

Research Article

Sport for promoting social inclusion of socially vulnerable youth in Morocco: Case of TIBU Africa

El deporte para promover la inclusión social de los jóvenes socialmente vulnerables en Marruecos: El caso de TIBU África

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Date of Receipt: 25/10/2025

Date of Acceptance: 26/11/2025

Date of Publication: 01/12/2025

How to cite the article

Benreghai, M. A., & Balhadj, S. (2026). Sport for promoting social inclusion of socially vulnerable youth in Morocco: Case of TIBU Africa [El deporte para promover la inclusión social de los jóvenes socialmente vulnerables en Marruecos: El caso de TIBU África]. *European Public & Social Innovation Review*, 11, 01-23. <https://doi.org/10.31637/epsir-2026-1984>

Abstract

Introduction: The sporting sector plays a key role in Morocco's socio-economic development and can be a powerful tool for promoting social inclusion. The aim of this study is to explore the underlying mechanisms through which sport program might have an impact on socially vulnerable youth social inclusion. **Methodology:** We decided to use a qualitative approach. The NGO TIBU Africa in Casablanca, Morocco, formed the setting for a single case study. Data were collected using document analysis, observations, interviews (n=32), and a focus group (n=13). **Results:** The main results highlighted the importance of socially vulnerable youth's sense of belonging, which gives them the opportunity to participate in life skill building activities and improve their life skills transferable outside the sports setting. **Discussions:** The supportive environment and the inclusive nature of the activities offered in

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a territorial ecosystem logic have enabled participants to develop a number of physical, personal and social positive outcomes. **Conclusions:** The general conclusion include the importance of social interaction in a supportive and nurturing environment, to promote socially vulnerable youth social inclusion.

Keywords: sport; sport program; social inclusion; socially vulnerable youth; youth sport; territorial ecosystem; TIBU Africa; sport for development.

Resumen

Introducción: el sector deportivo desempeña un papel clave en el desarrollo socioeconómico de Marruecos y puede ser una poderosa herramienta para promover la inclusión social. El objetivo de este estudio es explorar los mecanismos subyacentes a través de los cuales el programa deportivo podría tener un impacto en la inclusión social de los jóvenes socialmente vulnerables. **Metodología:** Decidimos utilizar un enfoque cualitativo. La ONG TIBU África en Casablanca, Marruecos, constituyó el escenario de un único estudio de caso. Los datos se recopilaron mediante análisis de documentos, observaciones, entrevistas (n=32) y un grupo de discusión (n=13). **Resultados:** Los principales resultados destacaron la importancia del sentimiento de pertenencia de los jóvenes socialmente vulnerables, que les da la oportunidad de participar en actividades de desarrollo de habilidades para la vida y mejorar sus habilidades para la vida transferibles fuera del ámbito deportivo. **Discusión:** El entorno de apoyo y la naturaleza inclusiva de las actividades ofrecidas en una lógica de ecosistema territorial han permitido a los participantes desarrollar una serie de resultados positivos físicos, personales y sociales. **Conclusiones:** Las conclusiones generales incluyen la importancia de la interacción social en un entorno solidario y enriquecedor, para promover la inclusión social de los jóvenes socialmente vulnerables.

Palabras clave: deporte; programa deportivo; inclusión social; jóvenes socialmente vulnerables; deporte juvenil; ecosistema territorial; TIBU África; deporte para el desarrollo.

1. Introduction

Knowledge of sport is the key to knowledge of society (Elias & Dunning, 1994). Sport, a mirror of the society in which we live, is, in the diversity and complementarity of its dimensions, a factor in well-being and health, a powerful lever for human development, an activity that generates investment, employment and value creation, and a factor of inclusion, social cohesion and the fight against poverty, exclusion and marginalization (Economic Social and Environmental Council [ESEC], 2019, p. 14).

Sport, through its activities, programs, federations, clubs and associations, is a social phenomenon. Whether at individual or collective level, it plays a key role in what is known as “living together”. In fact, the world today confronts the individual and especially youth with many pitfalls, that can threaten the smooth running of their life in society. Sport aims to prevent the emergence of such problems by intervening as early as possible when these situations arise (Said & Amine, 2022).

According to the High Commission for Planning (HCP), in 2022, one in four young Moroccans aged between 15 and 24 is in a NEET situation (neither in education, employment nor training), i.e. 1.5 million people (ESEC, 2023, p. 7). In 2019, the total cost of young people in NEET situations in Morocco has been estimated at 60 billion dirhams in terms of public finance and 55 billion dirhams in terms of opportunity cost (Liouaeddine & Oudad, 2024). These figures underline the inadequacy of public strategies and policies dedicated to the socio-economic integration of this particularly vulnerable category.

With this in mind, sport can represent a good factor for the inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups. By getting people who do not usually interact to get to know each other, to share a sense of belonging, sport can be useful. It enables people from different segments to overcome the hate speech they may hear around them, and combat all forms of social exclusion (Said & Amine, 2022).

Social exclusion can be defined as the absence or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society (Levitas et al., 2007). It is multi-causal and relational in nature, leading to loss of status, autonomy, self-esteem and expectations (Oppenheim, 1998). Socially excluded people often find difficulties and barriers in accessing services such as education, preventive healthcare, healthy living and working conditions (Bambra et al., 2010).

