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Subject: Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Sport Innovation

Delegations will find in the annex the conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Sport Innovation, as approved by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 17-18 May 2021.

Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Sport Innovation

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

RECALLING THAT

1. Pursuant to Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity, and its social and educational function.
2. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ acknowledges sport as an important enabler of sustainable development and recognises its growing contribution to the achievement of development and peace through its promotion of tolerance and respect, and its contribution to the empowerment of women, young people, individuals and communities, as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.
3. The Council Conclusions of 4 December 2013 on the contribution of sport to the EU economy, and in particular to addressing youth unemployment and social inclusion, recognised the potential of sport for creating jobs and for supporting local economic development, together with its ‘spill-over’ effects on other sectors.²

¹ The United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015 on ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, paragraph 37

² OJ C 32, 4.2.2014, p. 2-5

4. The Council Conclusions of 5 December of 2014 on sport as a driver of innovation and economic growth recognised that sport is an important driver of innovation and economic growth, and that the sports industry is characterised by constant and rapid waves of innovation, and considered that innovations have made sports technology a leader in certain fields of applied science.³
5. The Council Conclusions of 13 December 2018 on the economic dimension of sport and its socio-economic benefits considered that the sport-related dimension of innovation has not yet been sufficiently considered in terms of GDP and employment because of a lack of data.⁴
6. The Council Conclusions of 29 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector, call on Member States, in cooperation with the sport movement, to strengthen synergies with several sectors, including innovation, in order to provide new opportunities for athletes and for all citizens to be physically active, including through the use of digital tools.⁵
7. The European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2021-2024, adopted by the Council on 4 December 2020, recognises that sport could contribute to achieving the overall political priorities of the EU, and in particular the goals of various other policy areas such as innovation, digitalisation, economy, education, health, youth, social affairs, inclusion, equality, gender equality, urban and rural development, transportation, environment, tourism, employment, and sustainability; and that those policy areas could support the promotion of sport, based on cross-sectoral cooperation.⁶

³ OJ C 436, 5.12.2014, p. 2-5

⁴ OJ C 449, 13.12.2018, p. 1-5

⁵ OJ C 214I, 29.6.2020, p. 1-4

⁶ OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 18-22

8. The Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle of September 2017 sets out the commitment to encourage the knowledge and innovation communities, supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, EIT Health and EIT Food, to develop and boost innovative approaches to promoting and raising awareness of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.
9. The Council Conclusions of 4 December 2020 on promoting cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of sport and physical activity in society highlight that sport and physical activity have numerous links with other policy sectors including innovation, research, digitalisation, economy, health, and employment, and that cross-sectoral cooperation can play an important role in stimulating innovation and the economic dimension of sport.⁷

RECOGNISING THAT

10. Innovation should be regarded as a key priority for the development of the sport sector. Sport innovation is expected to foster opportunities to increase citizens' participation in sport and physical activity; enhance socio-economic development through sport; and address present and potential future challenges, thereby making the sport sector more sustainable and resilient.
11. In a public policy context, sport innovation should be addressed through a holistic, multi-level and cross-sectoral approach, building on close cooperation between public and private institutions, and contributing to sustainable development and to adequately tackling the wider socioeconomic challenges that the EU faces.
12. Around two-thirds of Europe's economic growth over the last decades has been driven by innovation⁸. Research and innovation boost the resilience of our production sectors, the competitiveness of our economies, and the digital and ecological transformation of our societies, including the sport sector.

⁷ OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 18-22

⁸ Horizon Europe impact assessment - Staff Working Document (link: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd_2018_307_fl_impact_assesment_en_v7_p1_97_7548.pdf, page 8)

13. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted the entire sport sector⁹. While affecting countries differently, the consequences stretch across all levels of governance and dimensions of sport. Additionally, it has both exposed and aggravated existing weaknesses and inequalities, and accelerated the adoption of innovative practices, highlighting the need to develop holistic approaches to address structural challenges.
14. Sport is generally regarded as an early adopter and a source of new ideas and innovations¹⁰, due to its ability to evolve on the basis of technological and social trends. Furthermore, people involved in sport, such as, athletes, coaches, teachers, volunteers, as well as other staff and individuals, can have a leading role in fostering innovation.
15. Sport can also be a driver of technological and social innovations that bring benefits in terms of economic attractiveness and related job market growth across the EU. Research shows that many regions in the EU have included sport in their smart specialisation strategies¹¹.
16. Innovative social, organisational, political, digital, and technological approaches are necessary to tackle existing and emerging threats and challenges which can affect both the Union and sport common values, such as those relating to inequality, human rights violations and abuses, commercial pressure, the exploitation of athletes, doping, racism, xenophobia, violence, corruption, and money laundering.

