CHAPTER 4

Recreational and Cultural Participation

Marialuisa Villani, Mario Trifuoggi, and Riccardo Prandini

Abstract The chapter explores recreational and cultural participation as constitutive dimensions of social capital and civicness, with particular attention to connections that bridge social, generational, and territorial divides. It examines sport first, highlighting associations as contexts that cultivate trust, cooperation, and civic competences when activities are embedded in participatory, educationally rich environments. It then reframes cultural participation as intentional, reflective practice—across offline and digitally mediated settings—through which cultural capital translates into collective capacities and shared meanings; choirs are presented as emblematic arenas of inclusive, bridge-building sociability. Adopting a territorial lens, the chapter maps how sporting and cultural

M. Villani (✉)
University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: marialuisa.villani@unibo.it

M. Trifuoggi
University of Naples, Naples, Italy
e-mail: mario.trifuoggi@unina.it

R. Prandini
University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: riccardo.prandini@unibo.it

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ecologies coexist and interact, while acknowledging discontinuities in available sources and the implications these have for comparative readings. Its contribution is to integrate sport and culture within a single civic framework and clarify the mechanisms—education, shared spaces, associational routines—through which participation supports social inclusion. Overall, the chapter provides a joined-up account that links everyday participatory practices to broader patterns of civicness and territorial cohesion, and shows how associational infrastructures can sustain inclusive, outward-looking communities.

Keywords Social capital · Cultural participation · Recreational participation · Sports · Choral participation

4.1 Introduction

Although social participation of a recreational and cultural type is usually linked to voluntary and pro-social associations, it first appears as a key dimension of the concept of social capital before the seminal work of Putnam et al. (1993) on civic traditions in Italy. The research described in *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam et al., 1993) considered the distribution of sporting clubs and associations in each of the 20 regions of Italy as an indicator (among others) of the propensity of citizens to take part in public life and to cooperate. This relationship is based on the assumption that non-political associations, or those with aims not explicitly concerned with social utility, reflect and help propagate civic values, such as trust in others and cooperation. Recreative associations can help spread these values and often translate them into greater generalised social trust, transcending the borders of single groups (Coleman, 1988, 1990). In this sense, joining an association, not necessarily for reasons of social utility like those examined in Chap. 3, but to develop one's passion together with others, can be considered a sign of capacity to create "good" social bonds.[1] The democratic-participative dimension is a further feature of such associations (Habermas, 1981), manifesting through education in local forms of responsibility.

[1] It can be considered thus, but not necessarily always. Certain forms of association do not produce social bonds of a type that generates civic sense (Lichterman, 2021; Eliasoph, 1998).

Sporting and cultural associations are therefore an important element in the creation of significant social spaces where citizens can interact and make friends. Such spaces counteract the well-known social atomisation typical of contemporary society (Putnam, 2000). Their generative function in fostering sociability and propensity for cooperation emerges as a fundamental element of both types of association (Bandura, 1977; Foote, 2006), although in different ways for different age groups. For younger groups, it manifests by generation and transmission of pro-social values and the development of relational skills (Coalter, 2007); for adults, it manifests through continuing education/training (Hosagrahar, UNESCO, 2019); for seniors, through maintenance of cognitive and relational functions (World Health Organization, 2021).

Both types of association contribute significantly to preventing social distress by developing recreational opportunities, community relational support, social skills and pro-social behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The social dimension represents the common ground underpinning sporting and cultural associations (CONI, 2020), confirming their essential function in promoting collective well-being and civic sense.

In this chapter we analyse the different forms of sporting and cultural participation from the viewpoint of civic sense. In Sects 4.2 and 4.3 we delve into the role of sporting participation in the construction of an index of social capital, examining the evolution of such participation in Italy in the last 15 years. In Sect. 4.4, we explore the social and civic dimensions of cultural participation, comparing sporting and cultural practices in order to demonstrate possible links and implications.

