

## SPORT AND URBAN IDENTITY

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**Abstract:** The evolution of large urban settlements determined the development and organization of sports and activities physical alternatives practiced by their inhabitants. Urban development has directly influenced the physical and sports culture of the young generation, which has become much more diverse.

In the paper "Sport and urban identity" we tried to present an evolution of sport along with the evolution of cities and how it leaves its mark on urban identity, the social benefits of sport and a small study conducted on 56 respondents regarding the influence of a stadium and the impact it has on the identity of the city that hosts it..

**Keywords:** technology, sport, identity, cities

### Introduction

Sport represents a form of cultural expression of human since prehistoric times, but it is difficult to establish when and how it manifested itself as a distinct social activity (Bairner, 2001). Play, from which sport evolved, is a part of human life since childhood, being a way of developing physical skills and social integration. It is possible that the sport was initially asserted in the context of hunting training, organized by tribes in order to procure food and practice battle tactics. And the games specific to initiation rituals, in which young people demonstrated their maturity as warriors, through physical tests, may have constituted a framework for the manifestation of sport. Thus, there could have been types of primitive activities from which, in Antiquity, sports such as wrestling, boxing, fencing, archery, horse racing, athletics, gymnastics, lifting and throwing weights, etc., were derived.

Sport culturally integrates diverse geographical spaces, being an unfirming tool in a positive sense and with global application. Crossing cultural barriers, it can eliminate retrograde traditions, changing social relations in a community (for example, supporting sports equality can change gender relations). It influences

mentalities at an individual level, thanks to the assumption of sports rules by each practitioner, who shapes their character according to its democratic principles, based on performance and fairness. The globalization of sport has opened up to the West, including states reluctant to its values, by participating or even organizing competitions. Due to the possibilities offered, for many young people from underdeveloped areas, sport is a way to prosper and can be an integrating tool (especially through naturalization), becoming true ambassadors of cultural diversity.

### Modern sport and social benefits

The evolution of sport, within the Western civilization, was shaped by the action of the advanced urban and industrial states (Galily & Ben-Porat, 2009). In Great Britain, the first clubs and regulations were created that turned the sport into a regularly organized competition. Great Britain contributed to the development of sports by promoting, above all, ball games and nautical games (swimming, rowing). Through its global maritime empire, it exported its cultural values, including sports. Under British influence, clubs were established almost all over the world, especially football and cricket.

Football has become a popular sport in many countries from Europe and Latin America, and in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, variants of this game have appeared (American football, Australian football, rugby). Instead, cricket prevailed in the colonies of the Caribbean, Africa, Australia and South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan).

And the USA has turned into a force generating sports, practiced as organized activities. The ball game, taken over in various forms from European immigrants, diversified and evolved, in the USA, into sports such as volleyball, basketball or baseball, spread all over the world. France also contributed to the globalization of modern sports, which was involved in the establishment of world-wide competitions, held regularly. Thus, the most important sporting events of humanity resulted or derived from the French initiative (the Olympic Games, the World Football Championship, respectively Formula 1). The Olympic competitions had and still have a major role given their power to integrate, in an organized framework, newer or older, summer or winter sports, originating not only from the West (cycling, skiing, skating, hockey, yachting, surfing, etc.), but from the whole planet (judo, karate, taekwondo, polo, etc.).

As can be seen, modern sport has developed in the space of Western democracy. Sport is a way of expressing Western civilization worldwide, against the backdrop of the rediscovery, in the Modern Era, of Greco-Roman cultural and political values (through the formation of democracy and the middle class). Implicitly, there was a revaluation of the sports of Antiquity, respectively of the Olympic competitions and the ball games. The modern west organized sport as an activity separates from state power, excluding political interference, and preserved the effect of Christianity's action by eliminating physical violence (Hix, 2006). Unlike the games of the past, the West modelled sports as a social activity

carried out on a democratic basis: accessibility (anyone can participate), equality (the same rules apply to everyone) and fairness (everyone has an objective arbitration).