Levitas et al. (2007) take a broad view of social exclusion, seeing it as a complex, multidimensional process. It is the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, as well as the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities to which the majority of people have access in a society. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. These authors have developed an operational measurement framework identifying three domains of potential social exclusion, which are linked to a lack of resources, an inability to participate and low quality of life (Levitas et al., 2007).

The multidimensional perspective of social exclusion is also emphasized in the European Commission's oft-quoted definition (Omtzigt, 2009): Social exclusion refers to the multiple and changing factors that cause people to be excluded from the normal exchanges, practices and rights of modern society. Poverty is one of the most obvious factors, but social exclusion also refers to inadequate rights to housing, education, health and access to services.

Social inclusion is a term increasingly used to encompass a range of issues concerning poverty, social injustice and inequality, issues that seem universal and widespread in all societies. Coalter (2007) has argued that social inclusion sports policies are primarily shaped by a dual objective: to extend social rights and citizenship (through access and participation) and to emphasize the various individual and collective benefits supposedly associated with the practice of sport.

Sport has the power to change everything; he can be seen as an effective tool for tackling the various problems from which society suffers, especially in terms of social cohesion and integration of the population (Benreghai, 2024). It also has the potential to increase self-esteem, social competence, self-confidence and higher skills in sport participants than in non-sport participants (Eime et al., 2013). In addition, a healthy lifestyle that includes physical exercise is effective in preventing chronic disease in later life, particularly when adopted at an early age (Macera, 2003). Given that participation in sport provides a focus for social activity, an opportunity to make friends, develop networks and reduce social isolation, it seems well placed to support the development of social capital.

When talking about socially vulnerable youth, Vettenburg et al. (1984) defined social vulnerability as a process of interaction between adolescents and social institutions. The key assumption of their theory of social vulnerability is that an accumulation of negative experiences and contacts with formal social institutions can lead to an unfavorable social perspective of this group.

According to Vettenburg's (1998), socially vulnerable youth are characterised as having an accumulated amount of negative experiences with the societal institutions in their lives, which often leads to distorted relationships with those institutions and social disconnectedness (Vettenburg, 1998). More generally, several factors characterizing social vulnerability have been described, such as poverty level, absence or limited access to resources (information, knowledge and technology), absence or lack of social capital, including social networks and connections, and vulnerable residential environments (Cutter et al., 2003). Thus, the literature generally refers to individuals aged 11 to 24 who are subjected daily to multifaceted stressors (social, emotional and economic) that create the conditions for social maladjustment (Galimberti, 2007).

Furthermore, the literature on sport and socially vulnerable young people has largely confirmed that sport can develop positive social outcomes that can be associated with social inclusion, such as life skills, positive psychological capital, active citizenship, prosocial behaviors and employment (D'Angelo et al., 2021). Hermens et al. (2015) have highlighted how sport-based interventions can develop the life skills of socially vulnerable young people. This work highlights the role of sporting environments in the development of certain skills, such as self-motivation, goal setting, self-direction, critical thinking, self-concept, self-efficacy, resilience skills, concentration, self-control, taking responsibility for one's own actions and discipline (Hermens et al., 2015).

It emerges from their work that each program is unique and that, consequently, results may vary depending on the specific conditions of the sporting environment. They also suggest that the positive outcomes promoted by sport may have been influenced by exposure to a positive motivational climate in sport. They report that it is possible that the positive climate experienced by young people affects the development of social outcomes rather than simply participation in sport (Hermens et al., 2015). Sport for development (SFD) is a relatively new field of research that, over the past decade, has attracted considerable interest not only from researchers, but also from governmental and non-governmental organizations (Schulenkorf et al., 2016).

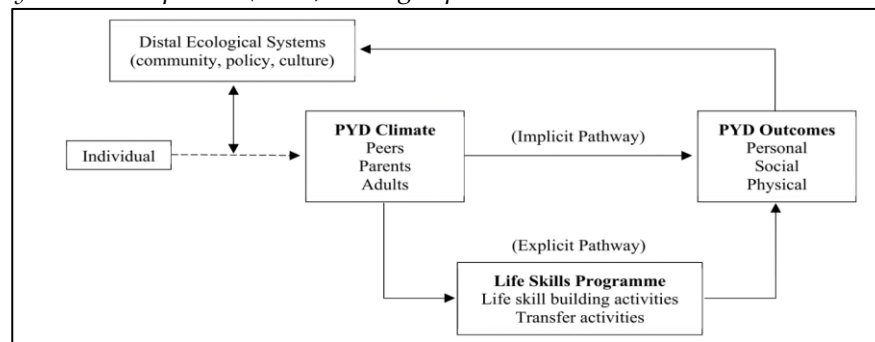
Lyras & Welty Peachey (2011) define SFD as the use of sport to positively influence public health, the socialization of children, youth and adults, the social inclusion of disadvantaged people, the economic development of regions and states, and the promotion of intercultural exchange and conflict resolution. Schulenkorf et al. (2016) realized that Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory was the most widely used theory in SFD. Lerner (2005) defines PYD theory as a working theory that analyzes how young people develop through sport and what in the external environment needs to be controlled to promote positive development.

Youth development is the result of an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, choices, relationships and support that enable them to participate fully in their families and society. Youth development occurs in families, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods and communities (Bloomquist, 2010). Holt et al. (2016) study of youth development through sport also highlighted the relevance of a positive climate within the sports micro-system as a condition for promoting youth development outcomes through sport.