4.2 Participating Through Sport

Various studies have examined the aims of social participation and its implications for creating, maintaining and developing social capital. In general, the literature distinguishes particularistic and universalistic types of association, suggesting that the latter is significantly better correlated than the former with bridging rather than bonding social capital (Larsen et al., 2004; Leonard, 2004; Patulny & Svendsen; 2007; Stolle, 1998; Stolle & Rochon, 1998). As mentioned in Chap. 2, bonding social capital can produce strong moral obligation and strong solidarity towards members of one's community, whereas bridging social capital is more likely to promote social sustainability and cohesion and democratic institutions of quality.

For example, sporting associations can generate bonding and bridging social capital, namely internal bonds of cohesion and support between members of a group and links between different groups, respectively, favouring understanding and collaboration on a wider scale (Seippel, 2006). According to Cartocci (Cartocci, 2007, p. 85), the distribution of sporting associations on Italian territory in itself reflected the presence of "social capital entrepreneurs", i.e. actors, often unremunerated, committed to promoting community activities and occasions where people meet. Thus, the inclusion of sporting associations as an indicator of social capital is above all linked to the commitment to community work of those who organise and ensure its effectiveness.

In contexts with adequate support, sporting activities can provide an inclusive platform that encourages mutual respect and builds trust (Coalter, 2007; Elmose-Østerlund & van der Roest, 2017; Nicholson & Hoye, 2008). In particular, sporting projects in disadvantaged areas, conceived to involve young people and keep them away from bad influences, use sport as a vehicle for socialisation, where social norms and values like cooperation following rules and discipline, are learnt (Coalter, 2007). The social capital of sporting organisations is derived principally from horizontal interactions between members, promoting mutual trust and social commitment (Seippel, 2006). Taking part in sporting organisations not only means physical activity but can expose members to shared information, to news and opinions that go beyond the sporting context. Thus, these organisations can become fertile ground for interest in social and political questions, increasing civic awareness and the capacity to collaborate. According to Seippel, the transmission of information in a sporting environment tends to be less formalised than in other associations, making it easier to internalise shared knowledge and values (Seippel, 2006).

Belonging to a sporting group also contributes significantly to forming the social identity of members, and to creating a sense of belonging and common objectives that fuel trust and mutual respect (Coalter, 2007; Seippel, 2006; Warren, 2001). However, it is important to underline that the process of building trust is not linear or automatic. For sport to promote civicness, a structure that offers an educational and participatory environment is essential (Coalter, 2007). Mere participation in sports is not enough: the activities must be accompanied by education in active citizenship that promotes the values of respect, solidarity and civic

involvement. It is therefore worthwhile recognising the validity and topical nature of an indicator that continues to capture certain essential aspects of civic customs and their distribution in Italy.

4.3 A Geography of Sporting Associations

In *Mappe del tesoro* (Cartocci, 2007), Cartocci resumes and delves into Putnam's indicator of sporting clubs and associations, focusing on the latter and studying their distribution at provincial rather than regional level. He stresses that sporting associations are not just recreational activities but also a means to develop social, civic and relational skills.

In the context of Italy, the law provides two forms of association for organising and managing amateur sporting activity: amateur sporting associations (ASD) and amateur sporting societies (SSD). The main difference is the legal form and governance model. The latter have more structured and managerial internal organisation but remain non-profit organisations. Both contributed to the construction of an indicator designed to measure the variety and territorial distribution of the fabric of Italian sporting associations, while highlighting significant regional differences (Cartocci, 2007). In some areas of Italy, especially in the centre-north, the sporting association phenomenon is very well developed, much more than in the south and islands.

Until 2021, the legal recognition and census of these associations was in the hands of the *Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano* (CONI), which managed the National Register of Amateur Sporting Activities regularly affiliated with National Sporting Federations (NSFs),[2] Associated Sporting Disciplines (ASDs)[3] and Sport Promotion Bodies (SPBs).[4] Since 2022, the

[2] The NSF is made up of associations which are generally organised on a territorial basis with regional and in some cases provincial committees recognised for their activity by CONI. There are currently 45 Federations.

