



Padel as a driver of well-being and sustainable local growth: a case study from Sicily, Italy

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of public health and physical well-being, encouraging a shift toward daily routines that prioritize outdoor spaces and physical activities. In this context, padel gained significant popularity, establishing itself as an accessible sport suitable for a wide demographic, with demonstrable benefits for both physical and mental health. From an interdisciplinary perspective, padel not only promotes personal wellness but also generates economic and social impacts, potentially fostering local development. Currently, padel represents approximately 25% of Italy's amateur sports market and is experiencing rapid growth, especially in regions like Sicily. The present exploratory study presents findings from a field survey on the development of padel in the Sicilian territory. Employing stakeholder analysis and conducting face-to-face interviews, preliminary results revealed substantial growth potential, as evidenced by an increasing number of participants and newly established facilities.

Keywords: wellness; Sicily; sport tourism; local development.

Introduction

The economic and social development of a region necessitates policies and actions that consider its unique characteristics and local resources. A crucial element in this process is the ability to interpret and design solutions tailored to the specific context, while also accounting for external and unforeseen variables. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered and disrupted daily life, underscoring the importance of sports activities, and changing how they are practiced, while maintaining their relevance [1]. The pandemic has also impacted entrepreneurial economic activities, causing severe consequences in some sectors, such as tourism [2]. However, in other areas, practical and innovative solutions have emerged, driving social and economic transformation. The activities related to the world of sports is currently a very popular topic, also after the pandemic. In fact, the structural changes that some important urban centers have undergone in recent years have also been partly driven by the idea of using sports as a tool for transformation, with the intention of achieving positive impacts on economic indicators and the so-called "happiness index", which contributes to measuring people's well-being [3,4]. Sports are deeply rooted in human nature and culture and are fundamental for excellent physical and inner health.

Landscapes and outdoor spaces, in turn, have contributed to the formation and development of sports activities and cultures of movement and the body, providing the opportunity to convert more profitable facilities, outlining aesthetically pleasing and therapeutic scenarios [5]. The value of activities related to sports offers an interesting perspective on the enabling role of reference



infrastructures as well as on events and their repercussions in territories not only at the local but also at the global level.

The study focuses on padel to highlight a development program managing a sport that boomed post-pandemic. The focus is on sustainable sports activities and player preferences of this sport. Additionally, it explores the growing link to sports tourism.

Padel is a racket sport played in doubles, originating in Mexico in the 1960s [6], which has become popular in Spain in recent decades, with over 4 million practitioners and a presence in 44 countries worldwide.

Specifically, the objective is to analyze through a field investigation. We apply stakeholder analysis (SA) methodology. Interviews include testimonies from entrepreneurs, technicians, federal executives, competitive and amateur players. The study examines the geo-economic effects generated by padel. It also explores the link between padel and sports sector development. Study area is Sicily, in the South of Italy. SA in this study is used to define and understand the interests of the various parties involved (from sports associations to managers, entrepreneurs, the relevant Federation, local governance, and also athletes), and represents a useful support in relation to stakeholders' expectations regarding the perception of the enhancement and development plan of such sports practice [7].

The paper is structured as follows. The next section establishes the conceptual framework of the study and presents the literature on the argument based on the study's hypotheses. Subsequently, the methodology of the study, including the sample, and analysis method, is explained. The findings of the study are then presented in detail. The study concludes with the implications for researchers and practitioners.

The importance of the sport: an Italian view of the padel development

2.1 Sport and Padel: a literature review

Sports are a free, complex, and structured phenomenon that represents multiple dimensions of contemporary society, the analysis of which can serve to understand broader social and economic cases. Around sports practice, there is a heterogeneous mix of meanings, interests, passions, activities, and rituals that manifest themselves at both micro and macro levels. Sports constantly generate opportunities for socialization, produce relational networks, narrative experiences, and symbolic connotations that contribute to the formation of individual and group identities, influencing consumption practices and life-styles. Furthermore, sports have significant repercussions on the development of territorial policies and actions, around which the functioning logics of the sector and the interests and actions of all stakeholders who revolve around the macro sector intertwine [8,9].

If you look at Italy, the subject of study, per capita spending has increased significantly following the increase in activities carried out, with a 9% increase from pre-pandemic (2019) to 2022, with the resumption of the organization of sports events and the development of "do-it-yourself" sports. Nearly 10% of "do-it-yourself" athletes do not engage in structured physical activity due to a lack of facilities nearby, highlighting limited diffusion of sports facilities. In fact, in Italy, there is one sports facility for every 5,750 inhabitants (out of approximately 59 million in total), 38% less



than the EU average (excluding sports organizations and events promotion, clubs, stadiums, and school gyms) [10].

The padel, an attractive sport, has recently entered competition with other minor racket sports such as badminton and squash. It is a sport that uses the rules and scoring system of tennis but is played within a synthetic court, enclosed in glass and metal (10 × 20 m), smaller than a tennis court, allowing the use of side and back walls. This increases the pace of the game, and the frequency of actions where high technical skill is not re-quired to begin playing. The necessary equipment includes a racket, balls, and attire including shoes, shorts, and a T-shirt. This particular characteristic makes padel an attractive and enjoyable activity, especially for adults and particularly for women, considering the aspect related to engaging in physical activity that promotes physical well-being [11, 12] presenting an injury incidence rate similar to other racket sports [13]. Additionally, enthusiasm and motivation seem to enhance the mental efforts of padel athletes [14]. The padel can be played by everyone, no matter its conditions as well as socioeconomic level, physical condition, age and gender. It embraces everyone in front of other sports played by people with specific characteristics. The appeal of padel is a sport that brings joy, amusement, and sense of community to its players. Padel is a sport with an increasing number of enthusiasts that involves the social sphere, a detail not to be overlooked considering the recent years post the pandemic Covid-19 [15, 16]. Also, accessibility and inclusivity are essential for creating a welcoming and diverse environment where everyone has the opportunity to participate, enjoy, and excel easy in the sport. Scholars [17] studying the areas of performance analysis in the padel, affirm the importance of four variables: temporal aspects, game actions, on-court movements and match score studies, depending on the gender and the level of players, the side and the zone of play as well as the time of the match.

Numerous studies in the literature delve into various aspects of padel sports activity, such as anthropometric, physiological [18], physical performance [19], biomechanical, epidemiological injury analysis [20], and match analysis. Indeed, publications on padel are experiencing exponential growth, with Spain leading the research efforts. In recent years, several new countries have also begun contributing to this field of study [21]. The analysis of the game was prominent, being the focus of the most studies. Additionally, the authors most frequently used terms like match analysis, performance analysis, competition, game analysis, or game actions, rather than racket sports, racquet sports, paddle tennis, or paddle [18, 21].

However, there are knowledge gaps and research potential in the economic and social field to understand the margins and profitability of development padel [22].

2.2 An Italian view of the padel development

During the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve in 2022, according to data from FITP¹ (Italian Tennis Federation), the number of registered members among tennis and padel athletes, beach tennis players, wheelchair tennis players, amateurs, students of tennis schools, and participants in the *Racchette in classe* project exceeded 550,000 units (last year they were about 475,000). Enthusiasts of racket sports, from competitive players to amateurs, from juniors to veterans, from beginners to coaches, who have subscribed to a membership with the Federation, reached a figure that suggests

¹ During the sixtieth National Assembly held in Florence on October 16, 2022, the Italian Tennis Federation (FIT) decided to change its name to the Italian Tennis and Padel Federation (FITP).



the state of health of racket sports in Italy (www.federtennis.it). The significant growth of padel has certainly contributed greatly to achieving this result [23]. In fact, in 2022 in Italy, both padel facilities and courts recorded a 9% increase, with 164 new facilities and 405 new courts. In recent years, the numbers of padel facilities and courts have been steadily increasing. According to the study by Playatomic-Monitor Deloitte [24] (2023), Spain leads in terms of the number of clubs and padel courts in 2021, but in terms of investments, it trails behind Sweden and Italy, both of which have spent approximately 80 million euros in the last two years (83.5 million for Sweden and 77.6 million for Italy). The growth during this period was 13% in Spain, while it stood at +374% and +388% respectively in Italy and Sweden.

With a focus on Italy, the structures (padel clubs, multisport clubs, hospitality facilities), according to updated data as of October 31, 2022, from the Mr. Padel Paddle Observatory, amount to 2,016 across the peninsula, of which 607 have at least one indoor court. The number of courts has reached 5,121 units, with 1,576 being indoor courts. The growth has quadrupled, and undoubtedly the increase has been aided by the pandemic. 91% of the structures are clubs or sports clubs (1,828) totaling 4,803 courts, but there are also 188 hospitality structures (hotels, resorts, villages, beach resorts, agritourism) that have 318 padel courts. 31% of the courts are indoors, a percentage that has increased compared to 2020 when the figure was 22%. Today, padel clubs are present in all Italian regions, with courts in 106 provinces and over 1,000 municipalities. The average number of courts per club is 2.5 (compared to 2.2 in 2020), with Lazio being the only region above the average of 3 courts, still far from the average number of courts in Spain, the leading country in Europe, which stands at 4.5 (with peaks of 6.4 and 5.0 in the metropolitan area of Madrid or Catalonia).

In Italy, after the Lazio region, which possesses 27% of the courts in Italy (1,371 courts across 439 structures), on the podium with over 500 courts, we find Lombardy (565 courts across 197 structures) and in third place Sicily (538 courts across 211 structures). Following with over 300 courts is Piedmont (361 across 149), followed by Emilia Romagna (314 courts across 133 clubs), with 4 other regions having over 200 courts and 6 with over 100. In Lombardy, the highest number of indoor structures is located (121 out of 363 covered courts, which corresponds to 64% of all courts in the region), while in Lazio there are 316 courts across 108 structures (23% of courts), and in Piedmont, there are 65 structures and 166 indoor courts. At the bottom of the list is Valle d'Aosta with 4 structures and 8 courts (www.mrpadelpaddle.com).

According to the Sports System Observatory of Banca Ifis [10], the turnover of padel in Italy in 2022 will be approximately 693 million euros. These numbers reflect the rapid growth of this discipline, which saw an 800% increase in revenue between 2019 and 2022, with a decisive leap in 2021 (the year after the pandemic). In the current year, the component that weighs the most is court rental (61%), while the remaining 39% concerns racket sales (880,000) and the construction of new facilities. The growth potential for this sport still appears significant, with an expected annual turnover of 1.4 billion euros.

Furthermore, it is necessary to mention the numerous sports events that have long been organized at the international level and have recently found space in the national territory, with interesting economic and territorial impacts given the development. It is well known that both passive and active sports events have a significant positive economic impact on the country or region hosting them. Such events can generate tourism and related activities, create jobs related to the construction and operation of facilities, as well as transportation and other services, or even through the sale of sponsorships, merchandising, and

broadcasting rights [25]. One such internationally competitive professional event, which began in 2005 but is now well established, is the Pro Padel Tour. It serves as a platform for showcasing the skills of elite padel players and promoting the sport globally. In fact, padel has transitioned from being an amateur to a professional sport.

Moreover, an increasing number of specialized fairs are being organized, either independently or as part of larger and more general sports expos (e.g., Padel Expo in Stockholm, ISPO in Munich, etc.). These events provide opportunities for industry players to showcase new products, technologies, and services, as well as to foster networking and collaboration within the sports community.

Materials and Methods

3.1 The focus on Sicily, Italy: facilities and practitioners

Padel has become Sicily's most practiced racket sport, attracting tennis practitioners, especially younger ones. For practitioners, padel represents a relational opportunity combined with sports practice in a mainly open-air environment.

The growth rates in the region are exponential. In the last twelve months, it has been recognized a proliferation of outdoor and indoor clubs. Sicilian people and tourists could access existing facilities, using indoor facilities (approximately 10) throughout the year (Figure 1). Moreover, the Mediterranean climate helps to lengthen the summer season. By the Sicilian Regional Committee of the FITP (i.e., Italian Tennis and Padel Federation) data, it is possible to understand the phenomenon's vast and quick development throughout the island (Fig. 1) and how it has already reached an excellent number of competitive (over 2,300) and other (almost 700) members. Also, the significant increase in not-only national / international amateur tournaments with prize money (which captivate renowned professional athletes) contributes to the growth of the entire movement, attracting investors from markets where padel is now a consolidated sport (e.g., Spain and Argentina) [26].

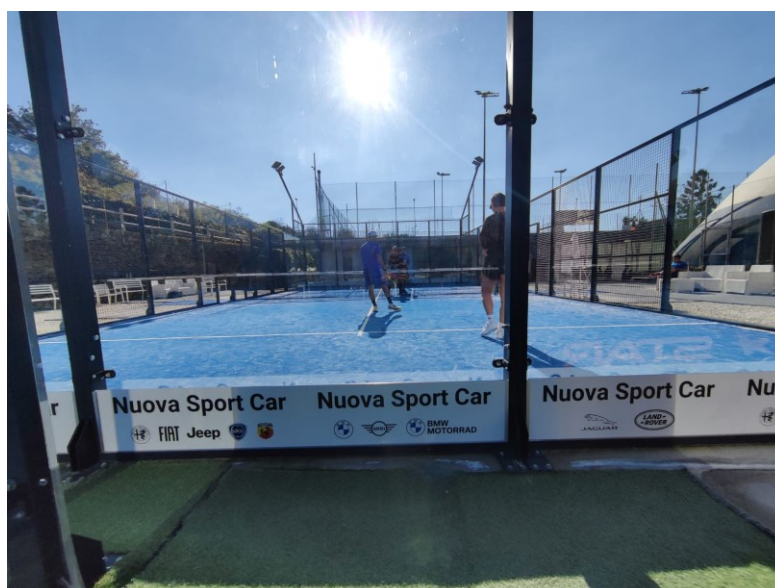


Figure 1.

An example of multifunctional structure in Sicily (Italy), Tennis, Padel and Beach tennis indoor court. Source: authors, 2024

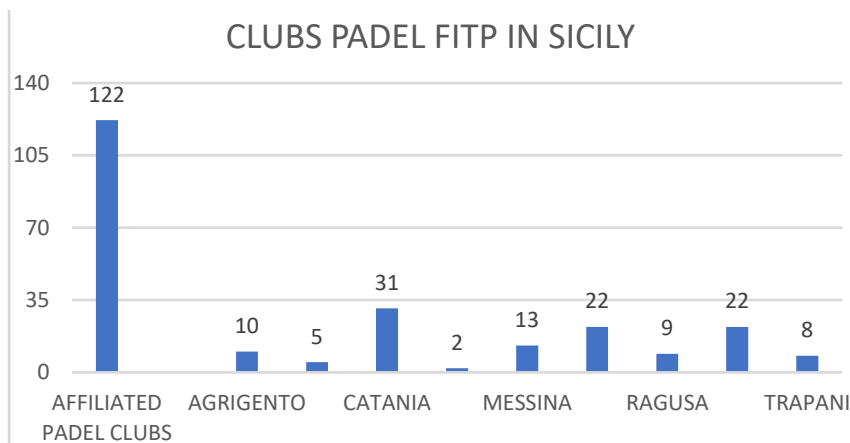


Figure 2. Padel clubs in Sicily, Italy. Source: Sicilian Regional Committee - FITP, 2022

As highlighted in Figure 2, the provinces of the island with the most padel clubs are Catania (31 structures), Palermo (22s), Syracuse (22s), and Messina (18s). Overall, all the Sicilian provinces are interested in increasing their number of fields and practitioners. Compared to 321 FITP-affiliated fields present in Sicily as of 31 October 2022, Catania and Palermo are in the national top ten for the number of fields per province (with Rome in the lead, followed by Milan and Latina) (www.federtennis.it). The average number of fields per facility is in line with the Italian one, i.e., just over 2 fields per club; at the same time, there are 14 clubs with at least 4 courts, of which 6 have at least 6. The top 8 clubs for the number of courts are located in the provinces of Catania (Figure 3) and Palermo. However, this year, several inaugurations of other larger structures are scheduled in the other Sicilian provinces.



Figure 3. Kajoka Padel club in Gravina of Catania in the province of Catania, Sicily, Italy. Source: authors, 2024



3.2 The application of Stakeholder Analysis (SA)

The present study carried out Stakeholder Analysis (SA), a methodology first used in business management and political science and successfully applied in every field where stakeholders play a predominant role. It is helpful to explore the context of the relation-ship in which an organization plays its strategy to achieve its goals. Also, SA could repre-sent as a primary methodological approach for a field investigation, and is therefore use-ful for any future in-depth research. Such a type of preliminary analysis is of critical im-portance since the satisfaction of the main stakeholders represents the key to the success of public and non-profit organizations, as well as for-profit companies [27, 28, 29]. A Stake-holder approach identifies and models the groups that are stakeholders of a corporation. It describes and suggests ways for management to consider the interests of these groups [30]. So, it is an important tool for ensuring that the needs and expectations of all interest-ed parties are met in the planning and decision-making process, particularly when new activities are being developed. Interviews directed to the stakeholders allow data gathering and qualitative feedback: the aim is to analyze operational flows, bringing out the critical issues in a system and the opportunities for improvement. Even if the choice of stakehold-ers is free, some categories could deserve particular attention. For public and non-profit organizations, the choice of future generations and sector operators is pivotal, as well as the choice of strategically essential groups. SA requires the researcher to put themselves in the stakeholders' shoes and consider the performances from different points of view. Thus, the methodology can be considered a powerful learning process and a strong gen-erator of possibilities for change. Also, it is a necessary precursor of any ethical reflection in business and organizational action [31]. Ad hoc semi-structured interviews were con-ducted. Participant categories (i.e., stakeholders) were selected in order to investigate three variables: padel's popularity towards social media after the pandemic, the relative physi-cal well-being perceived by those who choose to play the sport, and the perception of the positive impact on the local economy. Whilst each participant was given questions main-ly aimed at focusing on the three variables, the interviews were designed to respect a free dialogue with the interviewee, allowing each stakeholder to express their point of view while providing additional information. In order to investigate the perception of such fac-tors, each interview maintained the form of an open dialogue with the stakeholders but always guaranteeing the presence of some questions linked to the variables investigated (Table 1).

Variable	Questions
Popularity after the pandemic towards social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why padel has become so popular? - Do you think we could define padel as a “social media phenomenon”?
Physical well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who practices padel mostly, men or women? Kids or adults?
Impact on the local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How much does it cost to build a padel court? - How long does it take for the investment to be recovered? - Is the offer saturated? - Do you think it is worth investing economic resources in this sport?

Table 1. Variable-related questions considered for each interview directed to stake-holders.



Data gathering was carried out through ten face-to-face interviews (Table 2) [32, 33] after selecting some privileged interlocutors (IP) among the categories of actors directly interested. The interviews were conducted between September and November 2022 and provided different outputs. They have proven to be an effective tool for acquiring interesting information, adapting to the reference context and identifying the needs and attitudes of users who gravitate to the area under investigation.

Results

4.1 The interview to the participants

The results of the interviews are usually formalized by bringing out the main insights. This work reports a summary of the answers provided by the participants.

IP n.	Role	Institution/Sector / Territory
1	Sports Councilor	Catania Municipality
2	FITP Sicily Councilor	FITP (Sicilian regional committee)
3	Padel Club Manager 1	Entrepreneur owner - Gravina di Catania (CT)
4	Padel Club Manager 2	Manager and Instructor
5	Padel Club Manager 3	Entrepreneur owner – Agrigento
6	Instructor	FITP Catania
7	Competitive Player	Catania
8	Amateur player	Palermo
9	Retailer of specialized items	Retail business
10	Sports manager	FITP (Sicilian regional committee)

Table 2 Description of the Stakeholders interviewed

At the question *Why padel has become so popular?* the Padel Club Manager 1 (IP 3) re-plied:

There are a variety of reasons. Among these, padel is simple to learn (the rules can be quickly explained) and organize; also, it is very competitive for users, and it is Covid-friendly. It is a technical sport that requires training, but it is easily learnable. Furthermore, the matches are simply organized since only 4 people are involved, compared to 10 or 14 in five-a-side football. Finally, during the pandemic, it was a good choice for sport because it is played outdoors and there is no direct contact with many people. I was among the first to bet on the success of this new sport, and from an entrepreneurial point of view, I can see that the invested capital was recovered in just six months: so, the economic result was optimal.