⁹ Council Conclusions of 29 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector

¹⁰ EPSI - Strategic research and innovation agenda 2016-2021, p. 14

¹¹ SHARE initiative Research paper on Mapping smart specialisation strategies for sport (2020)

17. Developments in technology, such as those in Big Data, 5G, cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality, biotechnologies, and the application of gamification¹² principles to technology, are affecting the way sport is viewed, experienced, performed, and organised, while also providing an area for new business opportunities and sustainable solutions. These developments represent unprecedented opportunities and a necessity for sport-related aspects such as coaching, fan engagement, event management, smart cities, and active education and mobility.
18. The sport movement, and especially sport organisations, can use innovative technological and digital methods of communication and broadcasting, as well as non-formal and informal learning to promote the common values of the EU through sport, and using their influence to *inter alia*, raise awareness of and prevent intolerance, social exclusion, gender stereotyping, misogyny, homophobia, racism, xenophobia, marginalisation, harassment, abuse and violence, including sexual violence and any form of discrimination.¹³

CONSIDER THAT

19. Innovation is a multifaceted concept with a broad scope, including product, service, process, organisational, institutional, social, green and policy innovation.
20. Innovation can be a driver for development in any of the sport dimensions (social, economic, organisational), shaping how sport is played, viewed, and organised, and enhancing the positive role and practice of sport in society, as well as in the transition from healthcare to care for health, social integration and cohesion, and education.

¹² See definition in the Annex

¹³ OJ C 196, 8.6.2018, p. 23-26

21. Innovation in products and services related to HEPA¹⁴ can have a positive impact in terms of reducing sedentary lifestyles and increasing physical activity levels, such as improving and maintaining health and functionality in the elderly, decreasing the prevalence and management of obesity and non-communicable diseases, and promoting health, fitness, and well-being for all ages, and in a variety of settings, including the workplace.
22. Digital transition, through growing connectivity and new technological equipment, is enhancing training and learning methods, improving performance, can reduce the risk of injuries in sport. It is also increasing the engagement of citizens, athletes, coaches, sport staff, and fans, and leading to a fast development of new products and services in sport.
23. Digital tools, such as sports wearables¹⁵, augmented reality, and digital twins, as well as their combination with gamification principles, are enabling new perspectives on sport performance, co-training, sport surveillance, health monitoring, and artificial intelligence-assisted physical activity, providing new opportunities for athletes, both at elite and grass-root level, and for all citizens to be physically active.
24. Innovation can increase the capacity of the sport sector, especially of grassroots sports organisations, by improving working methods and processes, creating synergies and networks, and contributing to a more resilient, greener, better governed and transparent sport sector. Innovation can also contribute to the development and implementation of the key topics listed in Annex I to the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024.

¹⁴ HEPA - Health-Enhancing Physical Activity

¹⁵ See definition in the Annex

25. Social innovation¹⁶ in and through sport¹⁷ can positively affect the involvement of all vulnerable groups and people with fewer opportunities to do sport ¹⁸, by creating alternative tools for engaging in sport and physical activity, thus contributing to their social inclusion and empowerment, while improving their quality of life, health and well-being.¹⁹
26. Innovative approaches to urban and spatial planning are enabling adequate mobility solutions and the incorporation of sport infrastructures in urban, rural and nature areas. Smart and greener cities are increasing proximity and accessibility for citizens, thereby triggering a healthier and inclusive society, and boosting the attractiveness of sport and physical activity.
27. Innovative sport infrastructures, and the processes for their construction and maintenance²⁰, can embrace the objectives of the New European Bauhaus, and provide better and safer conditions for sport and physical activity, while being more sustainable, environmentally friendly, accessible and energy-efficient.
28. Sport, in its diverse contexts, such as activities and events, can contribute to the European Green Deal and to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by implementing innovative waste and resources management measures, promoting active and sustainable mobility, and raising awareness about climate and environmental challenges.

¹⁶ See definition in the Annex.

¹⁷ E.g. Social Innovation Academy, Homeless World Cup Foundation, Street Football World, HAND– Handball for a new destiny, PLAY International.