[3] The 19 ASDs currently recognised by CONI are similar to the NSFs, since they manage activities linked to one or more disciplines, developing them from basic to advanced level. However they differ in specific characteristics. The two main reasons for this distinction are: 1) their recreational nature (while some disciplines are perceived as sports, they are prevalently of a gaming nature, like drafts, bridge and chess); 2) Olympic recognition (other disciplines, albeit requiring significant physical commitment, are relatively young and not yet recognised as Olympic sports, like rock climbing and rafting).

[4] These associations often arose from non-sporting subjects which after growing and developing in Italy were recognised by CONI (15 bodies are currently recognised).

Register is managed by *Sport & Salute* for the Department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. This created a discontinuity in the criteria and manner of enrolment that has so far prevented continuity of the data series. We therefore decided to concentrate exclusively on CONI data for the provincial distribution of NSF- and ASD-affiliated sporting bodies up to 2019, extracting it from official reports *I Numeri dello Sport* (CONI, 2011, 2014, 2020).[5] In the study period, the number of associations in the CONI Register declined from 67,370 in 2009 to 60,568 in 2019. In Italy, the number of CONI-affiliated associations per 10,000 of population was 13, 12 and about 10 in 2009, 2014 and 2019, respectively.

The analyses conducted by Cartocci (2007) on CONI- and SPB-affiliated associations in 1999 showed higher densities of associations in the following Regions: Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Umbria, Abruzzo and Molise. The territorial data collected by us confirmed continuity of the geographical distribution found by Cartocci. In particular, Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Marche remained constantly in the top five regions in terms of mean number of associations per 10,000 of population in the three years. Molise appeared in the upper ranks in 2014 and 2019.

Our analysis of regional data showed continuity with respect to the situation described in the volume *Mappe del tesoro,* also for regions with lower densities of CONI-affiliated associations. The work of Cartocci showed the lowest numbers of CONI-affiliated associations in centre-south regions, in particular Lazio, Calabria, Sicily, Campania and Apulia. Our data confirmed this trend, ranking Sicily, Calabria, Campania and Apulia constantly among the bottom five regions in terms of mean number of associations per 10,000 of population in the years 2009, 2014 and 2019. Lazio ranked among regions with the lowest densities in 2009.

[5] Unlike the original indicator of Cartocci, our indicator therefore does not consider sporting bodies affiliated with EPS which while included in the CONI registers, were not in the official report consulted by us. Unfortunately, direct access to the source of the "old" register was denied us by CONI, presumably due to the transfer to *Sport & Salute*. Most of our single requests for data to EPS were also denied, preventing us from an alternative reconstruction of the data on this part of the world of sporting associations. However, since we were interested in social participation and not in affiliation with FSN or DSA rather than EPS, in our opinion the number of associations affiliated with CONI is a valid indicator of social capital. We hope to have more complete information when the *Sport & Salute* data becomes available.

Thus, our analysis of regional data made it possible to show a significant divide between regions such as the Aosta Valley, which recorded a density of associations almost twice the national average, and Apulia or Campania, which recorded values well below the national average. These differences underline a divide between northern (except Lombardy) and centre-south regions, already documented by Cartocci (Cartocci, 2007, p. 87).

Cartocci's geography of the density of CONI-affiliated sporting associations at the provincial level showed 12 provinces with a particularly high density. Six were in Tuscany (Massa-Carrara, Lucca, Pistoia, Prato, Livorno and Pisa), and the others included Aosta, Cuneo, La Spezia, Forlì-Cesena, Perugia and Rieti.

Also, in this case, our analysis showed continuity with Cartocci's results. Aosta and Ascoli Piceno were the two provinces with the greatest number of associations, and this primacy was maintained in time. The provinces of Isernia, Macerata and Trento emerged as those with the highest mean numbers of associations per 10,000 of population in 2009 and 2014, confirming the above regional patterns. In the periods analysed, the provinces of Nuoro in 2014 and Cagliari in 2019 showed a significant increase in the number of associations affiliated with CONI; all the provinces of Sardinia showed constant growth in the three years considered. The provinces of Florence and Prato showed a gradual decrease in ranking in terms of CONI-affiliated associations (Fig. 4.1).