The West has assumed, through sport, fundamental missions of a civilizational order: combating inequalities and discriminations, respectively promoting fairness. A cult of fair play was formed based on respect for the opponent, the severe sanctioning of violence and doping, the stimulation of revenge strictly in a sports setting, the equalization of opportunities including in financial terms by overtaxing the rich clubs in favour of the poor, etc. In order to support the sporting objectives, a legal framework was developed under which institutions (commissions, courts) with worldwide powers were created, the infrastructure was developed and the technological advantage was capitalized by the introduction of video refereeing to ensure full fairness. On the part of the West, open to cooperation, the democratization of sport was also manifested through its favourable attitude towards authoritarian states, accepted at competitions, including as organizers.

In the democratic West, sport has become a cultural solution for structuring society on multiple criteria and a framework that allows the peaceful expression of tensions (ethnic, religious, etc.). Through sports, citizens can express their grievances, as only their participation is sufficient, not victory, especially since they can take revenge in case of defeat. Against the backdrop of globalization, sport facilitates cultural interaction between states and nations, including through the specific tourism associated with it. Due to its universal language and noble values, sport is easily accepted by citizens regardless of the political regime in their countries. For the West, sport has turned into a more effective soft-power tool than the political-military or economic one, because it represents a way of cultural persuasion not

susceptible to interference in internal affairs or altering collective identity (Barbu, 2009; Barbu 2010).

There were and still are regimes that realized the multifunctional role played by sport as a social phenomenon, so they decided to use it for political purposes. Authoritarian states, especially totalitarian ones, exploited sport as a propaganda tool (Dine & Crasson, 2010).

These regimes used sport to promote their values and claim their alleged ideological supremacy, even in relation to the democratic West. The politicization of sport exposed it to the interference of governments that eroded its democratic principles, through their intervention in influencing the organization and results of competitions (including through doping). Currently, a major risk is the action of state actors (dictatorial regimes) and non-state actors (betting mafia) who use sports to achieve geopolitical interests, respectively organized crime. These actors appeal to the corruption of decision-makers or athletes.

Against the background of progress, a consumer society has developed in which sport risks becoming more of a business, dependent including on arrangements that generate corruption, and less of a physical exercise and a way of recreation for the population. The excess of free time, arising in the context of general prosperity, is consumed through a relaxed approach to sport, mainly as a show, and secondarily, as physical exercise. Citizens' interest in participating as spectators in sports competitions has also decreased, opting to view or practice them through technology (e-sports) (Barbu et al., 2020a; Barbu et al., 2020b). Consumerism promotes fitness as an alternative, by revaluing the ancient ideal of physical health and beauty. But fitness is only an individual method to burn the excess calories of the consumer society, with a low degree of socialization, compared to team sports.

### **The evolution of sports and urban identity**

Urban culture or identity includes cultural elements and behaviours that differ from country to country. The imprint of the lifestyle will be recognized in the productions of urban culture, clearly distinguishing them from naive art, from the current pop art or impressionist style. In the USA, as in England, the term of "urban" is related to hip-hop culture and subsidiarily to its roots in "black" culture. The term urban culture can also be used as a reference.

The scope of events and cultural institutions in a big city, compared to suburban or rural areas are somehow very distinct due to characteristic factors related to rural areas like demographic decline (especially lack of young persons), lack of facilities or sport related facilities or touristic attractions etc.

Sport also has its place in this contemporary trend and borrows characteristic cultural elements, at the same time exploiting completely new areas of the urban space (Beacom, 2012). Curbs, railings, differences in levels and other structures or elements of the architectural urban landscape were an impetus for the emergence of new sports and forms of leisure such as skating, biking, climbing on the wall or even on buildings. All these elements are used by roller skaters, skateboarders, cyclists or those who use only their own body to create, perfect and combine original motor actions.

