

NATIONAL REPORT



COUNTRY:
Italy

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1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

In Italy, the sports system is covered by the Department for Sport at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Specifically, this department regards sport in all its forms, at both a competitive and amateur level, as an important training tool for social integration and cultural dialogue, as well as a driving force for the dissemination of fundamental values such as loyalty, commitment and team spirit.

More specifically, the Department for Sport identifies the lines for strategic planning at the administrative level within the framework of the Government's priorities. Its actions aim at strengthening the coordination of protection and social inclusion policies and offering opportunities for self-employment activities for the new generations, also by leveraging convergent pathways with the industrial sector.

For these purposes, the Italian Sport Department works in synergy with local authorities, sector associations and key figures. In this sense, an important contribution is made, for example, by the CONI Sports System Observatory, which was created to measure the economic and social dimension of sport, at the request of the European Commission, in order to provide data and information to public and private decision-makers to guide strategic decisions.

The Italian sports system is also composed of:

- The governmental Agency Sport e Salute: <https://www.sportesalute.eu>, which designs and implements the policies to promote the social role of sports;
- The Italian Olympic Committee CONI and all affiliated federations: <https://www.coni.it/it/>

2. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY?

From the results of the interviews conducted with Italian key informants, it is clear that they do not perceive any formalized national sport diplomacy strategy. In general, they think that the sport diplomacy strategy implemented by their organisations is currently not integrated with wider government action.

More specifically, the key informants say that the main objectives of sport diplomacy in Italy are to promote peace and inclusiveness, spread and share values, and drive development. Normalising or reinforcing diplomatic relations and creating business opportunities and driving economic growth are, according to our findings, important goals of Italian sport diplomacy. Finally, improving the country's global reputation and creating or promoting a nation-brand are not important for the sport diplomacy strategy.

3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT DIPLOMACY GOVERNANCE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?

As for the organisation of Italian sport diplomacy governance, our research shows that it is decentralised and different actors are in charge of specific programmes and resources. In other words, coordination of sport diplomacy actors and activities in Italy is weak.

More specifically, regarding the actors involved in sport diplomacy processes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is quite important, the Ministry dedicated to Sport is important and a dedicated institutional body (e.g., an agency, a department) is essential. For instance, among other actors, one Italian key informant said that UNAR (Antidiscrimination Office) is a relevant player for the national sport diplomacy strategy.

As for the role of Italian city authorities and local institutions in sport diplomacy actions, they are involved on an *ad hoc* basis / only some of them are involved and receive funds for sport diplomacy. Generally, “we can say that the concept of sport diplomacy is not known or used by local authorities. They participate in events/debates promoted by associations (sports organisations or NGOs) working directly on this topic.”

Likewise, the Italian sports bodies are involved on an *ad hoc* basis by other sport diplomacy actors, as “they are involved (especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) when some special activities are carried on in projects abroad (e.g., international cooperation using sport as a tool of sport diplomacy). In general, sport is seen mainly as a physical activity, used for education and socialisation, not as a real tool of diplomacy.”

As for the mainstream media, the key informants say that they are not involved in sport diplomacy activities, and most are not interested in this specific topic, but it is possible to involve them in specific projects working with sport and integration/social inclusion/international cooperation. “It is stronger than the position of media managed by sports organisations/NGOs which underlined the role of sport diplomacy.”

“Private companies use their brand to communicate powerful messages conveying values connected with sport diplomacy. Some of these companies take direct action in specific projects in disadvantaged areas of big cities to bring people together and promote social inclusion and peaceful resolution of problems.”

The perception of our key informants changes in respect of athletes. They are empowered and constantly engaged, they receive specific training in sport diplomacy and can play an autonomous role, according to our findings. “They are fundamental as representatives. Sometimes it is difficult for them to join a project/event completely or be part of a real sport diplomacy strategy. It is easier involving athletes of a single sport or former athletes, not linked with their team or sponsors.”

Finally, the role of organisations, such as UISP Roma, is to develop skills and competences working in projects abroad together with different NGOs (e.g., ISCA, Terres des Hommes, CTM) and in disadvantaged areas in Italy in cooperation with different associations (e.g., Save The Children). From this different experience, the organisation develops training courses and tools using sport diplomacy. They try to pass on these skills at all levels of associations and to involve more and more national and local authorities in working on this topic.

4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

Regarding the level of public economic resources available for Italian sport diplomacy activities, the key informants involved in our research say they are scarce and, considering the pre-Covid19 period, few actions were attributable to sport diplomacy.

In detail, diplomatic and political efforts to attract mega-events and activities of employing high-profile sports people are very much implemented in Italy. However, media coverage, international broadcasting and the organisation of trade missions are less implemented.

As regards the sport diplomacy activities implemented in Italy in collaboration with less developed countries, partnerships for sport competitions often implemented, and, in descending order, mentoring or training programmes, funding for collaborative projects aimed at specific values, sport exchange programmes and sport fellowship schemes and grants are less implemented.

As for sport diplomacy activities implemented in our country aiming at empowering sport diplomacy actors, political support is the most implemented, followed by training for diplomats and athletes, dedicated resources and coordination tools, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

Generally, the most important sport diplomacy activities include “using sport as a tool for cultural mediation, conflict resolution, and the creation of a network including local/national authorities, third sector associations, target groups, and beneficiaries, as well as activities that we do working with prisoners, refugees, people with mental illnesses, and migrant communities.”

5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE

As for the major weaknesses of Italian sport diplomacy activities, “recognition of the importance of sport can play a major role in the work of diplomacy, not only for the logical role of organising international events or sports exchanges, but because it is possible to develop complex strategies where different stakeholders can work together and engage in social dialogue starting from sports activities, even in contexts where the power of *normal* diplomacy cannot succeed.”

Moreover, according to our results, creating a synergic network of different stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors represents the biggest challenge and opportunity of sport diplomacy activities, and the possible disadvantages are the different national points of view and the interference of professional sport.

Among the advantages, the key informants mentioned: the better use of EU funds and differentiation of EU funds (at the moment there is only one specific programme on sport and it is often difficult to use other programmes for sport diplomacy); better networking and a closer relationship between sport diplomacy and other forms of diplomacy; and, finally, a better understanding of the definition at EU level.



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