Holt and colleagues use the term "PYD climate" for this purpose. Holt and colleagues explain that the PYD climate is the social environment, based on relationships with and between adults, peers and parents, that enables young people to gain experiences that will contribute to youth development outcomes (Holt et al., 2016).

Figure 1.

Model of positive youth development (PYD) through sport



Source: Holt et al., (2016). A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704>

Other authors suggest that, to promote positive social outcomes through sport, it is important to adopt a multi-agency approach (Jeanes et al., 2019; D'angelo et al., 2021; Spaaij, 2011). Various studies have examined the relevance of sports agencies and social institutions as distribution channels for sport-related local development (Holt et al., 2016). Such collective action is particularly effective in implementing programs aimed at socially vulnerable populations.

Combating social fragility requires the sharing of technical, didactic and educational skills from different disciplines and professional expertise (D'Angelo et al., 2021). Spaaij (2011) noted that when sports programs collaborate with community organizations, it is possible to provide young people with more social resources, support and employability opportunities. He also asserts that youth development is significantly associated with a program's ability to connect with multiple institutional agents.

While there is substantial agreement on the positive impact of sport at the societal level, academics argue that more research is needed to understand the conditions under which sport can act on social inclusion (Bailey, 2005,2008; Coalter, 2001; Whitley et al., 2018; Schailée et al., 2019). Researchers have also highlighted the need for more critical research and theory that identifies the processes by which sport may be linked to individual-level outcomes (personal development, health) and social-level impacts (social inclusion and civic engagement) (Agergaard, 2018; Coalter, 2013; Kennett, 2014; Tacon, 2007).

In order to fill this gap, this research aims to find a new and innovative way of explaining the different elements of sport and social inclusion through the design of a territorial sport ecosystem that will enable all young people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to find their way to success, by promoting equal opportunities through support and privileged access to training or employment. In these landlocked territories, economic and social difficulties are manifold, and the presence of such an ecosystem is decisive. The main aim of this article is to explore the underlying mechanisms through which sport program might have an impact on socially vulnerable youth social inclusion and examine the necessary conditions that work as a catalyst for these underlying mechanisms.

2. Methodology

We decided to use a qualitative approach. A realist evaluation approach was implemented (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to assess the extent to which a sport program may achieve social inclusionary objectives, and why this can occur in these specific sport program interventions (Pawson, 2006; Weiss, 1995). The realist evaluation aims to identify the hidden causal forces behind empirically patterns or changes in those patterns (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Realist thinking thus starts from the empirical outcome, tracing processes backwards to study the question ‘What works for whom, why, and under which circumstances?’ (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) through identification of the key mechanisms (M), influential context factors (C) and expected outcomes (O).

Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations then serve as a heuristic for theory development, clarifying what preceded the visible outcome (Van der Veken et al., 2020). Instead of merely investigating if a program works, a theory-based evaluation approach (TBE) intends to understand why and how it does and in what circumstances. Central to the TBE approach is the notion that all programs have an implicit logic or theory (Pawson, 2006; Weiss, 1995). TBE is fundamentally concerned with theory development, refinement and evaluation. This approach aims for an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms, triggered by contextual conditions, within a specific program or activity.

2.1. Procedure

A case study protocol (Yin, 2009) was used to explore the underlying mechanisms through which sport program might have an impact on socially vulnerable youth social inclusion and examine the necessary conditions that work as a catalyst for these underlying mechanisms. Yin (2009) defines the case study research method as an empirical investigation that studies a contemporary phenomenon in its actual context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident, while benefiting from previous theoretical development for data collection and analysis.

Yin (2009) stated that the use of the case study protocol is appropriate when the studied object has unique characteristics that deserve to be documented, as it allows detailed descriptions to be provided. The non-governmental organization TIBU Africa in Casablanca, Morocco, formed the setting for a single case study as a leader in the field of social innovation through sport in Morocco. Sport programs had to meet three key requirements,

- 1) they must target youths between 10 and 18 years old,
- 2) they must target socially vulnerable youth according to Vettenburg’s (1998) definition and
- 3) they must be located in socially disadvantaged areas (working-class neighborhoods, suburbs, etc.).

Therefore, three different sports education centers, located in three different areas in Casablanca territory, Morocco, were chosen, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.*Sample of individual in-depth interviewees*

Participants	School of the second chance - New Generation - Oriented Trades of Sport -Old Medina	School of the second chance -New Generation - Oriented Trades of Sport - Derb Sultan	Multidisciplinary Centre for Education through Sport - OuledAzouz Nouaceur	Total
TIBU Africa founder & CEO		1		1
Sport Coaches	5	3	2	10
Youth	6	3	3	12
Parents	4	1	0	5
Partners*		4		4
Total: 32				

* Representative of the Ministry of Education, Preschool and Sports (MEPS), representative of the National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), Drosos Foundation representative and the Sport for Employment Alliance representative.

Source: Author's elaboration (2024).

The research aims to produce results that are both reliable and highly relevant to the specific context of the study. We initiated contact with the TIBU Africa founder & CEO by sending them an official permission letter, inviting them to participate in this scientific research cooperation by allowing us to carry out this unique case study on TIBU Africa, as a leading organization in social innovation through sport in Morocco.

After receiving consent, we coordinated with him to schedule a scoping interview to have a clear idea of the organization and the various programs and services it offers. It was also an opportunity to get the contact details of the various people in charge, staff and coaches, to coordinated with them to schedule field visits and interviews sessions at the time and location of their choice, ensuring that the process is both comfortable and pressure-free.