Pools on the banks of rivers, swimming ships, spaces for movement, sports and play have been built by the townspeople since the beginning of the modern era. To all of this, there are also ballrooms, spaces for tournaments, horse riding and archery, and in the 19th century, during the sportsmen's movement initiated by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), a lot of halls and sports field. Fencing halls near universities and military institutions were ubiquitous in German cities. In the centre of Göttingen, on Geiststrade, one of these

fencing halls can still be visited today. The building with typical architecture of the region, from the beginning of the 20th century, is used since its renovation in 2007 by the ballet school Art, as well as a non-commercial centre for events and various forms of artistic expression such as music, dance, literature and theatre. The space is bright and inspires clarity and concentration. Accessible from the street, the building looks through its wide windows towards the park next to the walls of the old citadel. Urban identity relies on sport facilities as a tool to create differentiation and boost urban branding (Nistorescu et al., 2013).

Parkour, skateboarding, inline skating, tricking, slacklining, high fall, cross golf or bouldering are modern sports, practiced right in the heart of urban landscapes (Jones & Armour, 2002). Concrete surfaces, railings, bridges, walls, roofs or gates and road access spaces are being redefined by young people.

More than standardized objects for sports or leisure use, young people need, in their places of meeting and action, protection, privacy and self-determination, spaces for cultivating their own image and for communication. In the social concentration area Grone in Göttingen, the Berlin architects from the office Lippert Cavally turned an old leisure area from the 1970s into a place where young people benefit from many free surfaces, but also a stage for their activities. Precast concrete stairs, a zig-zag ramp, rationally arranged urban furniture with two tall steel pergolas to protect them from the rain and a multi-purpose bench. In addition, striking colours, lines and shapes drawn on the ground that suggest tracks and playing surfaces, but which impose an unregulated space and, above all, one that can be transformed according to the individual needs of the beneficiaries. All these sport facilities need adequate promotion, helping the city authorities to attract more visitors and to stimulate local pride (Barbu et al., 2019).

Urban sports are part of the young generation culture in the cities and are a form of adaptation to the conditions of the built environment in which most of us live (Chandler, 2010).

They are fundamentally different from sports like football or rugby, which involve the notion of a field, of a natural surface, of soil that has not been interfered with to such an extent as to fundamentally change its texture (Nixon, 2008). The interest that this kind of motor activities presents for children and adolescents deserves more attention from specialists and local authorities.

More skate parks would mean attracting a greater number of children, teenagers and young people to practice some form of outdoor exercise. The spectacular character of the elements and combinations, as well as the speed at which they are executed, require a large volume of practice, which undoubtedly contributes to the development of all motor skills (most of which involve balance and orientation in space under unusual conditions, combined with very short reaction and execution times).

*"Men's Sana in corpore Sano"* (Healthy mind in a healthy body) – is the creed handed down, until today, from the ancient civilizations that form the basis of the contemporary world. More than 2,000 years after the first attestations of this Latin saying, with roots in Athenian culture, here is that the contemporary individual thinks the same: through sports we become healthier in body and mind; we develop more work power and creativity.

That is precisely why, in the last decades, *"the athlete of the future"* is being discussed more and more seriously at the world level, regardless of the other activities in which he or she is involved. And for all this, sports bases, fields and modern sports halls, stadiums and swimming pools have been built all over the world, both for those who want to perform and for the general public.

In Romania, in the last 18 years, more than 1,200 objectives have been built or modernized, through the National Investment Company (Compania Națională de Investiții - CNI), aimed at helping the development of sports, mass or performance infrastructure. Important cities in Romania today have stadiums, modern sports bases, sports halls and swimming pools, thanks to the projects carried out by the CNI: the Ion Oblemenco Stadium and the Polyvalent Hall in Craiova, the Sports Hall and the Târgu Jiu Stadium, the "Olimpia" Sports Hall, from Ploiești, the Arad Polo Pool, the Dinamo București Olympic Pool, the Steaua București Polo Pool, the Rapid București Olympic Pool or the Târgu Secuiesc Ice Rink are just some of the CNI's major investments in the infrastructure necessary for the development of performance sports. These are joined by the Euro2020 training stadiums that are currently being completed: Steaua (with a capacity of 31,254), Rapid (with a capacity of 14,050) and Arc de Triomphe (with a capacity of 8,207 of spectators). Multipurpose halls are also being built in Oradea, Pitești and Constanța, the Otopeni Olympic Swimming Complex and the Gheorgheni Rink. Because CNI invests in performance sports infrastructure and thus contributes to Romania's sporting achievements.