¹⁸ OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 40-44

¹⁹ OJ C 196, 8.6.2018, p. 23-26

²⁰ E.g. Multipurpose spaces, recycled construction materials, usage, capture and filter rainwater, solar panels, highly energy-efficient lighting systems.

29. The technological and digital transformation can significantly impact Major Sports Events due to the emergence of new business models and practices. While innovative approaches present opportunities for the optimisation of sports events delivery, fostering more cost-effective and sustainable events, as well as enhancing viewership and audience engagement, the possible negative effects and illegal practices associated²¹ with them must be monitored and prevented.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, IN LINE WITH THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO

30. Promote and support research and development initiatives and projects, particularly with universities and research centres, in the field of sport innovation, to create and disseminate knowledge, and provide tools for better policy development and sport innovation benchmarking, thereby contributing to a Smarter Europe²². For such initiatives and projects, explore and promote financial support from relevant EU instruments, such as the Cohesion Policy funds and Horizon Europe.
31. Support and encourage cooperation between the sport movement and other relevant organisations, regional and local authorities, universities and research centres, civil society, and the private sector on addressing barriers and challenges to sport innovation and entrepreneurship, such as those related to financing, brain drain, data protection and intellectual property rights²³.

²¹ E.g. Online piracy, illegal online transmissions of sport broadcasts, illegal content provision, match-fixing, illegal ticketing fraud.

²² One of the five main objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027.

²³ E.g., Patents, brands, trademarks, copyright- related rights related to broadcasting.

32. Enhance cooperation on sport innovation with international organisations such as the World Health Organization, the World Anti-Doping Agency, UNESCO, the OECD, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and the Council of Europe, as well as with other relevant organisations, encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation and supporting innovative measures and research aimed at promoting sport innovation.
33. Explore innovative solutions, including digital and technological innovations, to protect the integrity of sport and combat corruption in sport, by developing and adopting appropriate tools, to tackle cross-border challenges such as match-fixing, doping²⁴ and violence, and to preserve a clean, safe, non-discriminatory and healthy sport environment.
34. Promote multilevel partnerships and the exchange of good practices, including schools, youth organisations, the sport movement (particularly sport clubs) and other relevant organisations, to embrace a culture of innovation and experimentation, especially in addressing specific local issues.
35. Support cross-sectoral cooperation between the sport sector and other relevant sectors, especially on using innovative and digital tools, as well as on identifying synergies between the relevant instruments, in order to make sport more resilient to future potential crises, and to anticipate societal challenges.
36. Promote the exchange of good practices and experiences of sport innovation among Member States, as well as the mobility of researchers, at local, regional, national, European, and global level.

²⁴ E.g dried-blood-spot (DBS) testing, gene doping

37. Promote and facilitate co-innovation²⁵ among the sport movement, other relevant organisations and other sectors' organisations at all levels of governance, between public and private institutions, also by enhancing the performance of innovation clusters, by stimulating academic research and application, and by supporting community-led and mission-oriented innovation in the field of sport.
38. Strengthen the role and the inclusion of sport and physical activity as a tool for socio-economic development, including the promotion of sport innovation and projects in the field of social innovation in and through sport, within regional and local strategies as well as through smart specialisation strategies²⁶. In particular, promote smart specialisation as a tool to increase cohesion policy, regional development and economic transformation.
39. Support initiatives and projects exploring innovative solutions for the promotion and development of the social and educational dimensions of sport at all levels, such as physical education, grassroots sport, coach training, sport management, youth engagement and active citizenship, thereby contributing to the continued access to sport and physical activity.
40. Support and promote the role of sport as an enabler of sustainable development, in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as a contributor to the European Green Deal and the Paris Agreement, by promoting sport innovation and embracing greener practices.

²⁵ See definition in the Annex

²⁶ SHARE initiative Research paper on Active Development: An Integrated Contribution from Sport and Physical Activity to Economic and Social Development (2020)

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO

41. Raise awareness and promote the potential of sport as a driver and source of innovation, and as a tool to reconcile and address a multitude of practices and values, combining the traditional and the modern.
42. Promote cooperation with and between the Member States involving the sport movement, relevant third countries, sports clusters and networks; raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities of such cooperation and its outcomes; and facilitate online information sharing on sport innovation between Member States and other relevant stakeholders.
43. Disseminate information about available financial support opportunities for sport innovation-related initiatives through EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, Life, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and EU4Health; as well as the Cohesion Policy Funds (mainly the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the EU recovery initiatives, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU, while facilitating ways in which the sport movement and other relevant organisations, as well as sport-related projects can benefit from these.
44. Promote the sharing of best practices on sport innovation in the EU context, as appropriate, and continue to support the mapping of sport innovation,
45. Highlight the significance of sport innovation by promoting the availability of statistics to measure socio-economic trends and other relevant information, by addressing the topic of sport and innovation in the context of the working formats, as defined in the EU Work Plan for Sport²⁷, and by exploring other possibilities for developing the topic, including applying novel approaches.