Trust issues were crucial to the data collection process, which were negotiated largely through physical presence, attentive listening and respectful demonstration of the research aims and interest. The research took place between September 2023 and August 2024 (i.e. 12 months). During that time, a number of qualitative data were collected respectively through document analysis, observations of group activities (field visits), individual in-depth interviews (n=32) and a focus group (n=13). The research was designed using a rigorous procedure to guarantee the reliability and validity of the instruments used.

2.1.1. Document analysis

Firstly, the Foundation's main documents and reports were studied, the most important of which appears to be the strategy for development through sport in Africa to 2030. In which TIBU Africa is committed to helping achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sees them as an opportunity to position sport as a powerful tool for devising innovative solutions to the complex challenges of the 21st century.

As a leader in social innovation through sport in Morocco, TIBU Africa is focusing more closely on five specific development goals, including (03) good health and well-being, (04) quality education, (05) gender equality, (08) decent work and economic growth, (10) reduced inequalities and (17) partnerships for the goals (TIBU, 2024a).

Other documents were analyzed, including the organization's last annual reports (2022), the curriculum for the training courses and activities offered (mainly in the context of second-chance schools), some publications from closed Facebook pages, and updates on the organization's official website. Analysis of the documents mainly enabled us to understand the organization's perception of the social inclusion and social vulnerability of young people, and to gain a better understanding of the context created within the organization and the various mechanisms adopted to train life champions and create sustainable social change.

The literature review and document analysis carried out before the interviews enabled us to identify an implicit theory of the program underlying the organization model based on the positive youth development model through sport (Holt et al., 2016), and to structure the interviews accordingly, to be able to test the supposed mechanisms described in the underlying theory of the program.

2.1.2. Observation

Between September and December 2023, field visits have been scheduled to observe sport programs, training activities, tournaments and sporting events organized by TIBU Africa in the three different sports education centers chosen in Casablanca, Morocco. The field visits provided the opportunity for direct observation, which enabled us to obtain information concerning the context factors and the key mechanisms.

Michael Patton indicated that direct observation provides insight into the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday activities that may go unreported by participants, gives the researcher direct experience of the phenomena being studied, and creates an opportunity to see and hear what is happening in a social setting rather than focusing solely on narrative descriptions of participants (Mills et al., 2010). 18 field visits, accounting for a total of 62 hours of observation across the three selected sports education centers. The field visits lasted between 45 and 240 minutes.

During the field visits, we attended sport activities (Basketball, Soccer, Boxing, Judo, Tennis and Swimming), side activities (orientation, guidance and support in language, science, technology and mathematics) and staff meetings and events (briefing meetings, tournaments and sporting events). Field notes and observations report were kept in a research diary.

2.1.3. Interview

In order to acquire valuable insights individual in-depth interviews (Table. 1) with TIBU Africa Manager, sport coaches (10), youth representing different vulnerabilities (poverty, home-lessness, school dropout, addiction...) proposed by sport coaches and eager to tell their story (12) respecting the gender distribution, with their parent's consent and some of them were prepared to take part in the study (5). In addition to partners (4) from different fields (Ministry of Education, Preschool and Sports (MEPS), National Initiative for Human Development (NIHD), Drosos Foundation and the Sport for Employment Alliance).

The interviews were conducted mostly in French, however in some cases we were obliged to conduct them in Arabic or in English, so translation has been used. The interviewees were recruited across the three sports education centers (Table 1) located in disadvantaged areas (working-class neighborhoods, suburbs, etc.) in the territory of Casablanca, Morocco through a purposive sampling method (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) to increase the data richness.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants at the time and place of their choice and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each, a snowball technique (Jones et al., 2013) was used to further broaden the scope of perspectives. The sessions were organized according to the data saturation principle, the number of interviews was therefore guided by the point at which no new information emerged, and by complementary and repetitive responses. The interviews were recorded using digital recorder with the permission of the interviewee, although when not recorded, notes were taken.

An interview guide that explored the contextual factors and key mechanisms was developed, focused on (1) how interviews conceptualize social inclusionary objectives regarding socially vulnerable youth and (2) how they see that sport programs contributing towards these outcomes. The individual in-depth interviews were guided by three main questions, (1) what are the expected outcomes regarding socially vulnerable youth physical, personal and social development ?, (2) how and to what extent does sport program contribute to socially vulnerable outcomes ?, and (3) which context and mechanisms contribute to socially vulnerable youth physical, personal and social development ?

2.1.4. Focus group

Finally, a focus group (N = 13) took place at the school of the second chance - oriented trades of sport -Old Medina (July 2024) to complete the field observation notes and the data from the interviews. The participants (Old Medina Centre Director, 3 coaches, 1 teacher, 4 young people, and 4 parents) were purposely selected. The dynamics of a focus group can produce data that would not arise from an interview in which particular questions have been scripted by a researcher (Morgan, 1988).

Having observed these participants for almost a year, we were confident that this mixed constellation could provide an opportunity for an open discussion and in-depth examination of the functioning of the sports programs offered mainly to socially vulnerable youth by TIBU Africa. The objective of the focus group was to gain insight into the context created within the sports programs and the various mechanisms adopted to achieve social inclusionary objectives regarding socially vulnerable youth.