Cartocci (Cartocci, 2007, pp. 88–91) identified Caserta, Avellino, all the provinces of Apulia, Cosenza, Vibo Valentia, Agrigento, Enna and Ragusa as the provinces with the lowest number of CONI-affiliated associations. Our analysis indicated that Milan in 2009 and Monza-Brianza[6] in 2014 and 2019 were among the provinces of Lombardy with the lowest mean values. The provinces of Naples, Caserta and Agrigento showed negative trends in the study period (2009–2019). The province of Barletta-Andria-Trani ranked among the lowest for the number of associations affiliated with CONI in 2014 and 2019.

The divide between provinces was even more accentuated than between regions. In 2009 and 2014, the difference between the first and last provinces was about 20 points in average values. In 2009, Aosta recorded a mean of 26 associations per 10,000 of population, whereas Naples recorded only six. Likewise in 2014, Aosta showed a mean of 25 associations

[6] The province of Monza-Brianza was established recently.

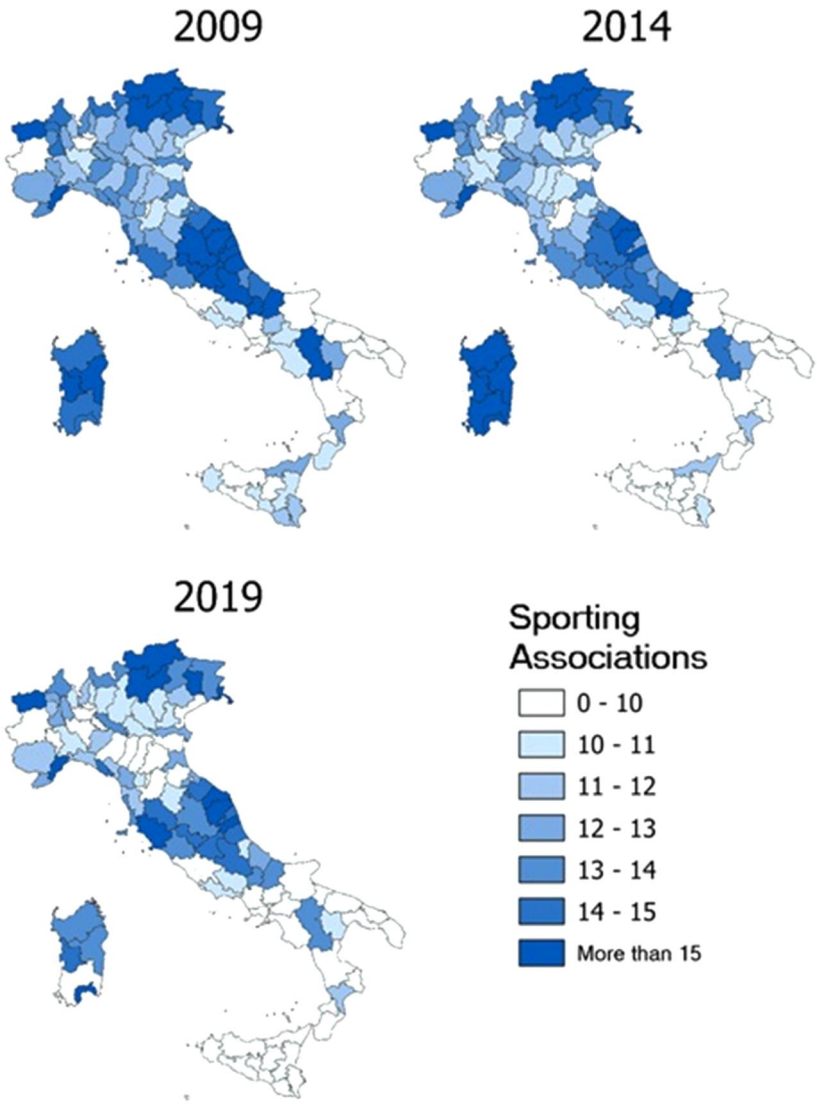

Fig. 4.1 Mean number of associations affiliated with CONI per 10,000 of population by province in 2009, 2014 and 2019. The authors' analysis. *Source* CONI. Map of provinces with names: see Appendix, Sect. A

against only five in the province of Barletta-Andria-Trani. In 2019, this divide narrowed slightly, Aosta recording a mean of 24 versus 6 associations for Barletta-Andria-Trani.

