> OECD (2026). "A historic decline in foreign aid: Preliminary 2025 ODA data".



funders have reported a rise in their budget, and 34% a stable budget. This pattern, which holds for nearly eight in ten funders, indicates that the sector is holding up better than the wider climate might suggest.

These trends should nonetheless be read with caution. Foundations and endowment funds are driving most of this positive momentum, with budgets

rising or holding steady in significant proportions. Sports federations show a more mixed picture: most record increases or stability, but some report isolated decreases. Companies, for their part, show greater stability. This overall momentum nonetheless masks significant regional disparities, with, in France in particular, budgets have contracted sharply, while the trend is clearly positive in other parts of the world<sup>48</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

This apparent resilience must not obscure several structural weaknesses that are hampering the movement's progress. Funding for social innovation through sport remains closely tied to the calendar of major international competitions. The Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Cups: such events open windows of opportunity that unlock funding, attract sponsors and draw political attention. But the boost they generate rarely lasts, in any structural sense, beyond the competition itself. The resources go where the events are hosted, then move on to the next one. This dynamic follows the rhythm of spectator sport rather than that of social transformation, which is built over the long term. The risk, then, is to mistake a media surge with lasting change, and leaving organisations exposed, their economic models tied to event cycles over which they have no control.

A significant proportion of the organisations engaged in social innovation through sport ultimately remains dependent on international funders. In South and South-East Asia, for example, two-thirds of the funds received by those surveyed come from foreign sources<sup>49</sup>. The most economically robust programmes are often the ones built in partnership with international bodies and donors. Valuable as this support is, such dependence exposes recipients to strategic decisions taken elsewhere. When external funders shift their priorities, withdraw from a region or change their thematic focus, entire local ecosystems are left vulnerable.

Finally, the sums raised remain modest compared to the global sports economy, which is worth \$2.3 trillion a year — close to 2% of global GDP — and projected by the World Economic Forum to reach \$8.8 trillion by 2050<sup>50</sup>. The gap stems less from a shortage of funding than from a failure in the redistribution and clarity of how the movement is understood. Beyond a

circle of insiders, social innovation through sport remains largely unfamiliar to economic decision-makers. Within companies, executives find it hard to see what such a programme can bring to their organisation. Sponsorship still dominates decision-making, to the detriment of a logic of social transformation. As long as that mindset remains dominant, the sector will struggle to capture a meaningful share of the resources the sports industry generates.

These vulnerabilities all point to the same conclusion: the financial ecosystem of social innovation through sport depends far more on the resilience of its stakeholders than on the soundness of its models. Three challenges follow. The first is to capture a meaningful share of the wealth that sport generates and direct it towards social ends. The second is to break free from the event cycle — the reliance on major sporting events for visibility and funding. The third is to reduce the sector's structural dependence on a handful of funders. Meeting these challenges calls for both safeguarding existing funding and designing new economic models. The following section explores these paths.

<sup>48</sup> In France, seven of the eight organisations reporting a decrease in their budget belong to the category of major funders (ministries, local authorities, federations). Funding from development banks is also in decline, reflecting the contraction of resources devoted to cooperation. More broadly, in Europe, it is public funding that is contracting. Conversely, in Asia, more than 80% of funders report an increased budget. In Africa, this proportion is close to 50%. The global ecosystem for funding social innovation through sport is therefore not following a homogeneous trajectory: it is being recomposed, with a localised contraction in Europe and a more sustained dynamic elsewhere.

<sup>49</sup> FICCI, Pro Sport Development PRIA, *Understanding the Sport for Development Sector in South and South East Asia*, 2020.  
<sup>50</sup> World Economic Forum (in collaboration with Oliver Wyman), report *Sports for People and Planet*, January 2026.

Emerging models, which are vulnerable to *the current economic climate.*

**32%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS OFFER  
INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

BUT ONLY  
**6%**  
DRAW MORE THAN  
HALF OF THEIR BUDGET FROM THEM

**10%**  
OF ORGANISATIONS HAVE A BUDGET  
OF OVER €1 MILLION



One finding stands out from the survey: the movement's middle tier is substantial. 43% of the organisations identified have budgets between €100,000 and €1 million. This middle layer has gradually consolidated and is now serves as a key pillar in the sector's development.