2.2. Data analysis

All documents report and field notes were kept in a research diary, while the interviews and focus group transcripts (standardize in French) were managed using qualitative data management software NVivo 14 to facilitate coding and data management process. We used thematic analysis technique to analyze the transcripts, involving open, axial and selective coding to identify and refine emerging themes and patterns in order to provide a clear view of the data collected.

The responses were analyzed sentence by sentence and word by word, and selecting the relevant semantic content, including words and phrases that correspond to the context factors and key mechanisms that enables sports education centers to foster social inclusionary outcomes for socially vulnerable youth. This detailed approach involved familiarization with the data and allocating general thematic codes, allowing for a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

3. Results

The results are summarized in Table 2 and highlight the context factors and key mechanisms that enables sports education centers to foster social inclusionary outcomes for socially vulnerable youth reported by respondents.

Table 2.

Results

Context factors: Creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for participation	Key mechanisms: Social interaction	Outcomes: Socially vulnerable youth perceived social inclusion through life skills development
Embracing a shared culture Participation	Building caring relationships with coaches Building caring relationships with peers Family involvement	Physical development Personal development Social development

Source: Author's elaboration (2024).

3.1. Creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for participation

3.1.1. Shared culture

Document analysis, observations, interviews and the focus group. All stages of research highlighted the importance of embracing a shared culture and unlocking young people's potential through sport education. By adopting a values-based approach that focuses on education, guidance and support, sports programs help to educate and develop young people's skills and culture, and provide a springboard to great values and success in life.

“On the strength of its commitment to young people in vulnerable situations and NEETs, sports education centers have made social innovation through sport its key tool for developing a shared culture and contributing to education through sport. We strongly believe in the power of sport, which appeals to the values of cooperation, solidarity and commitment to the most vulnerable populations”.

TIBU Africa founder & CEO scoping interview

Respondents also highlighted at many occasions the context switching, they compare the departure context outside the sports education centers which is marked by many barriers (barriers to social ties, barriers to sports and physical activity, barriers to employment...) and problems (poverty, unemployment, drugs, alcohol, deviance; delinquency, criminalization, vandalism, sectarianism, discrimination, racism, stigmatization, cultural conflicts...). And the new context inside the sports education centers which is marked by the creation of new relationships (relationships with coaches, relationships with peers, relationships with champions and sources of inspiration) that help develop a positive development context (common culture, security, trust, belonging, learning, education, guidance, support...). For instance, a sport coach who use to be part of the target group further explains this context switching as described by the following quotes:

Being from the neighborhood, I have similar background and I was part of the target group. So, I know how they feel and think, what to take into account, and which obstacles they are struggling with. It makes it easier for me as I speak the same language, I understand them and I know the neighborhood very well.

Judo coach, male, 32 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina

Coaches with similar cultural background can more easily connect with the target youth, Crabbe (2007) described such similarities as the “shared cultural capital”. This type of capital attracts socially vulnerable youths to work with them to achieve social inclusion objectives (Coalter 2013; Crabbe 2008; Haudenhuyse et al. 2012; Schailleé 2016). The sports education centers studied here recruited several sport coaches who share the same cultural backgrounds as the target group, who have benefited from the sports programs offered (followed the same path) and who have obtained diplomas enabling them to become sports coaches. One participant outlined the impact of using these coaching profiles as follows:

The sports coaches working here have been through a lot, because they have experienced similar situations when they were young, they are aware of what we are going through. They have more experience and therefore are wiser than we are. They have the ability to teach us things.

Participant, male, 16 years, School of the second chance - Derb Sultan

3.1.2. Participation

In socially disadvantaged areas, sports education centers created opportunities for participation and direct intergroup contact. The data supports the idea that the organization is able to motivate its participants to actively participate in the various activities programmed by the sports education centers.

In their daily life, youth from this area do not get an opportunity to interact with youth outside their community. Sport programs gave them the opportunity to actively participate through the creation of inclusive and equitable environment for participation. Participants come because they want to come, not because they are obliged.

Basket-ball coach, female, 26 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina

Although, through its programs built and adapted to the Moroccan context, TIBU Africa relies on an innovative approach based on education through sport to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This approach aims to create environments for learning, experiences and educational success.

Thanks to field visits of the various premises and spaces of the sports education centers. (Grounds, fitness rooms, training rooms, classroom, multipurpose rooms...), we were able to assimilate the work done in the context of education and socio-economic integration of youth through sport. Moreover, to have a clear idea about the different programs offered that are adapted to the needs of participants and help them to express themselves freely, actively participate and develop a range of skills. Most youth from the area showed friendly gestures, less pressure to perform and engagement when participating in the various activities programmed by the sports education centers.

On-site observation, School of the second chance - Old Medina

In conclusion, the context created by the centers for education through sport is characterized by the creation of a shared common culture and opportunities for participation. Youth participation in physical activity in educational environments provides opportunities for self-expression, improving self-confidence and social interaction and integration. It also appears that young people who take part in physical activity are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors. In this context, Holt (2016) refers to "Positive youth development climate" defined as a social environment that enables youth to gain experiences that will contribute to positive youth development outcomes. The features of the PYD climate were adult (leader/coach) relationships, peer relationships, and parental involvement (Holt et al., 2016).

3.2. Social interaction

3.2.1. Building caring relationships with coaches

Strong relationship between youth and coaches is crucial, it allows them to see the human side of their coaches and develop a relationship of respect, trust and friendship. This relationship was noted from the first visit and throughout the observation period at many occasions, although mentioned explicitly during several interviews.