4.4 Participating Through Cultural and Recreative Activities

Cultural participation and civic commitment are multidimensional concepts that can be studied at the individual and at the territorial level. Here, we explore the territorial distribution of cultural participation. The relation between cultural participation, rights and citizenship is central for understanding contemporary civicness. While citizenship has traditionally been considered mainly in political and social terms, in recent years, inclusion of a cultural dimension has broadened its scope and meaning (Meyer-Bisch, 2019; Stanley, 2006). The relation between cultural participation and democracy manifests primarily via the concept of "cultural citizenship" (Stanley, 2006). Cultural participation is a process of continuous learning and a means of collective comparison for tackling the challenges of daily life (Foote, 2006). Being excluded from these processes can limit the possibility of active, fully aware citizenship. The concept of cultural citizenship is based on the dimensions of respect for diversity, sharing of fundamental democratic values, a shared history and heritage, at least in terms of fundamental content, and continuous contribution to pacific intercultural dialogue (Foote, 2006). The relation between democracy, rights and cultural participation becomes fundamental for civic participation in public debate (Meyer-Bish, Meyer-Bisch, 2019). It is therefore possible to analyse the relation between cultural participation and civicness through the concept of "cultural public sphere" (McGuigan, 2005). McGuigan re-elaborated the concept of cultural public sphere according to Habermas and Rusconi (1986); Habermas & Calloni (2023), in which the political dimension, linked to the news and daily debate on questions of collective interest, flanks the literary-cultural dimension that includes a broader spectrum of cultural and discursive manifestations (McGuigan, 2005). The contemporary public sphere can be understood as a space that includes not only traditional political debate but also popular culture, the media in all its manifestations, and the articulation of public debate on personal and collective political questions. This cultural public sphere

is a plural arena where different dimensions of social life intersect and where participation takes many, often innovative, forms (McGuigan, 2005). Within the cultural public sphere (Foote, 2006), citizenship is expressed through daily living, free time and critical consumption, as well as through traditional political debate. In light of these elements, cultural participation takes on not only a recreational and entertainment-related meaning, but also becomes a true dimension of civicness.

Although the relation between cultural participation and civic engagement has been studied over the years (Delaney & Keaney, 2005; Jeannotte, 2003; Leroux & Bernadska, 2014; National Endowment for the ArtsNEA, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), 2009; Polzella & Forbis, 2016; Stern & Seifert, 2009), few studies have been able to analyse the mechanisms that structure the links between them.

In 2020, Campagna et al. defined cultural participation, or participation in cultural life, as the set of "receptive and creative conscious activities through which people increase their informational and cultural baggage as far as four different cultural domains are concerned: Cultural Heritage, Performing Arts, Books and Press, Audio and Audiovisual Media and Multimedia" (Campagna et al., 2020, p. 606).

The distinctive feature of cultural participation, compared with other forms of cultural consumption, lies in the intentional and self-aware dimension activated by those who engage in it (Campagna et al., 2020; Morrone, 2006).

The dimensions of awareness and intention are crucial for linking participation with civic life and cultural practices. Cultural participation not only sustains the formation of a system of shared values, but also promotes a growing interest in civic and collective questions at the individual level. It contributes to social cohesion by acting as a mechanism of continuing education and collective re-negotiation of solutions to daily challenges, where access and involvement in cultural activities are catalysts for the creation of community bonds and development of a shared sense of belonging.