All these modern investments are also essential for mass sport, contributing to the harmonious development of young people and the discovery of new talents and tomorrow's champions (Jarvie, 2003; Barbu & Diaconescu, 2018).

In recent years, thanks to the National Investment Company, we have more than 1,100 sports halls dedicated to teaching use and more than 150 more that are now in the execution period. Also, Romania has over 16 teaching swimming pools and another 22 to be completed soon. CNI is in the process of implementing and building sports bases whose locations are established in collaboration with the Romanian Football Federation (FRF) and

the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC).

All these investments are for a beautiful Romania, with people who will be able to develop harmoniously, with performers who will be able to train freely, so that they can win many international competitions.

### **Research methodology**

In this study, we analysed the situation related Ion Oblemenco stadium (IOS) as part of the identity of the city of Craiova and it was carried out among 156 participants, and the data obtained based on the responses of the people questioned were analysed, and in terms of the demographic part, we notice that a percentage of 73% are men and 27% are women, which means that men are, as is known, more interested in sports than women. Regarding the age of the people in the study, 27% were between 20-30 years old, 45% between 30-40 years old, and 28% were between 40-50 years old. Source: own interpretation with the help of the Excel program

The ranking of respondents according to their last absolute education highlighted the fact that 5% have secondary education, 70% of the respondents have higher education, and 25% of them have postgraduate education.

Analysis of the jobs of the respondents 23% carry out various activities on their own, a percentage of 8% work as clerks, and 6% have other occupations than those presented, 7% prospects are students, 66% of the people have activities as a teacher, doctor, engineer, economist.

### **Results and discussion**

Going over the questions regarding creating an image of the respondents regarding sex, age, occupation, the first question in the questionnaire wanted to create a ranking of the emblematic buildings in the city. Thus, the IOS occupied the first place in the minds of the respondents (a 29% of responses), because

it is the second stadium in Romania in terms of size and number of seats. It also benefits from spaces intended for athletes, the press, administration, a sports accommodation area with rooms and recovery facilities for athletes and is provided with parking lots and accesses of different categories designed and made in a flexible organizational manner, which allows optimal use of space. (see the representation in figure 1)

The stadium was designed to be able to host matches within the UEFA Champions

League, UEFA Europa League, or it can also be used for other types of sports: rugby (Rugby Union and Rugby League, rugby in 7), sheep, field hockey, mini-hockey or American football. It will be possible to organize concerts, fairs, and exhibitions, cultural and social events within the sports complex.

The following places were occupied by the building of the National Theatre, followed by the building of the City Hall or the Prefecture at a short distance from each other.

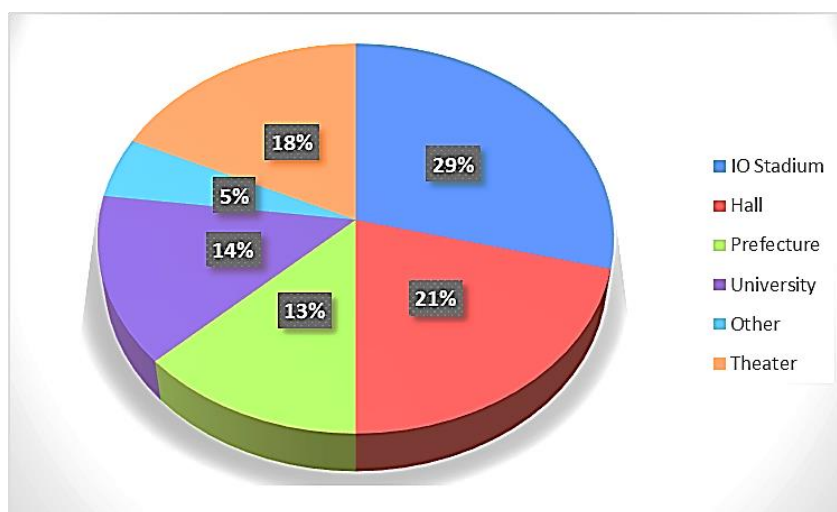


Figure. 1 The emblematic buildings of the city

Another question wanted to identify which are the main tourist attractions in Craiova. The percentage of responses are presented in figure 2, IOS is identified (in 30% of cases) along with the Nicolae Romanescu Park (28% of responses) like the most iconic images of the city.