We spend the whole year together practicing various activities and taking part in many sporting events and tournaments. They are a bit like our fathers.

Participant, male, 14 years, Multidisciplinary Centre – Nouaceur

My personality has changed completely thanks to my coaches. I have gone from being a shy, withdrawn person to being very open and self-confident.

Participant, female, 15 years, School of the second chance - Derb Sultan

We observed also that the coaches strive to ensure equal participation in activities, and establish customized approaches when focusing on education, guidance and support. They also demonstrated a high level of sensitivity and responsiveness to youth personal lives (family situation, school results, neighborhood features...).

You need to get to know them and their life situation, simply by listening and paying attention to who they are and what they are capable of, this will enable you to provide help and organize more activities that are meaningful.

Boxing coach, male, 29 years, Multidisciplinary Centre – Nouaceur

Convinced that the coach is the key to the blossoming and evolution of each apprentice, and very proud to be carrying out a high-impact project with a fine team of "Changemakers" determined to create champions of life through the power of sport.

Basket-ball coach, male, 28 years, School of the second chance - Derb Sultan

One of the participants who was willing to tell his story also noted the importance of the relationship between youth and coaches during the focus group.

I left school in the 5th grade because I did not have enough money to buy school supplies. The others used to laugh at my clothes and me because they could tell I was poor. Before I joined the sports education center, I always felt irritated and under pressure. However, meet my coach here was the best that happened to me, in the beginning we did not match but after a couple of months we started really talking, it was the first time anyone had listened to me, and it really made me feel relieved and at one point we became friends.

Participant, male, 17 years, focus group

Sharing their life stories, raise awareness about issues such as poverty, school dropout, addiction, discrimination, cultural conflicts, etc. In the process, participants themselves become increasingly aware of their vulnerabilities and strengths, the opportunities they have missed and those they can seize. Self-awareness and self-efficacy have been identified as prerequisites for personal development and well-being. In addition, several youths interviewed gave examples of how the activities of the sports education centers had boosted their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The coach taught me to first, build confidence in my playing, then to develop confidence in myself and in others.

Participant, male, 13 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina

Today I would like to introduce to you our champion Hafsa, a real enthusiast who discovered soccer at our sports education center in the old Medina. Hafsa is a disciplined, serious girl whose level is evolving one session at a time, and she is working harder than ever to achieve her dream of representing the women's national team. Hafsa is a true champion of life, I am proud of her. I wish you the best of luck Hafsa.

Foot coach, male, 31 years, focus group

3.2.2. Building caring relationships with peers

Strong peer relationships have been identified as a key mechanism for fostering a sense of belonging, understanding, acceptance, teamwork and leadership skills. Thanks to this group dynamic, training partners and the opportunity to make new friends, young people feel “part of a team” and end up wanting to be part of the organization, which presents itself as one big family.

First, we teach them that soccer is a collective game and that you travel together to attack and defend, and teach them how the body is positioned to receive and connect with the closest teammate in order to move forward, overcoming opposition.

Foot coach, male, 31 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina.

At first, I did not know anyone; we were just playing games, so we immediately had to communicate with each other to keep playing, the more we trained together, the more we felt connected.

Participant, male, 16 years, Multidisciplinary Centre – Nouaceur.

We also found that the centers for education through sport activities promote a youth-friendly environment in which youth feel a sense of belonging, self-esteem and personal satisfaction through participation and interaction with their peers. This supportive environment has been developed thanks to a number of key features, including: (1) structured activities and clear rules; (2) peer support and collaboration, rather than competition; (3) the use of sport as an educational tool and an engine for success and (4) the feeling of being involved in something bigger than oneself;

I think the most important thing is to make friends. I did not know anyone, but I have made quite a few friends, and we help each other along the way.

Participant, female, 15 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina.

3.2.3. Family involvement

The family is the first environment in which a child develops, learns and evolves. The values, attitudes and beliefs that prevail in the family play a fundamental role in shaping a child's personality and character. As the core of society, the family provides essential emotional support and creates an environment conducive to learning and growth. TIBU Africa is an organization that recognizes the importance of the family in the education of children and strives to involve them in the educational process. The organization implements programs for education and socio-economic inclusion through sport. It makes parents aware of the importance of following their children's progress and encourages them to become life champions through the power of sport.

I eventually make comparisons between what he learns in the sports education center and the way he handles situations at home. I support my son; I trust him and I am convinced that he will become a life champion thanks to the power of sports.

Father - 42 years - School of the second chance - Old Medina.

Last year, my daughter was rather shy and reserved, whereas now she is expressing herself freely and starting to feel confident. I have gotten to know my daughter on a different level, and I suppose it is very nice to see her evolution.

Mother - 34 years - School of the second chance - Old Medina.

Unfortunately, today's families face major challenges. Social upheavals such as poverty, social exclusion, marginalization, family conflicts and violence can have a negative impact on a child's harmonious development. These challenges can create uncertainty in children's education.

I dropped out of school for family reasons, to work and help my family because my father does not have a steady job and my mother is a homemaker. However, my parents did everything they could to make my life a success and for me to be better than they were. My dream is to work and send my parents on pilgrimage.

Participant, male, 16 years, focus group.

By involving parents in their children's development through sport, TIBU Africa offers a holistic approach to education. This strengthens family ties, improves communication and creates positive social support for young people.