²⁷ Notably at the Commission's expert groups meetings on green sport and on the recovery from the pandemic, and groups of interested Member States.

INVITE THE SPORT MOVEMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATIONS, WHERE APPROPRIATE, TO

46. Adopt and implement organisational innovation processes²⁸ to foster socio-economic developments and promote and educate about healthy lifestyles, as well as about safe, clean, fair and non-discriminatory sport.
47. Promote and support sport clubs, especially local clubs, and grassroots sport, in embracing digital transition and implementing a culture of innovation and experimentation.
48. Collect, discuss, and communicate the innovative ideas and suggestions of athletes, coaches, referees, and other sport staff on how to improve their safety and performance and the fairness of sport competitions, while reducing the health risks and environmental impact.
49. Cooperate with universities, research institutions and the private sector, by supporting the collection of data on the contribution of the sport-related dimension of innovation.
50. Contribute to the dialogue on and to share information and best practices on sport innovation.

²⁸ E.g. in working methods and processes, synergies and networks, governance and transparency, and organisational culture.

References

The Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council recall

- Council Conclusions of 4 December 2013 on the contribution of sport to the EU economy, and in particular to addressing youth unemployment and social inclusion (OJ C 32, 4.2.2014 p. 2–5)
- Council Conclusions of 5 of December of 2014 on sport as a driver of innovation and economic growth (OJ C 436, 5.12.2014, p. 2–5)
- Council Conclusions of 15 of June 2017, on sport as a platform for social inclusion through volunteering (OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 40–44)
- Council Conclusions of 8 June 2018 on promoting the common values of the EU through sport (OJ C 196, 8.6.2018, p. 23–26)
- Council Conclusions of 13 December 2018 on the economic dimension of sport and its socioeconomic benefits (OJ C 449, 13.12.2018, p. 1-5)
- Council Conclusions of 29 June 2020 on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector (OJ C 214I, 29.6.2020, p. 1–4)
- Council Conclusions of 4 of December 2020 on promoting cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of sport and physical activity in society (OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 18–22)

- Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 January 2021 – 30 June 2024) (OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 1-11)
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015)
- European Commission Mapping study on measuring the economic impact of COVID-19 on the sport sector in the EU (2020)
- SHARE Initiative Research Paper on Mapping smart specialisation strategies for sport (2020)
- SHARE initiative Research paper on Active Development: An Integrated Contribution from Sport and Physical Activity to Economic and Social Development (2020)
- Public Health Best Practice Portal (European Commission):
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/>
- Horizon Europe impact assessment - Staff Working Document
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- European Commission European Innovation Scoreboard 2020: The EU's increasing innovation vital for sustainable and inclusive recovery (22.06.2020)
- EPSI - Strategic research and innovation agenda 2016-2021
- The Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle (2017)
- New European Bauhaus initiative
https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

2. Definitions

For the purpose of these conclusions, the following definitions apply:

- *'Sport wearables'* are sport-related devices that can be worn by people when doing physical exercise or practising a sport. These include devices such as smart jewellery (rings, wristbands, watches, pins, etc), body-mounted sensors (which monitor and transmit biological data for healthcare purposes) and fitness trackers (often in the form of wristbands or straps, that monitor things like physical activity and vital signs).
- *'Social innovations'* are to be understood as new strategies, concepts, ideas, and organisations that meet social needs of all kinds — from working conditions and education to community development and health — that extend and strengthen civil society.
- *'Co-innovation'*, or open innovation, is when a company works directly with its customers and partners to solve business problems. In a sports context, 'co-innovation' should enable the different stakeholders (public administrations, sport movement, sport clubs, athletes, private companies, etc) to share resources collectively and collaborate on sustainable solutions. Additionally, the speed of co-innovation should allow quicker insights on shifting sport and business trends, thus providing all sport partners with the agility to predict and adapt to these trends.
- *'Gamification'* is the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts. It can also be defined as a set of activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements.