

SPORT



Photo: ©SAPC/Tom Buik

Street motions and emotions

Is it possible that traditional games and sports – those old ones we used to play as kids – can contribute to building communities, help all of us do a good workout and help develop community relationships? I believe this is

Maria Dalgarno reports on an innovative project encouraging young people from Scotland, Croatia and Italy, to share their traditional sports, and break down cultural barriers.

badly needed and can help develop healthier relationships in society.

When three European Sports Associations in Croatia, Scotland, and Italy heard about the European Sports Grant being offered through

Erasmus+Sport to any three Sports Associations in Europe, they said a collective ‘yes’. This involved showcasing their own traditional games and sports, and promoting them to local and national governments and sports associations, through visiting each other’s countries and involving their local communities. That’s how it started in May 2016 led by the main founders and animators: Sasa

Varmuza, an IT consultant and founder of the youth group ‘Animi’ in Split, together with Irena Konda member of the local Focolare group, who runs an after school children’s programme; Thomas Buik of Glasgow who founded the SAPC (St Angela’s Participation Centre) in Glasgow, and Dr. Giuseppe Auriemma who founded ‘Centro Vita’ youth sports association in Somma Vesuviani, Italy.

Working together with the Kinesiology Department of the University of Split, over a 10-month period, and with the help of many local families and volunteers, they kicked off in Split in April 2017, Darnley, Scotland in August and Somma Vesuviani, Italy, in September.

Each host country had to prepare ten of their own local traditional games and sports and display them, while the visiting country prepared five. The youth from each country who took part said it was ‘*a fantastic way to get to know the other countries, their language, their customs, and we look forward to making this grow in the future*’. It was clear to all that games and sports do overcome barriers, if they are lived with the right attitude. As many said, it wasn’t so much about winning but learning from each other and getting to know one another.

The group in Split demonstrated, to the joy of all, the ‘old karts’ game. The ‘karts’ were hand made by one of the volunteers of Udruga (a retired mariner and excellent carpenter) along with other very old games. Kornelija and Luka, the two youth ambassadors from Split, said it was a fundamental experience for their life and *‘we learned so much from the other countries, also about their culture and way of life; we look forward to going back.’*

Then off to Darnley in Scotland where Tom Buik said: *‘I knew from the start that this programme would offer different approaches and be a fantastic experience for all.’* Eight hundred children took part in the day, coming from local schools, with teachers, locals, some politicians who had lent valuable support and the media who gave great coverage. Scotland was proud to also showcase the famous ‘Keepie-Uppie with the renowned icon of Scottish football, Jim Baxter.

SAPC prepared a fantastic opening and closing ceremony, and to the joy and awe of the visitors it included a Scottish piper opening the day. They also prepared a medal award ceremony for everyone who took part. One of the children said she had never received a medal before and walked away a very happy girl! The principal of St. Angela’s primary school, Mrs. Watson said: *‘meeting the Croatian and Italian teams will remain in the hearts and minds of our students for a long time to come.’* Bill Garrett of Glasgow Life Sports Association said: *‘it was a magnificent event.’* SAPC received recognition and various awards from the Scottish Parliament for their work at national and European level.

Somma Vesuviana with its group ‘Centro Vita’ with Dr. Auriemma kicked off the world famous ‘Palio di Somma Vesuviana’.

The youth, locals and Mayor were delighted, and just to be united to Scotland on the big day, the heavens opened and it poured! Nevertheless, the games went on – no stopping these athletes! At the close of this magnificent year of traditional games and sports, the three Association founders agreed that they would do this again.

Auriemma wrote on Facebook:

‘Street games, because they are spontaneous, build relationships. They bring people, cultures and generations together... My experience in Split and Glasgow and then Somma Vesuviana was extraordinary and emotional. Even our different languages weren’t an obstacle. With Thomas, Sasa, and their volunteers from their Associations, the friendship among us built real relation-

ships made up of simple gestures and hospitality. I saw how Europe in this way becomes an experience of friendship and mutual trust. Building an event together, like this created great enthusiasm, above all amongst the youth, and it also involved the local people of the various cities. It is a project, which I hope, will continue.’

Sasa Varmuza wanted to contribute his IT skills and created a new ‘sports app’ called ‘Streetmotions’ which will be available soon. The participants use this to collect points as they do sport in their city, clubs and schools. At the end the winning club/association receives a prize! Sasa said he believes *‘this brings about healthy competition and helps everyone to do something physical for their own health; we prepared their games and sports so that no one was excluded!’*



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Obviously it’s a winner! Participating in simple games or sports together helps break down barriers of all kinds – from loneliness and isolation to health issues. It shows that running traditional games and sports which Erasmus+Sport is promoting, can indeed make a great contribution towards building a more united world. It can also change our often isolated and lonely cities and make them places of relationships, unity, joy and trust; and improved health too, because they are all interwoven. 🌊

Further information available at:
www.streetmotions.eu
www.sapcglasgow.co.uk
www.facebook.com/paliodisomma/