This process takes place through a network of local cultural institutions and third-sector organisations that, by facilitating individual and collective creative and expressive practices, promote social inclusion and strengthen the social capital of the community, essential elements for building a more cohesive and democratically participatory society (Campagna et al., 2020; McGuigan, 2005; Stern & Seifert, 2009). Awareness-raising and cultural

consumption are basically individual dimensions that can have major collective repercussions (Jeannotte, 2003). The results of the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted in Canada in 1998 (Jeannotte, 2003) showed a positive correlation between high levels of cultural capital, measured through the practice and consumption of cultural activities, and an increase in civic participation. Jeannotte (2003) sustained that investments in cultural capital produce collective benefits, which manifest in an increase in altruism, especially in the form of volunteer activity in the local social context. Thus, cultural capital is not solely an individual resource (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964, 1970) but can be considered a set of cultural and social resources that not only enrich individuals but also have a lasting positive effect on society. This capital is seen as fundamental for promoting solidarity, facilitating mutual understanding and creating "operative social systems" that allow communities to tackle collective challenges and develop sustainably. This suggests that the promotion of cultural capital can help improve engagement in the community and strengthen social responsibility.

Time invested in the community has a crucial role in analysis of the relation between cultural participation and civic life (Campagna et al., 2020; Willekens & Lievens, 2016). Thus the investment of time and the economic resources necessary to give rise to collective cultural initiatives, like for example choirs, is usually considered a good indicator of social capital, like rates of participation in amateur sporting activity and the distribution/density of non-profit sporting associations and societies (Delaney & Keaney, 2005; Elmose-Østerlund & van der Roest, 2017; Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Seippel, 2006; Spaaij, 2012).

In this context, the new digital forms of cultural participation play an increasing role. They can potentially reach more people than traditional forms of access to culture and the arts (Campagna et al., 2020). Traditional cultural fruition (theatre, concerts, museums) is sometimes considered elite, whereas digitally-mediated experiences can be more inclusive, involving people who, for lack of economic resources, time or cultural background, are not accustomed to enjoying these forms of art and culture (Agovino et al., 2017). Places of culture, including museums, historical sites and art galleries, as well as cultural associations and art cooperatives, are increasingly exploiting digital technologies and game-related approaches, contributing to the spread of new knowledge and providing contexts for civic action to a vaster public (Bria et al., 2015; Mortara et al., 2014).

Evidence of a Relation Between Sport and Choirs

Among the various types of cultural associations, it has been possible to obtain data on choirs. Many studies on cultural participation have underlined choirs as places where social capital is built (Campagna et al., 2020; Foote, 2006; Meyer-Bisch, 2019; Stanley, 2006). Choirs are an emblematic example of how cultural capital can become social capital and generate connections within a community through shared experiences such as singing in a choir. Jeannotte (2003) takes the concept of "singing together" as an activity which like "bowling together" (with reference to Putnam's *Bowling Alone*), can generate connections without requiring an ideological identity or common ethnicity. Choirs do not require a shared cultural background or pre-existing personal values (apart from interest in music). The experience of singing together creates an inclusive space that favours mutual understanding and respect for diversity. In this way, choirs help overcome social barriers, facilitating the meeting of different groups (Jeannotte, 2003). Singing in a choir also affects individual well-being, helping reduce feelings of isolation and improving the self-esteem and personal happiness of the participants. These individual benefits can have a positive impact on the community because people who are more satisfied and have strong social bonds tend to work harder towards community improvement (Jeannotte, 2003).

The data analysed here regards the different types of choirs affiliated with FENIARCO (National Choir Federation). Founded in 1984, FENIARCO is a cultural organisation that operates actively throughout Italy, coordinating 21 regional choral associations (one per region and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano) and more than 2800 choirs and a total of about 120,000 choristers. The mission of FENIARCO consists of valorising, increasing, promoting and broadcasting choral music in cultural, artistic, educational and social contexts.

Since FENIARCO only provided us with data on the number of choirs in the various provinces of Italy for 2024, we were unable to plot the trend of the indicator in our study period, and therefore it was not included in our index of social capital (Chap. 7).

In order to examine the relation between sporting and cultural participation discussed in the first part of this chapter, we decided to compare data on the number of choirs at province level in 2024 with those of sporting associations affiliated with CONI in 2019, the last year available. We calculated the Pearson correlation between the two variables. The reason for this choice was the idea that the two forms of association

(sporting and cultural) are valid indicators of social capital. The correlation turned out to be 0.47, evidence of a positive relation between the territorial distributions of sporting associations and choirs, suggesting that the two forms of participation tend to develop in social contexts that favour associations and cooperation. In other words, in areas where there are many sporting associations, there is often also lively cultural participation, confirming a social fabric that favours transverse bonds and shared active-citizenship pursuits.

Observing Fig. 4.2, a dispersion diagram plotted on the basis of provincial scores for the two variables (transformed into index numbers),[7] we

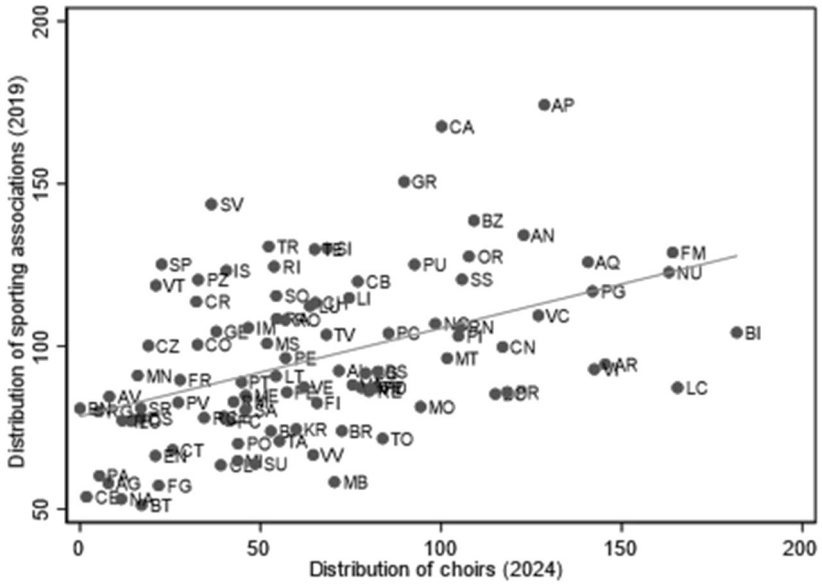

Fig. 4.2 Dispersion diagram: distributions of sporting associations (2019) and choirs (2024) at province level. Variables expressed as index numbers (national mean = 100). The authors' analysis. *Sources* CONI and FENIARCO. For the geographical collocation of the provinces, see Appendix, Sect. A

[7] See Chap. 7 on how to normalise a variable by expressing it as an index number (where 100 represents the national mean).

see that most provinces lie along the bisector, suggesting a significant relation between the distribution of choirs and that of basic sporting associations. However, some provinces are distinguished by values higher or lower than the general trend. Macerata (MC), Ascoli Piceno (AP) and Cagliari (CA), for example, show a high presence of sporting associations, whereas Aosta (AO) and Pordenone (PN) show a particularly high density of choirs with respect to the mean. Other provinces, like Belluno (BL) and Verbano-Cusio-Ossola (VB), are anomalous in that they show more choirs than sporting associations, suggesting the possibility of local dynamics linked to specific cultural traditions or different modes of social participation. This data confirms the hypothesis that cultural and sporting participation share common ground in the field of associative and community life. However, the territorial differences that emerged suggest that other factors, like local traditions, funding policy and access to infrastructure, can significantly influence the relation between the two forms of participation. High densities of both suggest provinces with a particularly active associative environment, where a culture of participation pervades different fields; discrepancies encountered in other provinces could be worthy of further study.

4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter we showed that participation in sporting and cultural associations can be considered an indicator of social capital in Italy and can therefore contribute to social cohesion and civic participation. Our analysis showed a positive relation between the distribution of sporting associations and that of choirs, suggesting a significant link between sporting and cultural participation. These results lend force to the idea that these two forms of associative engagement can be two interconnected dimensions of sociality that can foster community networks and civicness. Although they arise from individual inclinations, both forms of participation can potentially contribute to the civic dimension through education and the creation of community spaces.