Respondents had various objectives at their disposal, including the Ion Oblemenco stadium which was chosen as the main objective by approximately one third of the respondents, the already established location is part of a large, visible, accessible, eccentric, but well connected to the centre sports complex the city. Seen from afar, the stadium itself looks like a huge ovoid balloon surrounded by a promenade that encircles it like a Saturnian ring. The undulating movement seen from the outside has a counterpart inside, through the layout of

the stands and lawns that can accommodate 30,000 people. The football show is housed under a crown of colossal arches that, in the centre, form a huge oculus, the ellipsoidal counterpart of the rectangular field.

On the 2nd and 3rd places follows the park and the botanical garden, the park being also emblematic of Craiova's identity, being considered the largest natural park in Eastern Europe and one of the most representative monuments of landscape art in Romania, but also the Botanical Garden which is another attraction of the city, which is located within the University of Craiova. It is named after the professor who founded it in 1952 with his students from the Faculty of Agronomy, with scientific, didactic and recreational purposes. It covers about 13 hectares,

being the fourth largest in the country. The institution includes eight sectors with

various plants, a herbarium and a museum. (see Figure 2)

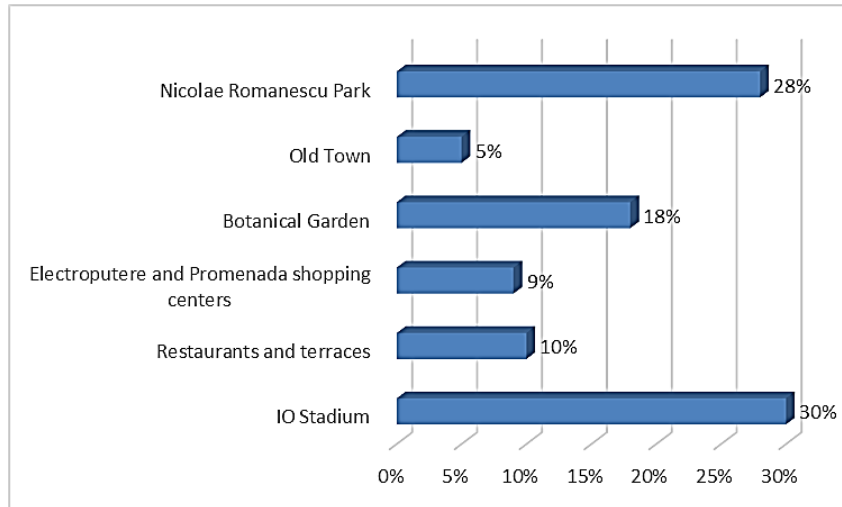


Figure. 2 The main tourist attractions in the Craiova city

Among the elements that can help the Ion Oblemenco stadium to attract more tourists, we can count, in the respondents suggestions, either the organization of various sports competitions that will implicitly lead to an increase in income within the city of Craiova or that the local sports teams have better performances in

order to be able thus organize other sports competitions. (see figure 3)

The respondents also suggested that the stadium be used for the organization of various concerts, fairs, exhibitions, cultural and social events, as was the case with the Intensity festival since 2022.

