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EU COLPBOL: IMPLEMENTATION OF COLPBOL SPORT AT EUROPEAN LEVEL AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY-OF-LIFE PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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COLPBOL, THE INCLUSIVE SPORT FOR ALL

15% of the world's population, or one billion people, are persons with disabilities (UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, 2021). Among all types of disabilities, intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which covers many daily social and practical skills. This means a reduction in the ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (World Health Organization-WHO).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, UN, 2006) in its first article, states that "the purpose of this Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity".

One of the most accepted models to assess the social and economic inclusion of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID) is the Quality of Life (QoL) Model (Shalock &Verdugo,2002). Although the concept of QoL is not new, the professional or academic approach to its conceptualization and measurement in the field of PwID is relatively recent. The QoL concept includes the subjective and objective aspects that have a highest influence at the people's perceived quality of life, and that is composed of eight domains: (1) self-determination, (2) rights, (3) emotional well-being, (4) social inclusion, (5) personal development, (6) interpersonal relationships, and (7) material and (8) physical wellbeing.

Art.30 UNCRPD, promotes the participation of Persons with Disabilities in cultural, recreational and leisure activities, together with SPORT, as a way to participate on equal terms with others. In that way, Art. 30 asks States Parties, among others, for:

- To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;
- To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;
- To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;



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PwID are often characterized by motor difficulties and limitations expressed in the performance of sports skills. In general terms, the levels of alteration of the motor behaviors are directly proportional to the cognitive levels of each individual. Research in the field of sports with PwID shows mostly positive influences of physiological aspects such as weight gain, physical and emotional wellbeing and health, aspects of muscle coordination and flexibility, personal development by developing new talents or taking profit of the talents they have, self-determination by increasing autonomy, independence and decision making, increase of personal relationships and social inclusion, sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Therefore, the participation of PwID in sports is a fruitful scenario to improve their Quality of Life.

PwID are increasingly incorporated into sports activities, either autonomously or with the collaboration and/or intermediation of their supports (associations, relatives, etc.). The impact of Sports in their Quality of Life is rather now explicit, they fully exercise their right to be part of sport activities like and with others, they enhance their Wellbeing (physical and emotional), they feel socially included by being part of something bigger or a team, where they also enhance their personal relationships and self-determination being, and have the chance to develop personally learning new skills.

COLPBOL is an innovative and inclusive sport modality successfully implemented in Spain along the last 20 years. It's a collective sport game that;

- encourages the maximum possible participation of all the players whatever their physical, motor level and abilities
- minimizes individual differences and requires essential collaboration and collective communication to achieve the final goal of the game, the goal.

That is to say, a true and authentic inclusive team game which addresses the Meaningful Involvement principle stated by the Unified Sports (Special Olympics) approach, "that ensures that every player is given an opportunity to contribute to the success of his or her team through their unique skills and qualities. This means that every teammate: (a) demonstrates sufficient sport specific skills and game understanding; (b) plays a valued role on the team that emphasizes his or her personal talents; and (c) has an opportunity to play without a heightened risk of injury".

It was created in 1997 in Valencia (Spain) by a group of experts in sports and education as a new content within the area of Physical Education in Primary and Secondary School. This dynamic later extends to other sports areas with the first local and regional competitions and its purely recreational aspect in children and adults.

COLPBOL is defined as a "collective invasion sport played by two mixed teams of 7 players in a clearly defined space, the purpose of which is to introduce a ball into the opponent's goal through hand-hitting".

The aim was to create a dynamic, co-educational, inclusive and supportive sport, and at the same time fun and motivating. The two fundamental pillars of Colpbol, which define its essence are cooperation, it is an obligatory first-touch game and, coeducation, being always A mixed game.



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The bases of COLPBOL are:

- Strengthening of the collective spirit.
- Coeducation and gender equality. Integration.
- Overcoming stereotypes.
- Easiness. Attention to diversity.

These bases underpin the essence of Colpbol, and together with the progressive growth that in a few years it has experienced both in diffusion and in the number of practitioners and competitions have made it a new sports benchmark, which contributes, on the one hand, to the comprehensive education of boys and girls in the educational field, offers a novel and attractive alternative for the recreation of children and adults and also serves as an option to satisfy that desire to compete that we all have, from parameters of maximum equality, cooperation, respect and of true enjoyment with sports practice.

According to the aforementioned characteristics, COLPBOL is a powerful tool for improving Quality of Life of PwID due to, among others;

- In general terms, its simplicity in terms of technical movements and rules make it easy to be played by PwID and, therefore, increase their involvement in physical activities with the explained benefits in the wellbeing dimension.
- In specific terms, through the involvement of persons with different abilities, PwID can play with Persons without Disabilities, thus increasing their social inclusion.

Based on the previous assumptions and on the opportunities that the sport of Colpbol has to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, a powerful European consortium developed the EU COLPBOL Project, which was financed by the European Commission through the ERASMUS+ SPOTS program during the years 2020 and 2022.