## ■ A SECTOR MARKED BY A WIDE RANGE OF SIZES

The social innovation through sport movement is neither dominated by a handful of large international organisations nor reducible to a scattering of small, emerging associations. In recent years, it has come to comprise actors of widely varying sizes, now falling into four clearly identifiable tiers<sup>51</sup>.

- 10% of organisations have a budget of over €1 million: these are the most robust, present on every continent and in 18 countries.
- 22% have a budget between €500,000 and €1 million.
- 21% have a budget between €100,000 and €500,000.
- 30% have a budget below €100,000.

## ■ SOCIAL COMMITMENT REGARDLESS OF SIZE

Almost all the organisations surveyed pursue goals that extend beyond simply providing access to sport or competition. The most striking finding concerns those with the smallest budgets: 93% report non-sporting objectives, compared with 77% of those with larger budgets. Social innovation through sport is therefore not the preserve of the best-established players, able to devote resources to it. It is an approach pursued with particular vigour by the smallest — deeply rooted locally, often inventive out of necessity, and in direct contact with the social needs of the communities they serve.



## ■ HYBRID ECONOMIC MODELS

Nearly a third of organisations, 32% to be precise, report running revenue-generating activities. Four main sources stand out: the sale of licences or memberships (46%), of sporting services (45%), sponsorship (38%) and the rental of infrastructure (30%). Two further sources make up the rest: the sale of training (22%) and of products (21%). Most of those that generate revenue combine several activities rather than relying on a single source. This mix reflects the range of strategies they adopt in response to unstable external funding.

## ■ TABLE: THE DIVERSITY OF REVENUE SOURCES GENERATED BY ACTIVITIES<sup>52</sup>

	As % of those generating revenue	As % of all organisations
Sale of licences/memberships	46 %	15 %
Sale of sporting activities / services	45 %	14 %
Sponsorship	38 %	12 %
Rental of infrastructure	30 %	10 %
Sale of training	22 %	7 %
Sale of products	21 %	7 %

Total responses = 753 organisations

## ■ SELDOM FINANCIALLY AUTONOMOUS

Overall, financial autonomy through revenue-generating activities remains the exception. Among the organisations that engage in such activities, only 20% draw more than half their budget from them — that is, 6% of all those surveyed<sup>53</sup>. At the other end of the spectrum, around 30% of the smallest (those with annual budgets below €100,000) report generating revenue, but these activities make up only a small share of their overall budget.

Three obstacles, clearly identified by the stakeholders themselves, explain why this momentum has levelled off. The first is the limited size of local markets, which restricts the commercial potential of sponsorship, infrastructure rentals and the sale of training in many settings. The second is the weak business culture across part of the non-profit sector, inherited from a history shaped by grants; the shift to hybrid models therefore calls for new skills. The third, more structural, is the caution of funders towards such models: some, both public and private, remain wary of organisations that combine grants, sponsorship and the sale of services and products, fearing substitution effects or a dilution of the social mission. In practice, large-scale self-financing remains the preserve of a minority, since it requires a critical mass of resources: teams able to prospect, negotiate contracts and manage commercial activities; promising local markets; and facilities that can be rented out or offered as a service. Self-financing is thus a widespread practice, but one whose economic impact remains limited<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> 17% of the organisations have not answered the question.  
<sup>52</sup> These data concern global trends excluding the case of France. Trends including France vary little (+/- 3%) except on two points: the sale of training would be more important in France than in the rest of the world, and the rental of infrastructure would be more important in Africa than in Europe. We do not detail here the revenue models of organisations that generate more than 50% of their annual resources from these activities. This could be the subject of a subsequent publication.  
<sup>53</sup> We do not detail here the revenue models of organisations that generate more than 50% of their annual resources from these activities. This could be the subject of a subsequent publication.  
<sup>54</sup> The balance of the economic model is not reduced to own revenue. Some associations also seek to reduce their expenses by developing food or energy autonomy dynamics — an emerging dimension that would warrant specific analysis.



# Conclusion

As this first volume comes to a close, the following observation emerges: globally, the social innovation through sport movement is continuing to take shape, diversify and grow. Drawing on a survey of 936 organisations in 81 countries, case-study analyses and contributions from experts, this Panorama brings to light a phenomenon that has hitherto struggled to be recognised as such. It identifies the factors that unite these players, while acknowledging the differences that set them apart: their geography, history, sociological context and ambitions.