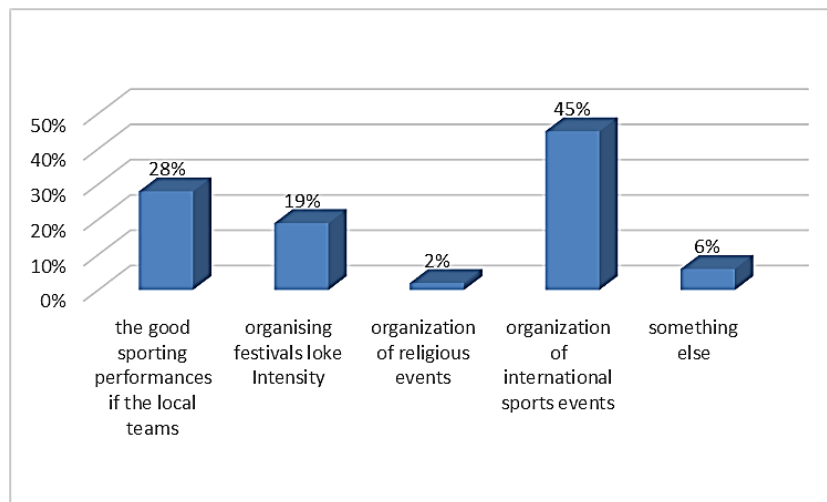


Figure. 3 Elements to attract visitors

Among the elements proposed by the people who were part of our study for the transformation of the stadium into a permanent tourist attraction (figure 4), when they are not tourist attractions, the organization of a museum of the Craiova football team, which could include

scarves, is counted with a percentage of 40% worn by supporters at matches with Bordeaux, Kaiserslautern or Benfica, champion shirts of all generations of players or life-size wax statues depicting all Craiova Maxima players. Tours can also be organized to present the stadium

with small stops where tourists can be served something to drink and eat, or meetings can be organized that include

discussions, offering autographs, and photo sessions with the current athletes of the Craiova team.

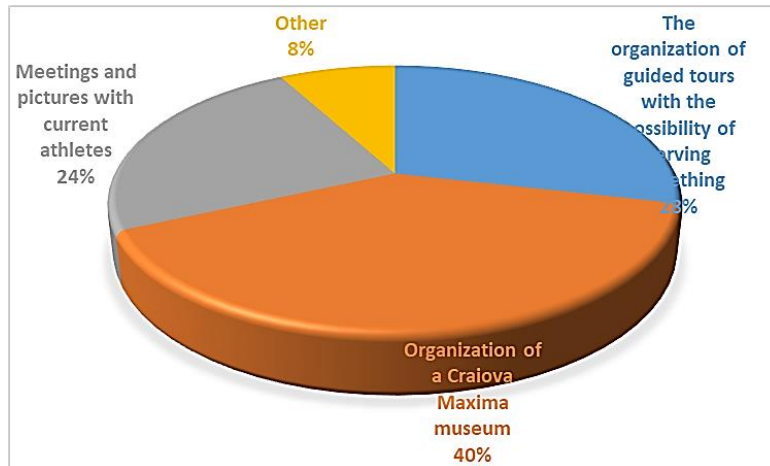


Figure. 4 Elements to transform the stadium into a permanent tourist attraction

The following question sought to know what are the elements or rather the benefits that the Ion Oblemenco stadium can bring to the city of Craiova where it is built, thus contributing to the formation of the urban identity and this can be achieved through the regular organization of competitions

that will contribute to increasing revenues, increasing the number of tourists, developing small businesses, developing infrastructure, these are just some of the most important effects that this stadium can have.(see the figure 5)