Education is an aspect of both sporting and cultural activity. Sport can foster values such as collaboration and following rules (Coalter, 2007). Likewise, cultural participation can stimulate critical thinking and understanding of different perspectives. The benefits of education are not limited to a single age group: in young people, it favours the development of relational and prosocial skills; in adults, continuous learning (Hosagrahar,

UNESCO, Hosagrahar, 2019); in seniors, maintenance of cognitive and social abilities (World Health Organization, 2021).

Regarding the creation of community spaces, the theory of social identity of Tajfel and Turner (1986) suggests that shared spaces can facilitate the development of relations between participants. This is sustained by the rich international literature, which shows that social activities promote the values of solidarity, trust and active citizenship, all key elements for opposing social fragmentation (Cartocci, 2007; Coleman, 1988; Putnam et al., 1993). We discussed the way both forms of participation generate bridging social capital, which specifically favours the capacity to create links between different individuals and groups (Larsen et al., 2004; Seippel, 2006). This diversification is an important added value for social inclusion, because it creates links beyond immediate and family relationships. This capacity to build social bridges makes it possible to activate relational and cognitive resources that foster understanding of rapidly changing fields, enabling broader participation also by traditionally excluded subjects. In this sense, the development of heterogeneous associative practices, whether sporting or cultural, is a fundamental vehicle for offering solid opportunities for inclusion and civic participation, even to vulnerable groups commonly left on the side-lines of institutional citizenship circuits (European Commission, 2019; Forum Terzo Settore, 2021).

Our analysis showed that the density of sporting associations per 10,000 of population in centre-northern regions like Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, is well above the national mean, confirming continuity with the data analysed by Cartocci in *Mappe del tesoro* (Cartocci, 2007). At the same time, these regions also show a higher density of choirs, sustaining the hypothesis of a relation between the two dimensions of participation. By contrast, centre-southern regions like Sicily and Campania showed a lower density of associations, indicating a structural divide that reflects regional differences in social participation and the construction of social capital (Table 4.1). Although sporting associations showed a decline in numbers between 2009 and 2019, those affiliated with CONI fell from 67,370 to 60,568; this seems partly compensated by the spread of cultural associations, such as choirs affiliated with FENIARCO, that involve about 120,000 choristers in the whole of Italy.

In conclusion, while sport and culture remain individual choices, they activate community processes of cohesion and civicness by virtue of their capacity to generate educational experiences and shared spaces that favour

Table 4.1 Number of CONI-affiliated sporting associations at national and regional level. Data for 2009, 2014 and 2019. Authors' analysis. *Source* CONI

	2009	*2014*	*2019*
Total number of associations by year	67.370	63.726	60.568
Number of associations per 10,000 of population by year	13	11,8	10,1
Highest provincial value per 10,000 of population	26	25	24
Lowest provincial value per 10,000 of population	6	5	6

Area	*Region*	*Mean number of associations per 10,000 of population by Region*		
North West	Aosta Valley	26	25	24
	Piedmont	13	12	11
	Lombardy	12	11	10
	Liguria	14	14	14
North East	Trentino-South Tyrol	18	17	16
(former white area)	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	16	16	15
	Veneto	12	12	11
Centre-North	Emilia- Romagna	12	11	10
(former red area)	Tuscany	12	12	12
	Marche	18	17	16
	Umbria	16	14	14
Centre-South	Lazio	12	11	12
	Molise	18	16	13
	Abruzzo	15	13	13
	Sardinia	15	12	15
South	Campania	9	8	8
	Apulia	8	8	8
	Basilicata	14	14	12
	Calabria	10	9	9
	Sicily	10	9	8

the construction of social capital, especially that of a bridging nature. This capacity to connect different people and groups makes cultural participation a driver of social inclusion and civic participation for all citizens. Territorial differences suggest the importance of developing future policies to enable associative participation in less fortunate regions, in order to improve community well-being and to more evenly distribute opportunities for sustainable social development at the national scale.

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