This movement has come of age in several respects. It has matured through a convergence of goals: 90% of the organisations surveyed use sport first and foremost as a tool to address educational, social, environmental or health needs. It has matured through a convergence of themes — health, education, the inclusion of women, mental health, youth empowerment — all part of an educational project in the broadest sense. Finally, it has matured through a shared framework for action: the integration of sporting and non-sporting activities. Two further dimensions add to these three defining features and underscore the movement's maturity. The first is the cooperation and partnerships built with schools, the sports movement and the health sector. The second is the growing engagement of funders: 81% of them now support sport for what it achieves beyond sporting practice itself, including within sports federations. The movement now reaches every continent.

This same movement, however, has yet to achieve stability in three key areas. Its funding remains

modest compared to the wealth the sports industry generates, and is being weakened by the shrinking of public funding in Europe. Its educators work in a profession marked by job insecurity and a lack of training. Its public funding frameworks remain siloed, struggling to recognise the cross-sectoral effects of sport. Overcoming these barriers does not rest with the organisations alone: it calls for a joint transformation of funders' strategies and public evaluation frameworks.

This shift from maturation to consolidation will define the agenda for the coming years. It will call for a shared effort: funders who commit to long term support, public authorities that break down the silos in their ways of working, sports federations that take their full share of responsibility for this transformation, and research that documents both the effects of sport and the conditions that make them possible. A mature movement is not, for all that, a stable one. It is on this consolidation that the scope and depth of the social transformations that sport can bring about will depend in the years to come. Without it, social innovation through sport will remain a movement that is strong in its convictions, but fragile in its means.

The second volume of the Panorama will extend this analysis by focusing on the question of scaling. This is precisely one of the conditions for the consolidation that this present volume calls for.

# Recommendations

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To better connect sporting practice with the response to social, educational, environmental and health needs, three initial recommendations have been formulated to support social innovation through sport. They are addressed both to public and private funders, in order to inform their choices, and also to grassroots stakeholders, to support and strengthen their advocacy.



**Recommendation 1**  
Jointly develop an international framework of practices that identifies the conditions for social innovation through sport, *thereby giving the movement greater clarity and visibility.*

## Why?

The Panorama makes three complementary observations. First, the “sport and development” movement tends to see itself as separate from organised sport, even though many of the organisations within it also work to promote access to sport. Second, organised sport’s own stakeholders are themselves setting up social innovation through sport. Finally, a wide range of labels exists, each specific to its national context (socio-sport in France, sport social in Chile, and so on). This diversity does not facilitate either the understanding or the recognition of the movement.

## How?

Set up an international working group that brings together the sector’s stakeholders (grassroots organisations, federations, funders, researchers) tasked with mapping out the various approaches and methods, and identifying the points of convergence that could form the basis of a shared framework of practices.

**Recommendation 2**  
Build an international network to develop *shared certification and toolkits for educators in the field.*

## Why?

Beyond the proliferation of labels, the sector’s low profile can also be attributed to the lack of recognition of the skills and impact of its educators who they themselves are poorly acknowledged. The Panorama shows that a number of organisations are already working to certify educators’ skills: their ability to analyse needs, adapt the content of activities to the people they work with, to help develop psychosocial skills, etc.

## How?

Conduct a study on the challenges relating to certification and resourcing of educators, followed by the establishment of an international working group that would make it possible to bring together the progress already made. A common core shared core of skills could then emerge which could be adapted individually by each organisation in line with its national context.

**Recommendation 3**  
Encourage players in the sports industry — professional sport, media, events — to devote at least 1% of their sponsorship budget to *philanthropic giving for social innovation through sport, whether voluntarily or through a tax incentive.*

## Why?

The Panorama shows that public and private funding remains the main source of the movement’s development, with revenue-generating activities a complementary means of financing. In addition, organisations in certain parts of the world remain heavily dependent on short-term private funding, which can undermine the sustainability of their work over time.

## How?

Building a coalition of committed companies and foundations would make it possible to pilot ways of collecting, governing and redistributing funds. Measuring the impact of this coalition’s work would then help build a case for advocacy more widely: including towards other private stakeholders, to encourage them to join the initiative, and towards public authorities to bring about changes to the tax framework for philanthropic giving in sport.

# Methodological appendix

## How the questionnaire was distributed

The questionnaire was distributed through several channels. It was first shared with the organisations on the steering committee and with Res Sportiva's founding partners. Funders then passed it on to the projects they had supported around the world over the past decade. Because some of these are firmly rooted in their local areas, it could also circulate through informal professional networks.

## The characteristics of the sample

The sample's geographical coverage is satisfactorily representative compared with the most recent comparable census<sup>55</sup>. While the conditions of 2017 are not those of 2025, it is striking that two studies using such different<sup>56</sup> methodologies arrive at a similar or nearly identical proportion of organisations in certain geographical areas.

Although diverse, our sample has certain particular features. It consists mainly of well-established organisations: 88% have been running for at least four years, and 56% for more than ten<sup>57</sup>. In other words, this survey captures the sector's most established and recognised organisations more than its newest ones. It also focuses on those with paid staff (88%), that is, those having at least one paid employee. Informal groups, volunteer collectives and entirely volunteer-run associations are therefore absent from it. The challenges they face, and the way they operate, could well be different, and would warrant a survey of its own.

Finally, the limited presence of sports clubs in the sample (111 clubs, compared with 579 non-profits) is likely due to the fact that most of the clubs involved are seeking to improve access to sport and competition, rather than running activities that address non-sporting needs, such as education, employment, or health.

## Self-reported data

The vast majority of respondents are presidents, senior managers, or project and programme leaders (74%). While the survey draws mainly on what the organisations surveyed reported about themselves, two measures were put in place to safeguard the quality of the data.

First, when the quantitative data provided, the number of paid employees, the number of cities concerned by a scaling-out, the number of beneficiaries, deviated significantly from the trends observed on the rest of the sample, publicly available

In each case, those contacted were invited to forward it using what is known as the "snowball" method: that is, to share it with at least one other in their immediate circle. This method of distribution had several effects on the composition of the sample, the scope of the study and potential biases.

	2017 Survey	2025 Panorama	Comparison
Africa	382	233	40 % - 30 %
Europe	151	257	16 % - 34 %
South and Central America	99	38	11 % - 5 %
Asia	115	94	12 % - 12 %
Middle East	26	19	3 % - 3 %
Oceania	12	7	1 % - 1 %

Table: Distribution of the number of organisations across two global studies

Only a small number of clubs fall fully within the scope of social innovation through sport. These features helped us contextualise our sample, and to distinguish between what it revealed from what it left out.

It is worth noting that the number of responses from France was particularly high—both for grassroots organisations<sup>58</sup> and for those that support them<sup>59</sup>. This over-representation of France could well have skewed the continental trends. To limit this effect, the trends presented in the report have been systematically compared with and without the organisations whose headquarters are in France. Whenever a bias was detected<sup>60</sup>, global trends excluding France were presented, and then where relevant and useful, how the French case differed from them was specified.

information from the name of the structure to the email address of the respondent was verified.

Second, when this verification was not possible, the declared data (number of paid employees, number of beneficiaries, number of cities concerned by a scaling-out, annual budget) was systematically cross-referenced in order to detect any inconsistencies. Any entries presenting significant anomalies were replaced by the "do not know" modality.

<sup>55</sup> Svensson, P.G., Woods, H. (2017). "A systematic overview of sport for development and peace Organisations", *Journal of Sport for Development*, Volume 5, Issue 9.

<sup>56</sup> The Svensson and Woods survey draws on the detailed analysis of databases supplied by historical and central organisations of the sport and development sector.

<sup>57</sup> This predominance of organisations over four years old can be found in other regional or national studies. See for example FICCI, Pro Sport Development & PRIA (2020). *Understanding the Sport for Development Sector in South and South East Asia*.

<sup>58</sup> Of the 753 grassroots organisations, 175 have their head office in France.

<sup>59</sup> Of the 183 responses, 57 come from France, i.e. 31.15% of the total. This proportion creates a collection bias, which limits the capacity to generalise the results. The analysis must therefore be considered as an exploratory snapshot. It reflects trends identifiable in the responses collected but cannot claim strict statistical representativeness. The margin of error, already limited by the size of the sample and its uneven structure, calls for caution in the interpretation of results and a systematic comparison (when possible) with the existing literature.

<sup>60</sup> A margin of error of more than 3% on the trends.

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