



Analysis of a National survey of opinions shared by people practicing as well as non-practicing sport in Italy

MOVE. Movement Valorize Europe

"New Competence for Trainers"

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Introduction

The aim of this second on-the-field research carried out in the framework of the project MOVE, is to collect the opinions of sportspersons and non-sportspersons on sport practice and active ageing.

The survey goals were to determine what strategic skills sport professionals should have, what expectations when sport is practised, what factors may encourage non-sportspersons to practise sport. The main questions tackled in the survey concern the following fields:

- Possible barriers to sport practice (organizational, financial, structural, etc.);
- Personal, collective and social aspects related to sport and its practice (promoting a healthy life style, ways to achieve a sound life style, the need for socialization, sense of belonging, personal successes, etc.).
- What the level concerning some of the key skills of sport professionals should be, so as to meet the needs of those who want to do sport.

To better set the sport “phenomenon” in a national perspective, here are some data concerning sport practice (at amateur level 2015) in Italy.

In our opinion, a read-out of this data highlights the existence of a very considerable potential “basin” who unlikely has received a response to their needs, therefore the various professional profiles performing in the world of sport must be ready to integrate these needs within their skills on new social scenarios.

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Nearly 40% of Italian teenagers in the age group 13-14 years practise no sport activity (on top of the 2 hours a week envisaged by the school calendar), or practise less than two hours a week and the percentage raises to 44% as far as girls are concerned. So, a potential “basin” of people, among whom a large proportion of young people are not involved in any kind of sport activity.

The read-out of the data concerning how many people do sport activity (or are physically active) per % age group that observe a constant decrease in sport practice related to age, results to be very interesting. This data that may be partially “physiological” probably underlines the lack of an appropriate sport “offer” with the progressing of age, in fact only 20% of people who are 75 year old or over do sport activity, 40% in the age group between 65 and 74, 50% between 60 and 64.

Moreover, the proportion of people who practise sport on a constant basis in small towns equals only 17%, while 48% of the population has a sedentary life style.

People who practice sport activity in relation to their qualification:

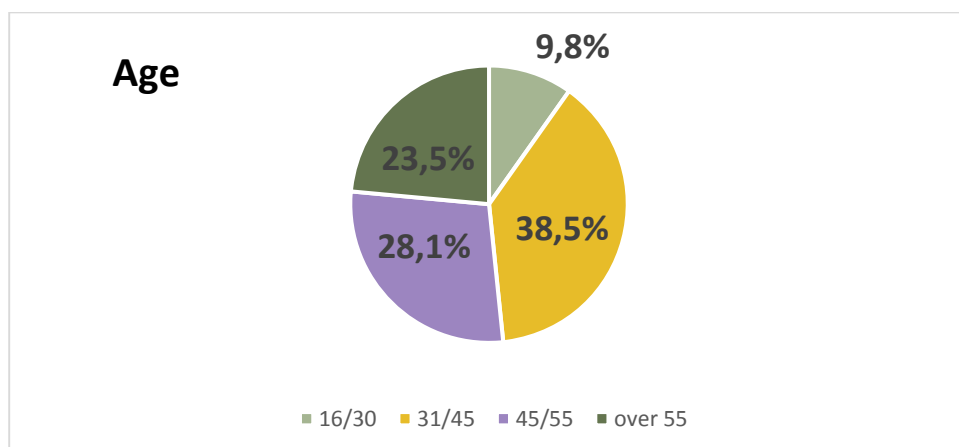
- Degree or higher qualification 44.6
- School-leaving certificate 35.6

- Secondary school certificate 24.7
- Primary school certificate or no qualification 23.6

MOVE has submitted 200 questionnaires across Italy to people who habitually practise amateur sport and to those who do not practise any. From here on, we will analyse our findings.

Characteristics of the sample

The chosen sample gave priority to middle aged people, an age band who more rarely carries out sport activity at a competitive level, for whom sport often plays a role in socialization and physical wellness, and increases the rate of sedentary life style. Particular attention was paid to people over 55, also enabling to explore past experiences of people who are heading towards the old age, for whom sport may have an important function in terms of inclusion and development of self-care in the fields of health and wellness.

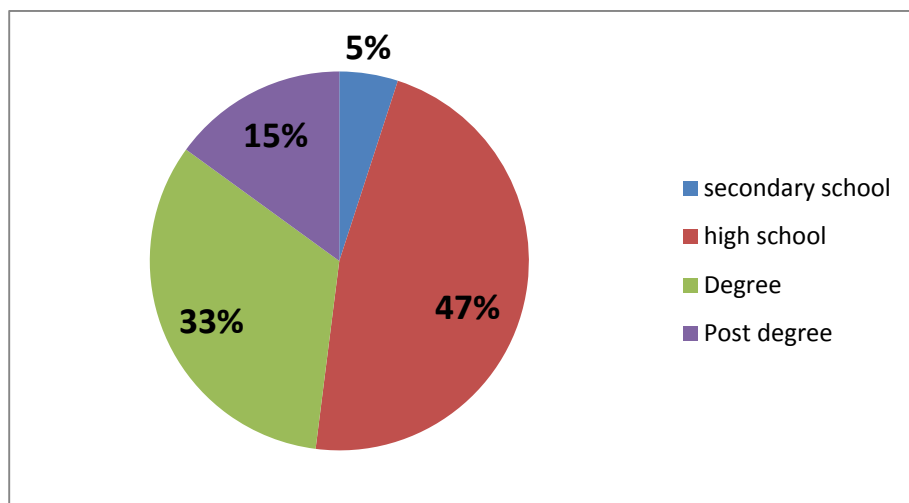


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From the viewpoint of gender difference, our sample is organised in a quite balanced manner, and present a light overrepresentation of women - 55% women against 45% men. The territorial origin highlights a large majority from the city of Rome (73% of the sample), where the research was primarily carried out, while the remaining 27% is distributed among other municipalities on a national scale. Among the respondents' nationalities, a large majority is Italian (92%) and only 8% is composed of other countries' nationals.

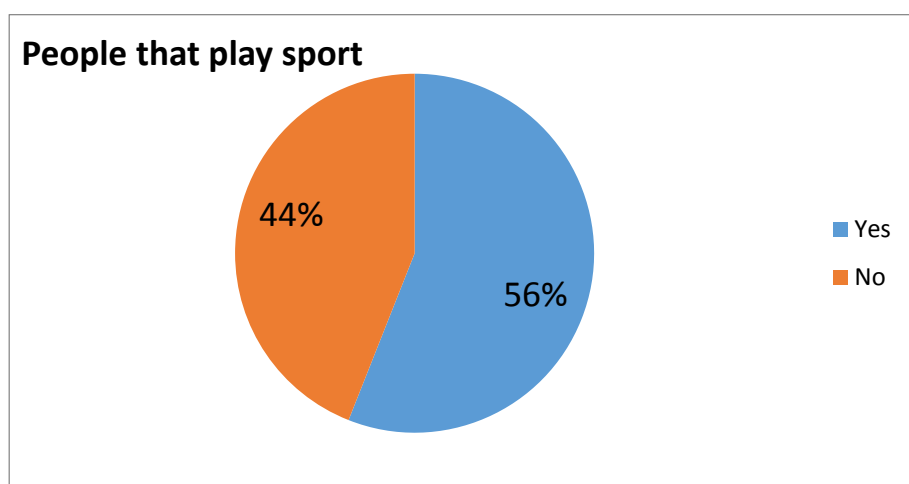
The profile of our sample in terms of educational level is quite high, however higher than the national average, also considering the age group characterizing it.

In fact, no sample possesses only a primary school certificate, as well as most of the sample is graduated. Thus, we think of a sample well capable to master the language and the complexity implied by the research.



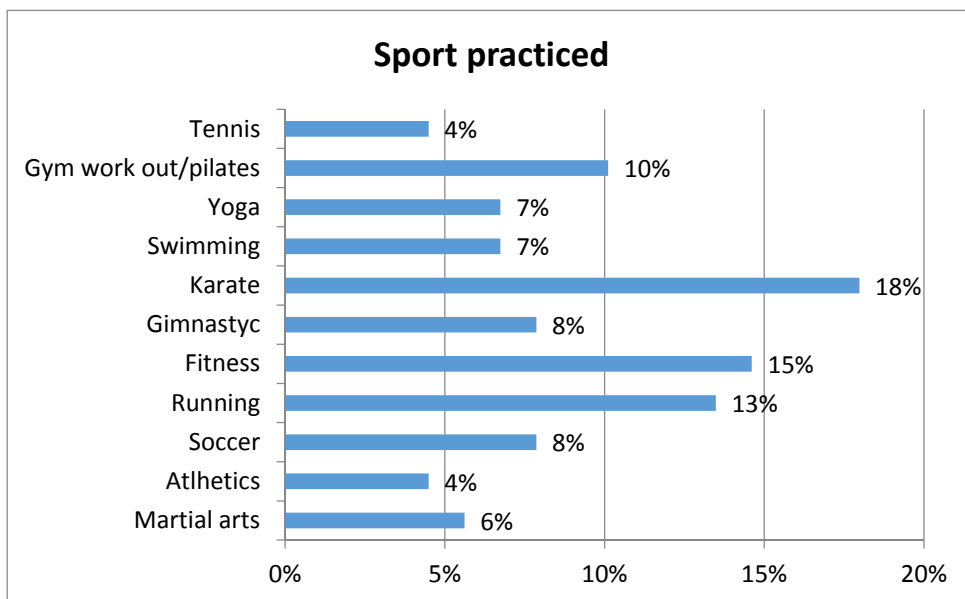
As we referred to in the introduction, the sample is distributed among those who currently practise sport at amateur level and those who do not practise it or have stopped practising it. The proportion of sportspersons is slightly higher, but the on-the spot proportion allows for an easy comparison among viewpoints, which appeared to be interesting with particular reference to the section concerning the skills that sport operators are expected to have.

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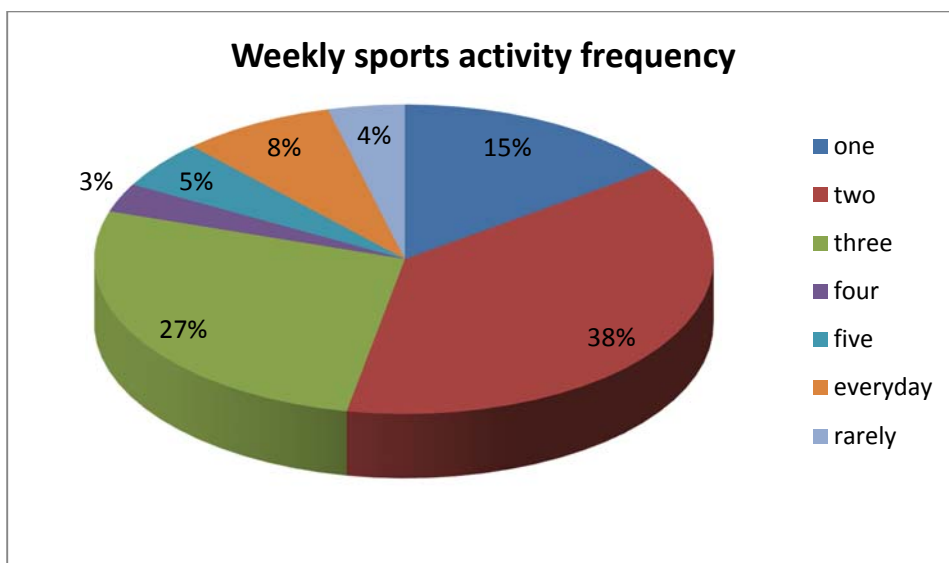
Among those who practise sport on a regular basis, the variety of sport disciplines of interest of the respondents allows us to be provided with a wide spectrum of viewpoints about several sports, which imply various cultures and the number of functions attributed to sport. Most of them are individual

sports rather than team sports, but many of these – although they are individual (like martial arts or light athletics) - envisage a strong involvement of the group dimension.



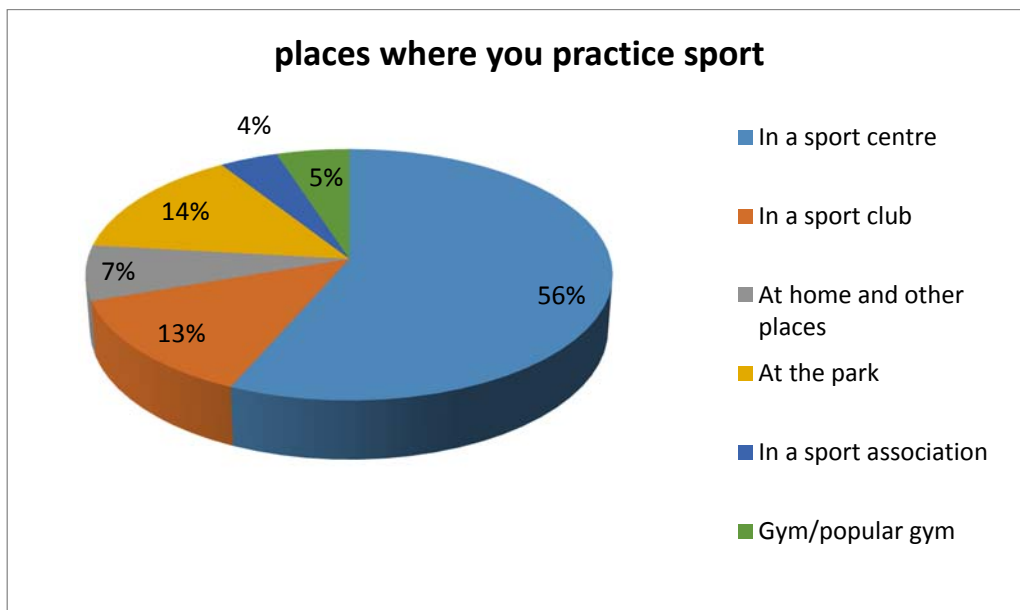
53% of the respondents do sport activity once or twice a week, 27% three times a week and 4% rarely with discontinuous frequency; only 16% carry out more intensive sport practice on 4, 5 or even seven days a week (this frequency may pre-figure a conception of sport that is no longer just amateur). Of course, we talk about proportions built upon approximately half the sample who practises sport activity, so those who have a very intense relation with sport are less than 10% out of the global sample.

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Sport is primarily practised in gyms, sport centres, where sport instructors, coaches and operators generally perform. This part of the sample has therefore a direct experience in the relation between a sport operator and a sport user, an aspect that will result to be significant in the section of the questionnaire regarding the skills that sport operators are expected to have.

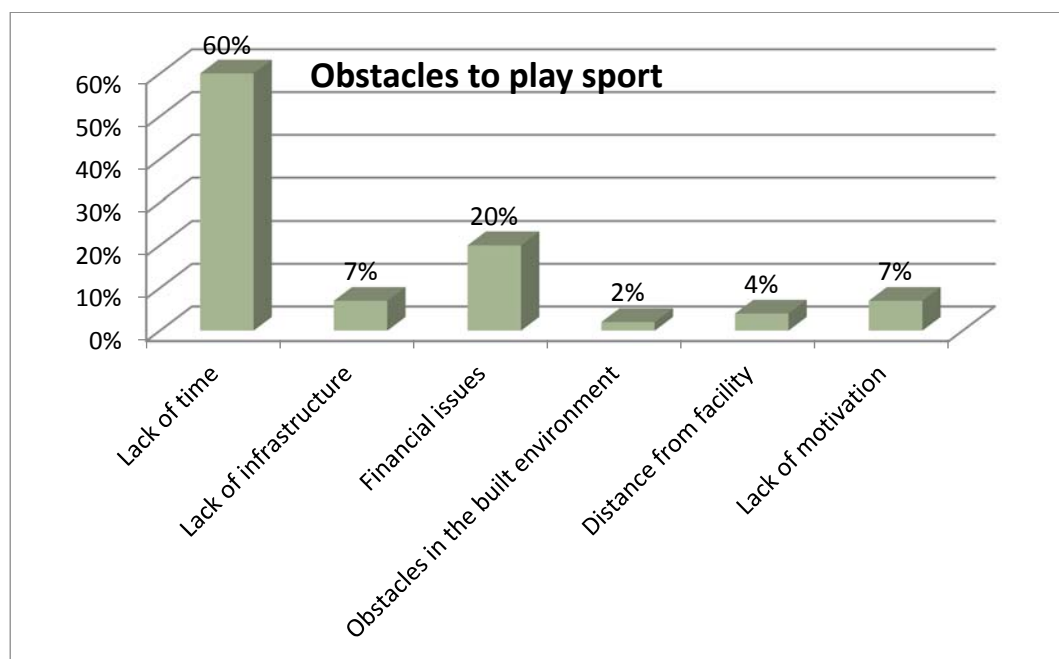
Overall, 20% of people autonomously practise sport at home, at the park or in other places, the others utilize sport facilities and sectoral professionals to a certain extent.



Barriers to sport practise.

Those respondents to our questionnaire who practise no sport activity were asked what the key barriers or motivations for deciding not to do any sport at all were, at least at this stage of their life. Apparently, the main motivation was related to the lack of time and less, of income; on the contrary, lacking or difficult-to-be-reached infrastructures appear to be a rather weak reason, also as the evidence of a broad proliferation of sport facilities and opportunities, even if these are private and payment services. Poor impact appears to have low motivation too. So, people would like to do sport and would also have available facilities but often, they cannot conciliate their life and work time or cannot incur sport activity costs.

This should highlight that sport is a "space for the self", a place for wellness and socialization, which we cannot dedicate ourselves to but we would theoretically like to have.

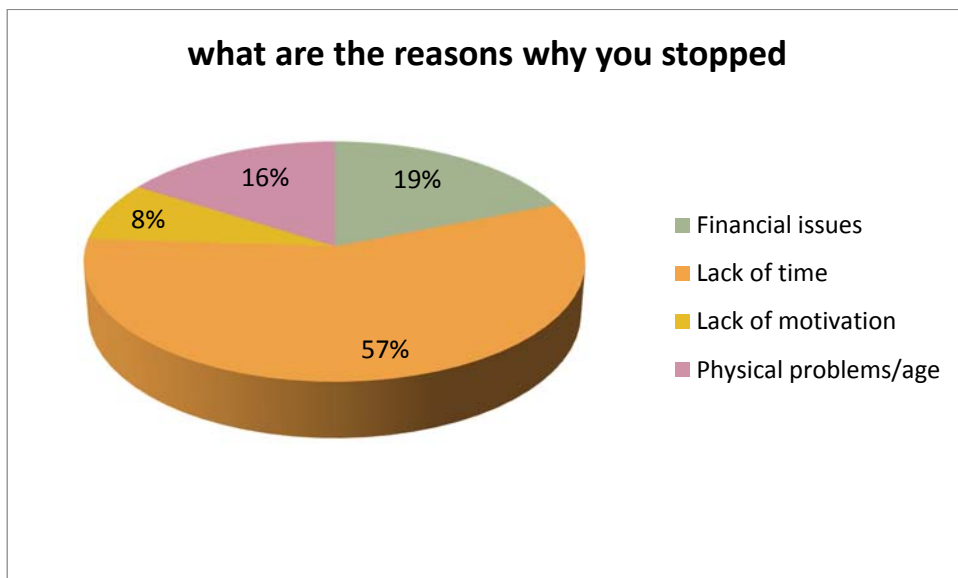


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Evidence to this interpretation comes from the answers to the question "Why did you stop practising sport" and again, the first option concerns the lack of time, the second the lack of money, following an option related to physical problems or age, while only 8% state that they stopped practising sport due to lacking motivation.

So, not practising sport is a majorly frustrating experience, or even a denied right more than a choice.

91% gave a positive answer to the question whether they would take up this activity again after removing the barrier.



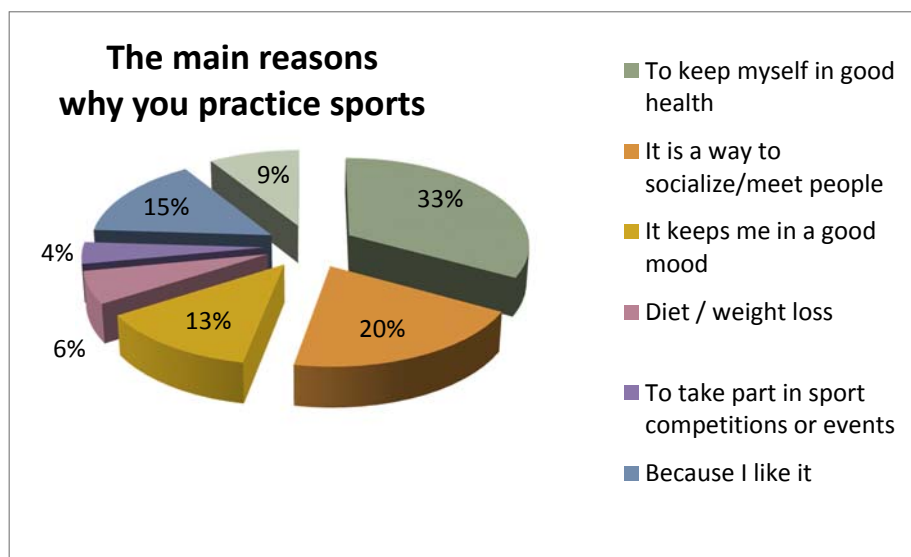
On the other hand, evidence that this difficulty is not encountered when accessing facilities is given by the answer to a specific question of the questionnaire where the respondents were asked: how difficult reaching a sport facility is. 76% believe that it is easy, 13% state that it is easy if you are motivated, while 10% underline that low cost or free opportunities exist too.

Reasons for choosing sport

A section of the questionnaire focussed on the meaning that people attribute to sport in their life, why they choose it and what skills and learning enable to experiment in their opinion.

In some questions (e.g. related to the expressed skills) the opinions of sportspersons and non-sportspersons are equally interesting because they allow us to explore the social role that those who currently have no direct experience in sport, attribute to the latter.

Concerning the question **"What are the main reasons why you practise a sport activity"** most answers refer to body care, physical shape and health, while a number concerns the scope of socialization and psychological wellness, much less that the aspects liaising with sport results and performance.



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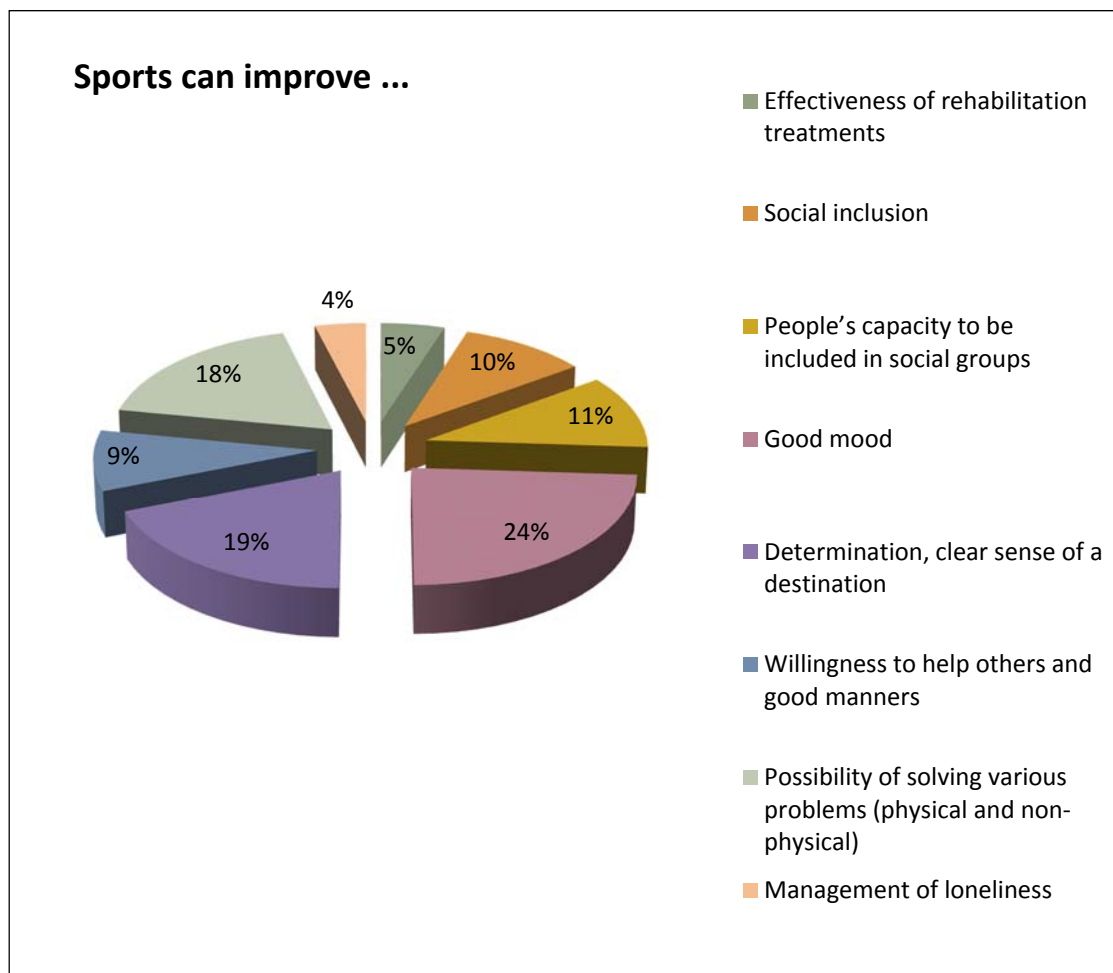
Proportions do not refer to the respondents rather to the answers given, which are more numerous seeing that the question envisages more answer options

In fact, if we gather together the aspects related to health and body, the total percentage is 48%, that is the same proportion deriving from summing up the whole of choices relating more to psycho-social aspects, fun, good mood and socialization, while the aspects linked to performance are very low (4%) and result from the aggregation of two types of answers, one concerning the realization of competitions and the other concerning the achievement of better results.

The answers to the question on the aspects that sport activity may improve (question N. 20 of the questionnaire) appear to be quite coherent with what mentioned earlier. Much attention is paid to the psychological aspects again as a means to improve good mood, but partially to those relating to the sense of belonging and social inclusion, as well as health-related aspects of course.

A relevant proportion also emerges from this question stating that sport can improve determination and ability to pursue the goal, an interesting data for the identification of the necessary skills of the sport operator, who will have to be able to encourage processes of motivation and of focusing on the

goal. As we mentioned earlier, this data is not as much linked to the respondents' focus on aspects related to sport performance (very low results among the roles attributed to sport), rather it is linked to the dimensions of self-discipline and self-esteem.

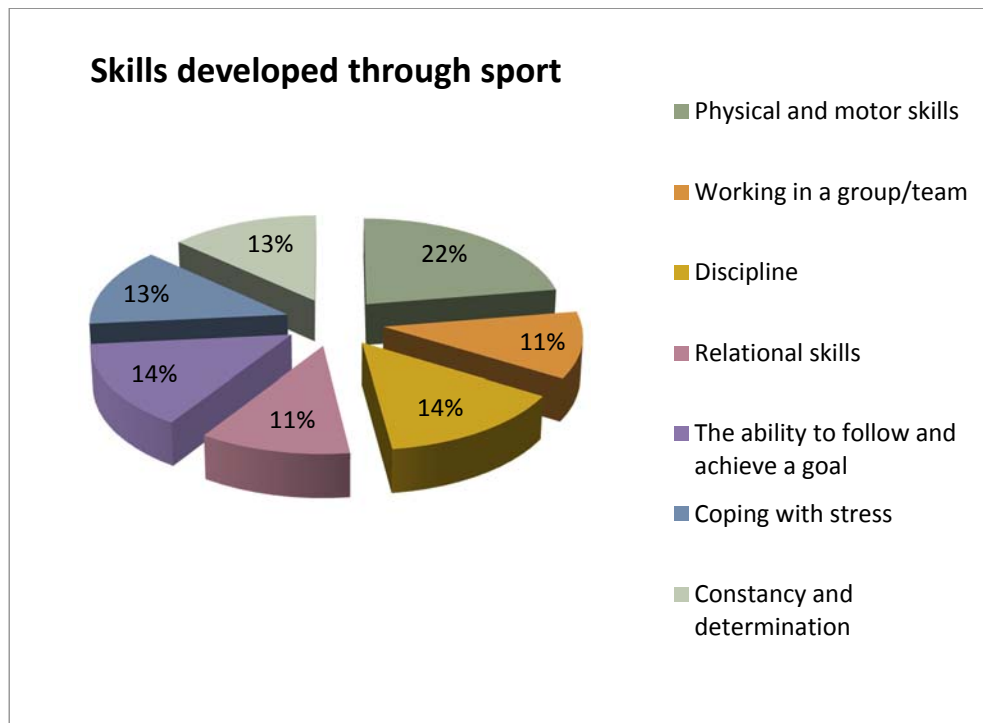


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Proportions do not refer to the respondents rather to the answers given, which are more numerous seeing that the question envisages more answer options

Actually, according to our sample, among the skills and attitudes, which can be acquired through sport experience, many go in the direction of focusing on the goal, discipline and determination. Once motor abilities have been taken for granted, 41% of the answers head for this direction when we aggregate discipline, ability to pursue a goal and determination; considering that we talk about the proportion of answers in one question with 5 possible options, this means that most respondents highlighted this

aspect. On the contrary, relational aspects and group work skills appear to be lower than expected, maybe because of the prevalence of individual sports against those sports practised by our sample.



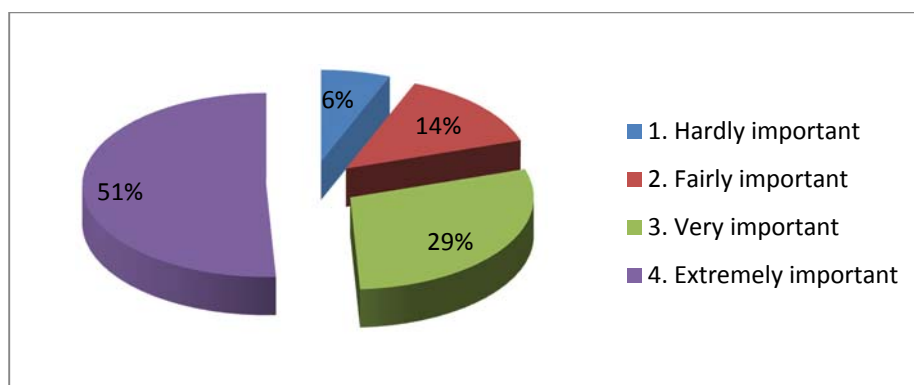
Proportions do not refer to the respondents rather to the answers given, which are more numerous seeing that the question envisages more answer options.

Strategic skills of sport operators

The core of our survey concerns the identification of the strategic skills of sport operators, which in this case are considered from the perspective and the expectations of actual or potential users. In this regard, we identified a series of strategic skills, to which the respondents gave a score from 1 to 4 with the possibility to give 0 points too. The score was attributed in relation to how much competence for that professional profile is considered as useful. The question asked: "According to your experience, how important is it that a sport operator (instructor, coach, master, etc.) has the following features?". The skills appraised were 17, the results emerging from the survey are outlined below and enable to make a distinction among the answers given by both sportspersons and non-sportspersons, where discrepancies are highlighted.

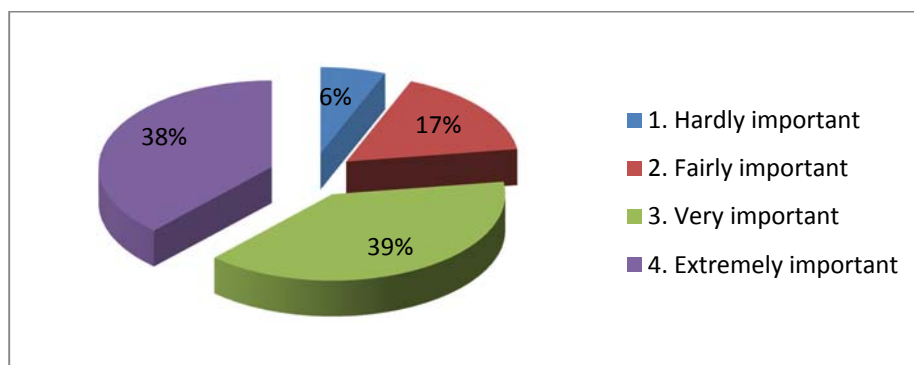
Area of communication and relational competences

1. Should the coach express himself/herself in a clear and legible way

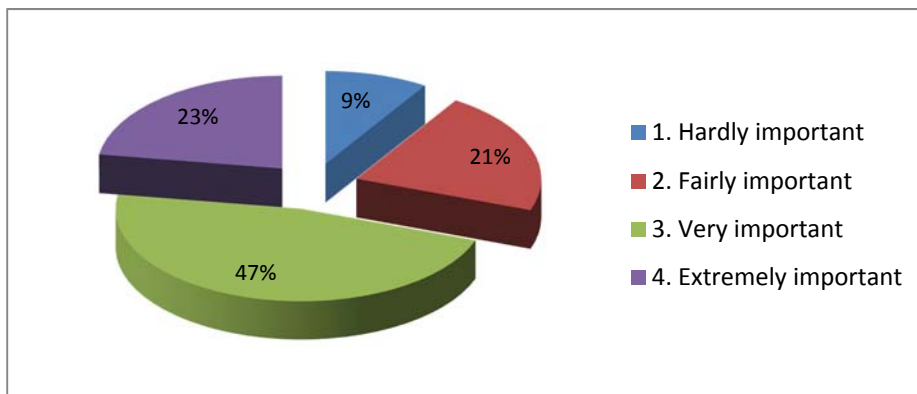


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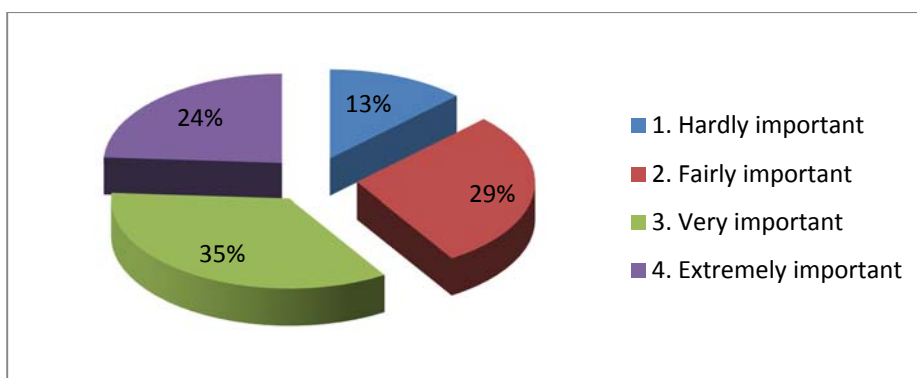
2. Should the coach be empathetic



3. Should the coach be able to interact with different groups



4. Should the coach encourage others to express their point of view even if it is contrary his/hers



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This first competence area appears to be considered as an important one by the respondents, in fact high scores, 3 and 4, in the case of the first two competences reach approximately 80%, around 70% for the third, while they go down to approximately 60% for the fourth. Given even higher values than “four”, we can observe how the communication scope – on which greater expectations are laid – is **functional communication** in the first place, namely **clarity** of the first competence, and how expectation weakens gradually as the relational competence becomes more and more refined and closely related to a comparison with diversity.

Interacting with various groups and being able to encourage a different point of view for a large part of the respondents does not appear to be so relevant, maybe because it is considered to be more pertaining to the sphere of assistance and educational professions. Whilst the ability to work harmoniously/becoming empathetic for most of them results to be an important competence in sport too, even if not so much as the ability to be clear.

By matching data deriving from the answers by sportspersons and non-sportspersons, it is interesting to notice that the aspect concerning empathy is apparently acknowledged more by those who do sport rather than by those who do not, while the ability to encourage others’ opinion is acknowledged -

even though slightly - more by those who do not do sport. It appears how being closely involved in sport would enhance the empathetic aspect of the encounter with the sport operator, while a sharing of opinions with the latter is recognized a lower value.

Answers of those who practise sport

2. Should the coach be empathetic	%
Not important	0%
Hardly important	7%
Fairly important	18%
Very important	32%
Extremely important	44%
	100%

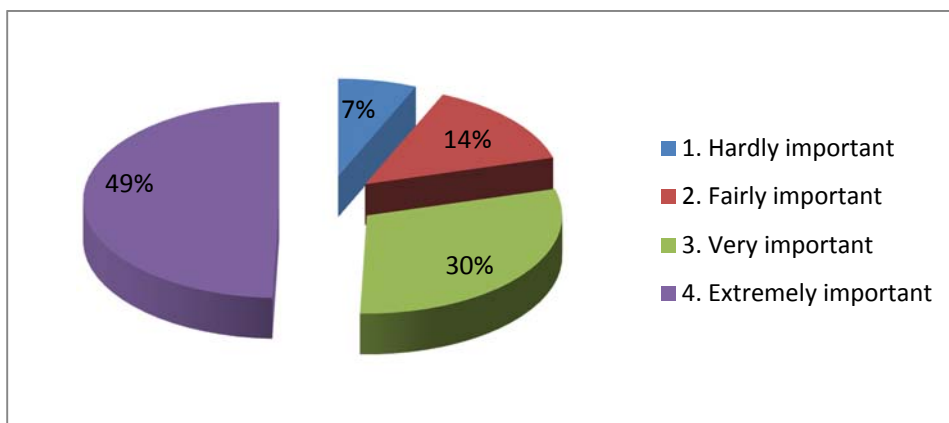
Answers of those who do not practise sport

2. Should the coach be empathetic	%
Not important	1%
Hardly important	6%
Fairly important	18%
Very important	45%
Extremely important	29%
	100%

Area regarding leadership, competences related to the ability to motivate, to focus on the goal, rules and collaboration.

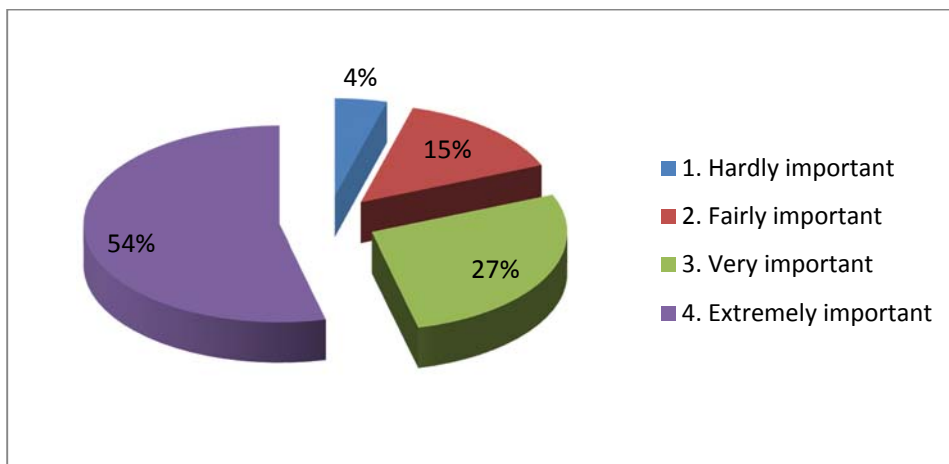
An area that appears to be emerging already from the previous questions is the one linked to helping people focus on their goal, give themselves discipline and motivate themselves. We have summarized this area as that of leadership. To this respect, we affirm that these skills are not merely targeted to performance but also to development and greater definition of the personality, both individually and in relation with the group.

5. Should the coach keep the undertaken commitments

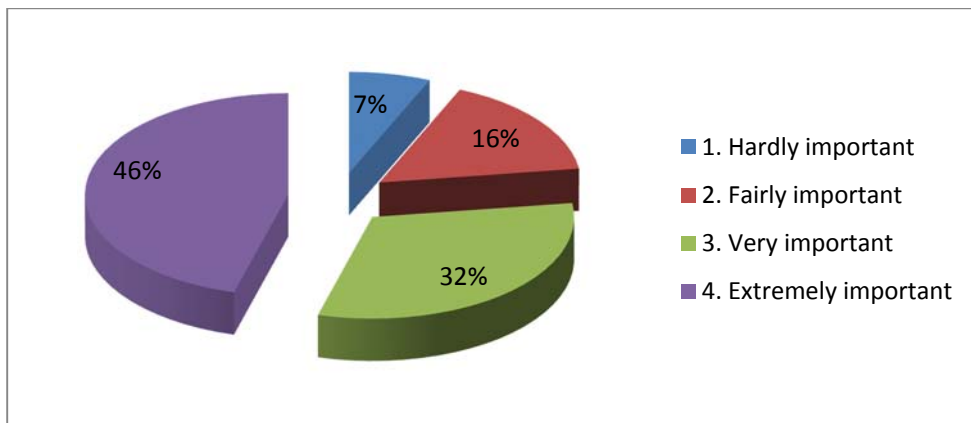


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6. Should the coach promote motivation and cooperation within the group to improve the quality of teamwork

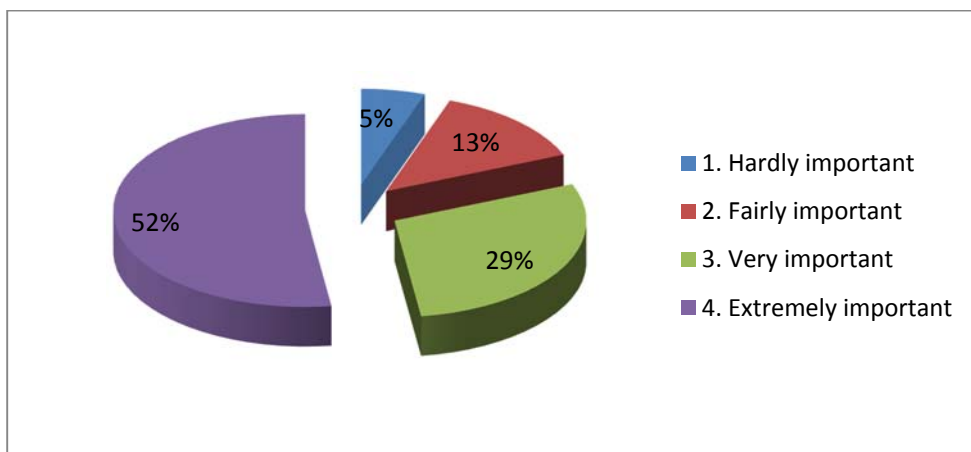


7. Should the coach promote respect for discipline and its rules

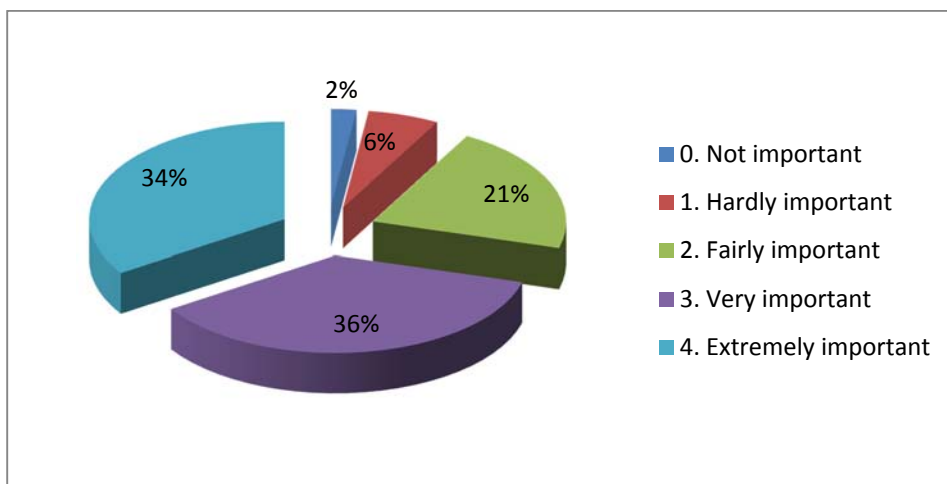


8. Should the coach create a positive work environment by promoting and supporting group identity and cooperation among all members in order to achieve common goals

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9. Should the coach always maintain a high level of concentration and attention in order to achieve the common goal



This area may appear to be the only that matters according to what was identified by our sample in terms of expected competences, as well as, among the others, to be complying with what is mentioned in the previous passage about attitudes that sport can develop, as far as the ability to pursue the goal, determination and the ability to motivate oneself are concerned.

Actually, if we put together other attributes to skills (3 and 4) 4 out of 5 competences in this area reach the approximate proportion of 80%, while the last remaining one is about 70%.

Competences 6 and 8 appear to be particularly meaningful exceeding score 4 by 50%, both relating to the ability of the leadership to be motivating and creating a positive group atmosphere.

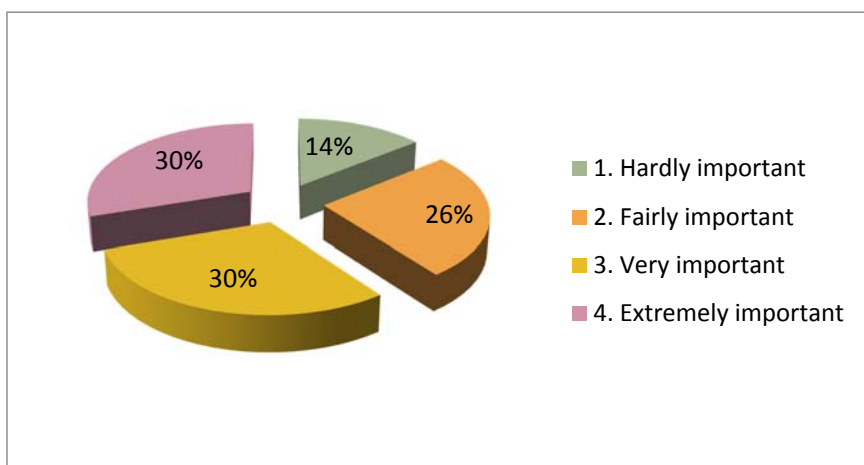
Among the others, the proportion "4" of these two questions is equally higher for both sportspersons and non-sportspersons, while non-sportspersons tend to attribute a lower value to the other questions of this area.

In particular, 84% of sportspersons attribute the two highest scores (3 and 4) to competence 7 linked to the ability to help rules and discipline application, while this proportion lowers to 67% for non-sportspersons. From several viewpoints, among strategic skills that of **being capable to motivate** emerges, which means helping people set goals for themselves, build self-esteem. A quality relating to emotional leadership capable not to focus only on performance rather on the process that is built in relation to the sport path.

Area of organization and management skills

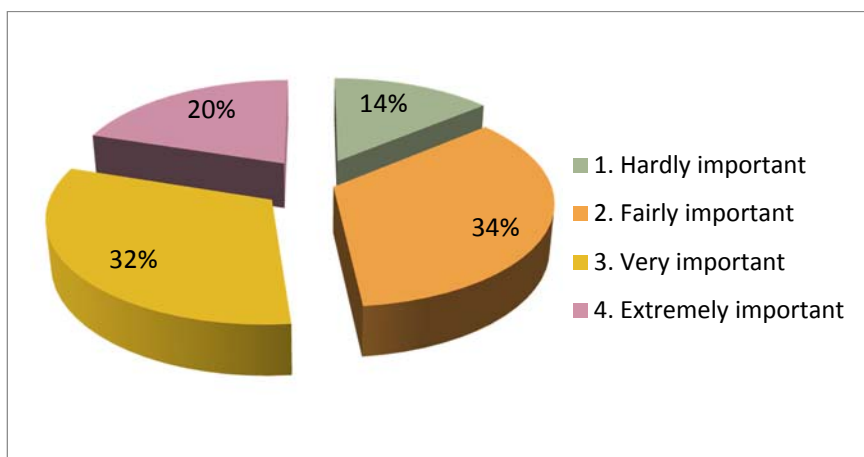
A third area we explored is that relating to the aspects of organization and role management. Relevance that appears to be a little lower in the case of the needs expected by actual and potential users, as we can see from the data below.

10. Should the coach plan and organize the activities and resources needed to achieve the goals

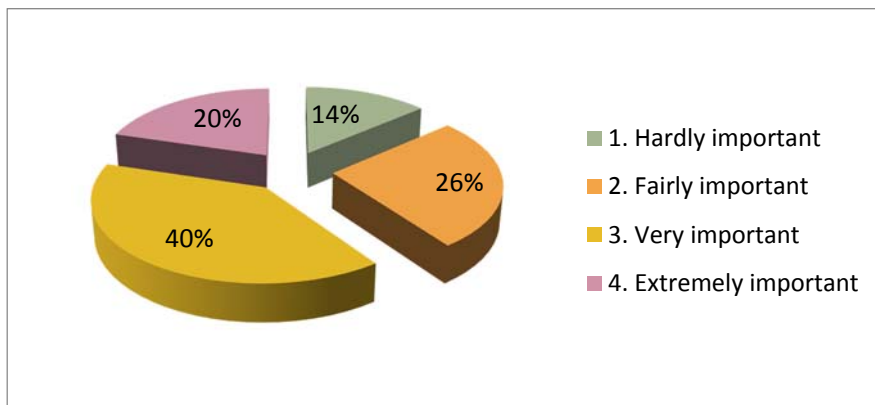


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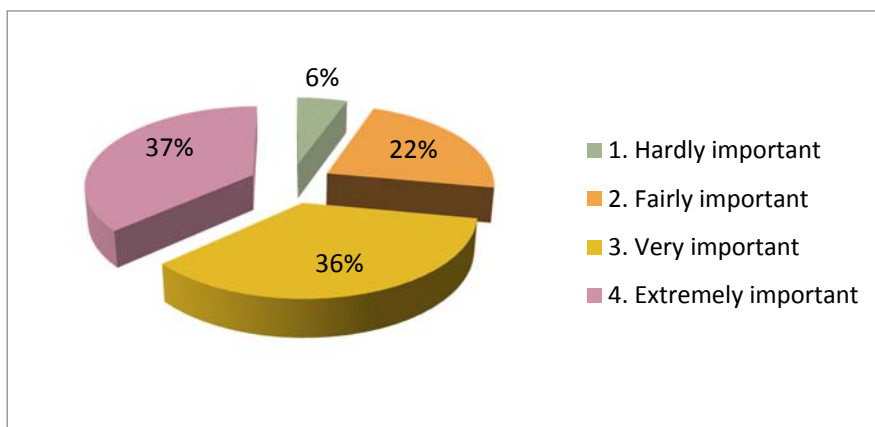
11. Should the coach assign tasks and challenging work plans to stimulate professional and personal development



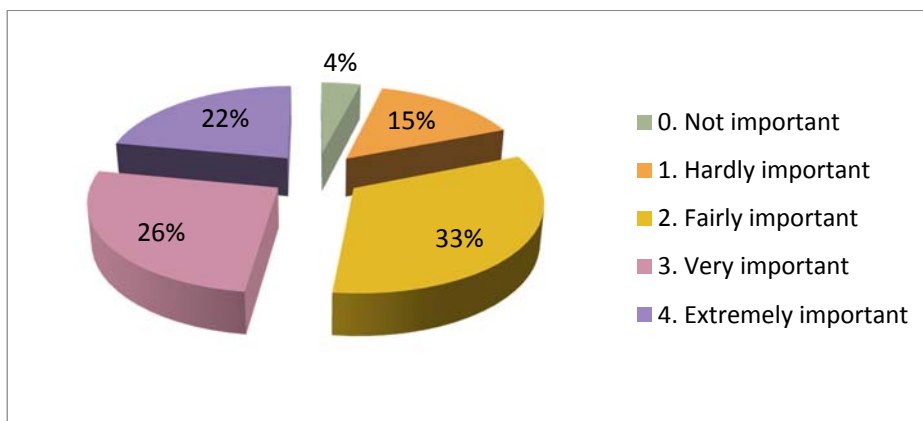
12. Should the coach inform people when the results did or did not reach the expected level in order to stimulate the achievement of personal goals



13. Should the coach be able to analyse, evaluate and modify the initial plan (e.g. training plan) with creativity, flexibility and originality



14. Should the coach be flexible in decision-making



The results deriving from these areas in terms of expectations towards sport operators' competences indicate that no doubt, less attention is paid to the grounds of organizational, management and planning competences compared to the others.

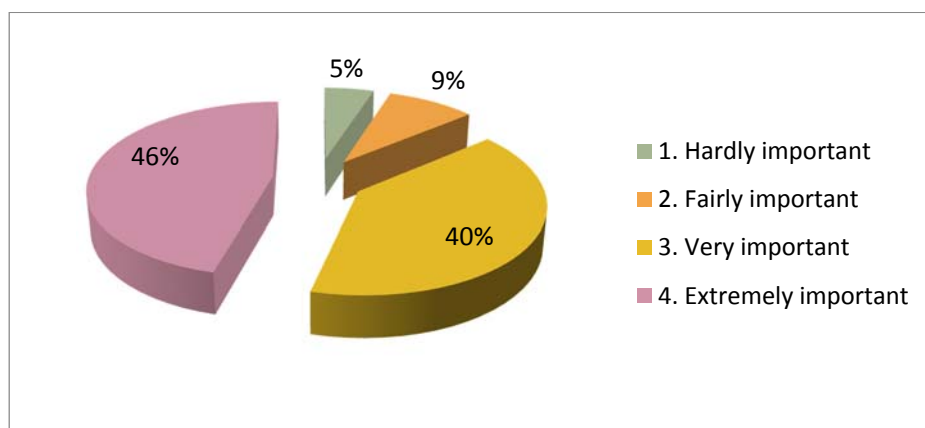
A different perspective from the one emerging from our previous research on the part of sport operators, who acknowledged these as the lowest competences. The average of high scores 3 and 4 equalled 74% in total in the first area on communication and relational competences, while 78% concerning competences of leadership and focusing on the goal, and lowers to 58% for the area of work organization and planning.

In particular, the scope of flexibility in decision-making and the creation of a work plan results to be not particularly important according to the respondents when compared with other competences. On the contrary, the planning aspects appear to be taking second place if again, aspects on objective planning and relating to performance would not be taken into account against the aspects of leadership within the relationship. In this area, the difference between the value emerging from the answers given by sportspersons against those given by non-sportspersons slightly stretches upwards on the part of sportspersons, but considering the average high score given by sportspersons in all questions, the discrepancy does not seem to be particularly meaningful.

Area of autonomy and social inclusion

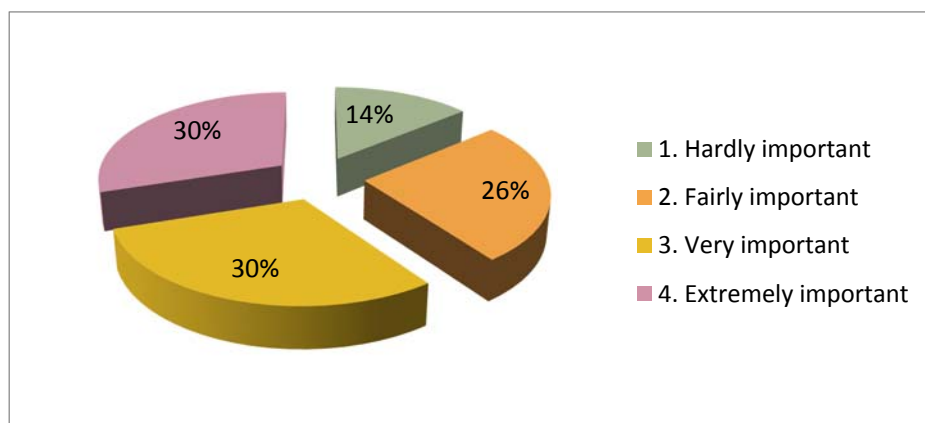
This area gathers the competences regarding not only the development of autonomy, but also the process of social inclusion and of relation with the diversity, which is needed to work with particularly vulnerable and socially fragile categories.

15. Should the coach help sport users to develop their social inclusion abilities

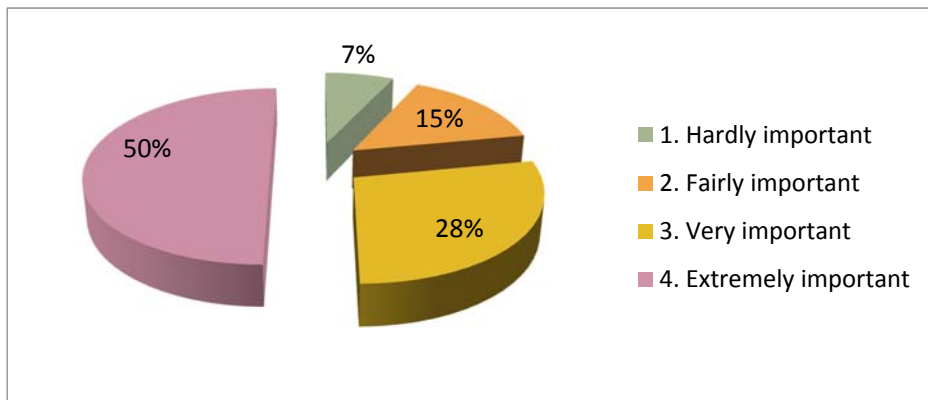


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16. Should the coach give the autonomy to sport users

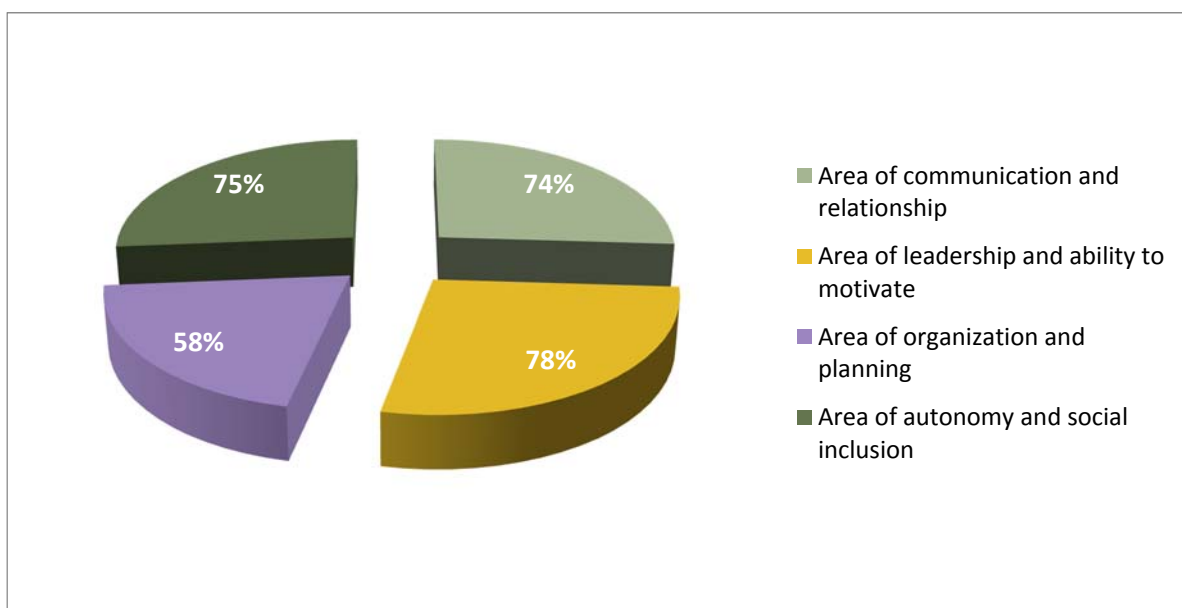


17. Should the coach be able to analyse complex situations by considering different points of view and the relation between particular problems (disability, social exclusion, cultural diversity)



Competences relating to autonomy and social inclusion appear to be rather acknowledged by the sample of interviewed people, 75% of the respondents answer by giving a score between 3 and 4 as an average value to these competences. It is noticed that autonomy – which is not attributed a particularly high score – is the ability to handle the topics of diversity and social exclusion (question N. 17), to which particular importance is recognized. Considering that we refer to a topic that is thoroughly hooked off the traditional aspect of the result of sport performance, it is relevant to us that 50% of the sample gives a score of 4 to the need of the sport operator to have this skill. The proportion of 86% is similarly high, a score between 3 and 4 is highlighted for question N. 15 on the development of one's abilities. If on one hand, this appears as a competence easily attributed to the sport operator, on the other we must recall that according to how the question is formulated, we are not referring as much to learning something or training someone, rather to mostly identifying talents in a maieutic perspective and not necessarily in relation with the athlete's performance, rather with the development of personal resources. It is true that in general, the answers to the questionnaire move the profile of the sport operator in this direction, namely a person who helps people by taking into consideration their characteristics and possible vulnerabilities and weaknesses, in order to develop their talents and goals, rather than as someone who must achieve the maximum result. The two things can even coincide in some cases, but the scale of priorities differs when the external feedback is the baseline in one case, whilst the internal feedback is majorly highlighted in the other case. Answers by sportspersons and non-sportspersons in this area are not very discrepant.

To conclude with, we report the overall data of the high scores attributed to the various areas by the interviewed sample by means of a graph outlining, in a clear manner, the diverging relevance of strategic skills of sport operators, starting from the expectation of the people benefiting from sport activity.



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