In addition, sport promotes personal development and teaches values such as discipline, team spirit and perseverance.

Involving parents in their children's training is essential to their success; they should be part of the team.

Basket-ball coach, female, 27 years, Multidisciplinary Centre – Nouaceur.

I always tell parents that our work with their children must complement their own. Our common goal must be the optimal development of their children.

Foot coach, male, 31 years, School of the second chance - Old Medina.

The family plays a fundamental role in the education of children, and it is essential that parents are actively involved in this process. TIBU Africa, through its education and social inclusion through sport programs, strives to strengthen the role of the family in the harmonious development of young people. By uniting the efforts of the family, school and society, we can create a favorable environment for the new generation to flourish, preparing them to become life's champions.

4. Discussion

The focus of this paper was to explore the underlying mechanisms through which sport program might have an impact on socially vulnerable youth social inclusion and examine the necessary conditions that work as a catalyst for these underlying mechanisms. One of the key aspects is the importance of a positive development climate for youth in a sporting context, through relationships with coaches, peers and family involvement, to promote life skills in the personal, social and physical domains.

The positive development climate can lead to results in two ways, an implicit way characterized by strong relationships between young people and adults, strong peer relationships that include opportunities for peer leadership and feelings of belonging, as well as parental support. In the explicit pathway, the positive development climate lays the foundations for the development through sports experience programs that specifically promote life skills and their transfer. Holt et al. (2016) proposed that these pathways could lead to the development of personal outcomes (perseverance, respect, problem-solving skills), social (teamwork, belonging and inclusion, communication skills) and physical (movement, healthy active life skills) (Pink et al., 2020)

Holt defined the PYD climate as a social environment that allows young people to gain experiences that will contribute to PYD outcomes. The characteristics of the PYD climate were relationships with adults (leader/coach), peer relations and parental involvement (Holt et al., 2016). The adult relations theme refers to the idea that strong relationships between youth and adults (e.g., program leaders, coaches, and teachers) could create a social environment conducive to promoting PYD climate.

The peer relations theme was defined as strong relationships between young people leading to the creation of a PYD climate, and it includes opportunities for peer leadership and feelings of belonging to a wider community. Through these peer relationships, young people could develop a sense of belonging to a team or training group. The theme of parental involvement refers to parents who support youth involvement in sports programs in a positive way to promote positive youth development on a personal, social and physical level.

The personal dimension of social inclusion concerns the improvement of knowledge, skills and understanding. Centers for education through sport activities offers opportunities to develop valued skills and competencies, and the evidence of sport's contribution to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills is compelling (Bailey, 2006). Discussion in this field has focused mainly on the social nature of most sports (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

Moreover, the need for individuals to work collaboratively will encourage the development of skills such as trust (Priest, 1998), empathy (Moore, 2002), personal responsibility (Hellison, 2003) and cooperation (Miller et al., 1997). Secondly, social inclusion can be defined in relational terms, as a sense of social acceptance (Bailey, 2008). Sport can play a role here, offering young people a sense of belonging to a team, club or community (Ennis, 1999). Players sometimes claim that sport can serve as a common point of interest, bringing families together and encouraging people to interact in sporting activity, often with people from different social backgrounds (Bailey, 2008).

The results highlighted the importance of socially vulnerable youth's sense of belonging, which gives them the opportunity to improve their life skills transferable outside the sports setting. Sport brings together individuals from diverse social and economic backgrounds in a common interest in activities considered intrinsically valuable (Bailey, 2008). Sport contributes to social inclusion, insofar as it increases individuals' sense of control over their lives, as well as "community capital" by extending social networks, strengthening community cohesion and civic pride (Bailey, 2008).

The establishment of social networks is an essential feature of social inclusion practices (Putnam, 2000). Sport participation has recently been presented as a method leading to some form of personal change and, subsequently, this personal change will translate into broader, positive societal impacts. Sport programs have the capacity to empower and support marginalized individuals. In other words, sport provides a supportive environment to encourage and assist these individuals in their social development and integration (Peachey & Sherry, 2017).

The broader theoretical literature clearly and systematically emphasizes that socio-ecological systems influence and are influenced by behavior (Lerner et al., 2012). Sports programs are a microsystem (Bengoechea, 2002), and interactions within this microsystem may be influenced by the characteristics of the larger macrosystems in which sport programs (and those participating in sport programs) are located. Therefore, the whole model fits in the context of the distal ecological systems (Holt et al., 2016).

The positive development climate of young people referred to social contextual characteristics in a sports context. This research suggests a conceptualization of sport as a territorial ecosystem, clearly defining the roles and participation modalities of the different actors and stakeholders, in order to guarantee consolidated social inclusion and ensuring personal, social and physical positive development for socially vulnerable youth through sport.

The notion of ecosystem is a contested and continually debated concept. To define what an ecosystem is, we need to go back to the "biological ecosystem" announced by Tansley (1935) in which different living species coexist and interact to maintain themselves and the site. For example, if one species evolves, the other does the same to preserve the balance of the environment (Tansley, 1935). James Moore (1996) based on the work of Tansley, announced the "business ecosystem" which refers to a community of actors gathered around technical specifications defined by a dominant company.