The Consortium was formed by the next entities, belonging to different sectors and areas of expertise (direct attention to persons with intellectual disabilities, academia and ICT):

- COPAVA (project leader). Spain.
- Colpbol Sports Association (creators of the sport of Colpbol). Spain.
- ALDO-CET. Romania.
- University of Craiova. Romania.
- EDRA-COOP. Greece.
- University of Athens.
- University of Kaunas. Lithuania.
- Center for Social Innovation. Cyprus.

"EUROPE COLPBOL" project was launched with the main objective of promoting the implementation of COLPBOL as a tool to improve Quality of Life of PwID, including the following specific objectives:

- Development and transfer of adapted guidelines aimed at PwID to motivate and teach them to practice COLPBOL



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- Development and transfer of a TRAINING PACKAGE aimed at Sports professionals with technical instructions to optimize the practice of COLPBOL involving PwID in sport contexts
- Development and transfer of a TRAINING PACKAGE aimed at Supports of PwID (Disability Professionals, Relatives, etc.) with technical instructions to optimize the practice of COLPBOL involving PwID in occupational and leisure contexts
- Creation and consolidation of local networks to promote collaboration between sports organizations and the field of intellectual disability to promote the implementation of COLPBOL
- Creation of a European network of entities committed to COLPBOL
- Development of an e-Platform that facilitates and multiplies access to project resources and acts as a point of contact and a driving force for COLPBOL, including an e-Training Platform, for enhancing the training of PWID, COLPBOL and Sports Professionals and Supports.
- Development of dissemination actions, including conferences, seminars, meetings, events and awareness actions that support previous activities.

After 2 years of cooperation and work the Consortium has achieved the next results:

1. Co-creation sessions with end-users (PwID, sport professionals, disability professionals and relatives) in all countries of the Consortium members. The main objective of this Co-Creation Sessions was to discuss and agree with them on the definitive drivers and barriers considered in the development of the COLPBOL Guidelines for PwID. The involvement of PwID in co creation sessions was the first step towards increasing the social inclusion and participation. Almost 120 persons from all profiles targeted participated in the co-creation sessions and helped to us to design the next results.
2. Training Package for involving Persons with Intellectual Disability in the practice of COLPBOL. Training Package has been developed including a set of adapted training materials and tools addressed to PwID on how to practice COLPBOL.
3. Training Package for Sports Professionals. This Training Package has been developed including training materials and training activities for Sports Professionals aiming to motivate them to promote and practice COLPBOL while transferring knowledge and tools for leading the practice of COLPBOL with PwID and persons without disabilities, developing the Coach role.
4. Training Package for Supports. This Training Package has been developed including a set of training materials and training activities addressed to Supports of PwID (Disability Professionals and Relatives) aimed to develop their competences for: motivate Supports to practice COLPBOL; encourage Relatives to play the role needed for their PwID when they want to be engaged in COLPBOL; Encourage Disability professionals to bring COLPBOL for their Occupational Centers as a part of their occupational therapies through the practice of this sport.
5. EU-COLPBOL e-Training Platform with the following approach:



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- Making all the Training Packages available and accessible, especially for PwID, within a structured training approach,
- Including a workspace where the project partners could manage e-learning courses and where trainees (PwID, Sport Professionals and Supports) can get access to their own course and interact with other trainees and trainers.

6. Pilot Validation Actions. These actions have been done in each country with the involvement of more than 20 PwID, 5 Professionals of Sports and 10 Supports participating in the Validation of Training Packages and testing the e-Training Platform.

7. Multiplier Sports Event on each country. 4 National events in the field of COLPBOL have been organized in Spain, Romania, Lithuania and Greece, involving more than 150 stakeholders. Consortium partners shared their opinion about barriers and key success factors in the development of the EU COLPBOL training program. In addition, during these events, a competition of COLPBOL where all attendees participated was organized with the purpose of making possible to try this sport with a mix approach.

8. Development of Local and European Network of COLPBOL. In the last stage of the project, the partners have been working in the creation of Networks with main Stakeholders interested in the implementation of COLPBOL and committed with its exploitation after project lifetime. This has been done in two steps:

- Creation of Local Networks: local stakeholders addressed by dissemination actions and/or involved in validation actions and Multiplier Sports Events have been invited to join to the Local Networks for COLPBOL. This included sports associations, clubs, disability entities, universities and other stakeholders.
- Creation of European Network: Stakeholders from other countries have been invited to join to the European Network for COLPBOL.

This project is in an advanced phase of development, but it has not yet come to an end. However, the results and benefits obtained so far have been very positive. We are sure that EU-COLPBOL will have a great impact in the short term in the local communities where the training program is implemented, and in the long term in society by replicating and transferring this training methodology.

EU-COLPBOL has developed a communication strategy through various communication channels that anyone can consult to follow our steps, join our project and make all those contributions that can enrich us and maximize our achievements and results:

<https://europe-colpbol.eu/>

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