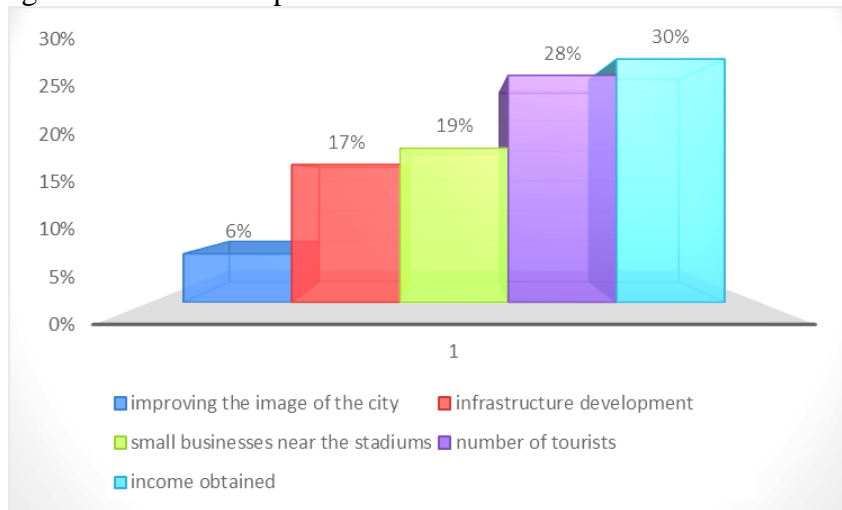


Figure. 5 Elements of the stadium that influence the urban identity

Next, we wanted to highlight the elements of the connection between the Ion Oblemenco stadium and the city that hosts it.

As can be seen below (figure 6), there are various elements of influence, among which the size is directly proportional to the size of the city.

It is logical that in a city developed in size, there will be a stadium of the same level. Architecture also plays an important role, if the city is modern and keeps pace with technological progress, this will be highlighted in the construction of the stadium, or even the name can have an influence on the urban identity, usually the



stadiums bear the name of an important

personality from the history of the city.

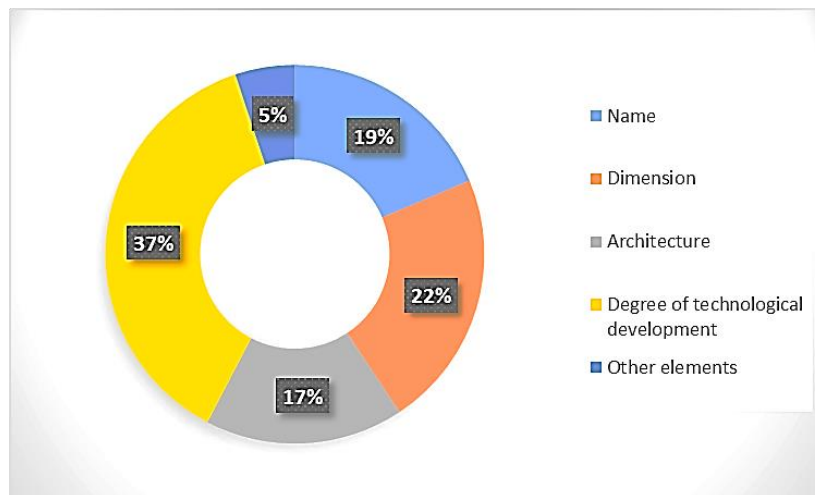


Figure. 6 The connecting elements between the stadium and the city

### Conclusions

Built space is what surrounds us most of the time, the vast majority of us living in urban environments where architecture and urbanism are protagonists. Urban identity is what distinguishes one city from another, and in the age of globalization this struggle for a unique identity, specific to each urban space, should be all the more important. Urban identity, this distinctive character of an urban space, can be formed based on a set of inherited features, on history and heritage.

Sport also has its place in this contemporary trend and borrows characteristic cultural elements, at the same time exploiting completely new areas of the urban space. Curbs, railings, differences in levels and other structures or elements of the architectural urban landscape were an impetus for the emergence of new sports and forms of leisure such as skating, biking, climbing on the wall or even on buildings.

Sport culturally integrates diverse geographical spaces, being an unfirming tool in a positive sense and with global application. Crossing cultural barriers, it can eliminate retrograde traditions, changing social relations in a community (for example, supporting sports equality can change gender relations). It influences mentalities at an individual level, thanks to

the assumption of sports rules by each practitioner, who shapes their character according to its democratic principles, based on performance and fairness. The globalization of sport has opened up to the West, including states reluctant to its values, by participating or even organizing competitions.

As we also saw in the small study carried out, the influence that a stadium can have on the identity of a city, the way it forms and processes it over the years, the connecting elements between the two.

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