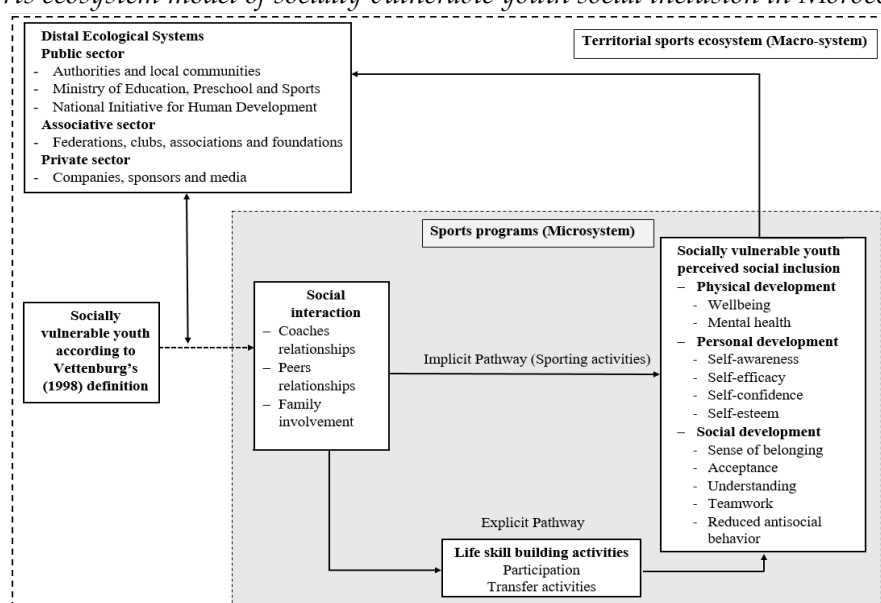
For Moore (1996), the “business ecosystem” introduces the idea of co-evolution and coopetition of the actors of a market through cooperation in the development of collective strategic solutions for the ecosystem. This idea is valid for the most complex problems or situations where individual actors do not have the skills, resources and knowledge to produce solutions alone (Bouhaouala, 2017). TIBU Africa is the leading non-governmental organization (NGO) in Morocco focusing on the education, empowerment and socio-economic inclusion of youth and women through sport in Morocco and Africa (TIBU, 2024a). It aims to support the education, employability and social inclusion of young people through sport (Moustakas et al., 2022). Thanks to the involvement of these factors in the sports sector, TIBU Africa is committed to contributing to the Kingdom's ecosystem development, by mobilizing its extensive network of public and private partners in several fields (TIBU, 2024b).

Sports education centers is considered as one of the flagship programs offered by TIBU Africa, which is an excellent example of this mobilization. TIBU Africa founder & CEO announced in the scoping interview that during the launch of this program, the organization must make partnerships with public, private and associative organizations to ensure the project's impact and success. TIBU Africa's partners provide both moral and financial support, enabling the organization to expand and broaden its scope of action. Thanks to this valuable contribution, TIBU Africa can not only launch new sports education centers and new activities, but also support a growing number of socially vulnerable youth.

By collaborating with its partners, TIBU Africa fosters the exchange of expertise and encourages mutual support for the benefit of the beneficiaries of its programs. This collaborative approach strengthens the impact of the organization's actions and maximizes the positive spin-offs for communities. Within this framework, we propose a territorial sports ecosystem model of socially vulnerable youth social inclusion adapted from Holt PYD through sport model (Holt et al., 2016).

Figure 2.

Territorial sports ecosystem model of socially vulnerable youth social inclusion in Morocco



Source: Author's elaboration (2024), Adapted from Holt et al., (2016). A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704>

The life skills program refers to specific activities and techniques designed to promote life skills. The focus on life skills involves providing opportunities to engage in life skills building and transfer activities. The territorial sports ecosystem (Macro-system), will help all young people reach their full potential through sports programs (Microsystem), thanks to an environment that recognizes the value of the different actors in the territory (Distal Ecological Systems) from the public, associative and private sectors (Holt et al., 2016). The life skills program refers to specific activities and techniques designed to promote life skills.

5. Conclusions

This study provides some important insights into how sports education centers activities can promote socially vulnerable youth social inclusion, through the creation of positive development climate for youth in a sporting context, through relationships with coaches, peers and family involvement, to promote life skills in the physical, personal and social domains. The article deals with the case of the NGO TIBU Africa, as a leader in the field of social innovation through sport in Morocco, and as a benchmark in ecosystem development by mobilizing its large network of public and private partners in several fields.

The inclusive nature of the activities offered within the sports education centers, and the supportive and nurturing environment provided, have enabled participants to develop a number of positive outcomes. These positive outcomes are reflected on a physical level, including wellbeing and mental health, personal level including self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem, and on a social level including sense of belonging, acceptance, understanding, teamwork and reduced antisocial behavior, which gives them the opportunity to improve their life skills transferable outside the sports setting.

In conclusion, sports education centers represent a pivotal step towards elevating and generalizing this experience in other territories. While challenges remain, particularly in terms of resource availability and financial support, the potential for growth and improvement is significant. Ultimately, the success of this program will depend on the collective efforts of the territorial sports ecosystem actors and the broader community, to create a sustainable and effective social inclusion for the future of socially vulnerable youth.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Funding: The authors declare they received no funding for this article.

Acknowledgments: The research team is grateful for the support provided by the founder & CEO of the NGO TIBU Africa, Mr. Mohamed Amine Zariat, as well as for the commitment of the directors of the selected institutions and the technical and administrative staff.

Conflict of interest: The author reports no conflict of interest.

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