As a competitive player (IP 7) and instructor, he highlighted how the practice of this sport involves various aspects of our physicality:

First of all, padel players are very coordinated and elastic. Like many other sports, padel contributes to tonicity, improves reflexes, and benefits the cardiovascular and respiratory systems for the aerobic activity involved. Also, it generates a series of benefits, including sociability, self-esteem, and a healthy competitive approach that can satisfy those looking for a challenge in their daily lives.

The exponential growth in demand pushed the Retailer of specialized items (IP 9) to contact Superpaddle to set up three sales points in Catania, Siracusa and Ragusa:

«The opening of specialized shops was a necessity dictated by market demand», the interviewee claimed. A great excitement in Sicilian circles is then confirmed. The point of reference for padel is the Mas Sports Center in Catania, which in 2021 managed to rank third in the Italian team championships. The manager of the two camps has worked incessantly in recent years, organizing internships, amateur, social and federal tournaments, and various activities to create and nurture a solid and assiduous movement. He confides that since the opening (October 2015), the network of padel players has grown by 200%. Such an excellent result pushed him to plan the construction of two new outdoor courts; with a further, strong growth trend, he also planned to host a stage of the World Padel Tour, which is an important annual event for the sport fans. Furthermore, participation in the first national Padel Trend Expo fair in the first months of the new year is considered relevant: numerous exhibitors in the sector, but also exhibitions, guests and tournaments (including spaces dedicated to neophiles) will be on display to promote and make known all the activities with and connected to the padel.

Moving to Agrigento, we point out the presence of the Tennis *Club Città dei Templi*, where the managers decided to install an outdoor structure to promote padel after winning a municipal tender to promote the sport. Various social tournaments and federal Opens are also organized in this club. Unlike other clubs, the Padel Club Manager 3 (IP 5) highlights:

A huge female and young following: many Under-16s have fun on my padel court, and I will involve them in specific courses.

The FITP Sicily Councilor (IP 2) is a stakeholder who is working hard to grow the movement. He has set himself the objective of consolidating a circuit of tournaments involving the IV and III categories, following the tennis path, since these two categories are the foundation for both beautiful sports.

Last year, a youth circuit was created in Sicily, reserved for categories from under 12 to under 18 to grow the youth movement and fuel young people's interest in this sport. It comprises seven stages plus the final master's course from Agrigento to Palermo.

Furthermore, the Padel Province Cup has been organized in Sicily for three years. The island is the first region in Italy to organize this type of competition. The event, conceived by the regional committee, took place in Syracuse in a new structure - the Seven Padel Village - which boasts twelve regulation courts, ten indoors. The best padel players in Sicily will compete in two days of great entertainment, gathered in formations made up of a minimum of 27 players per team, including under, over, big and amateur.



4.2. *The padel as a social phenomenon*

Nevertheless, padel is also a social phenomenon that uses smart technologies to enjoy and share events and experiences (www.padelnews.it). As the Managers (IP 3 and 4) of two very dynamic structures in Catania highlighted during the interviews, all the clubs are actually equipped with apps for bookings and organizing amateur matches and tournaments. Furthermore, there are numerous communities on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, which act as a promotional driving force that conveys the charm of this sport with media efficacy.

The value of padel in social networks is of considerable importance. Unlike many other sports, padel in Italy exploded amid the social era, in a period (i.e., the pandemic) in which the use of the most famous apps saw a clear increase, filling the lack of other relationships. Thus, people discovered the padel shovel through reels and stories on Instagram and videos on TikTok and YouTube, which effortlessly convey images and fascinate online users.

Recently, social media have returned different communications of padel: there are contents publishing the champions' shots (often viral, given the spectacular nature of specific actions), others providing information, and still others that focus on racket reviews or videos. Also, lessons created by professional players or high-level coaches explain the game's various technical and tactical aspects. By combining all the contents, a virtuous circle can increase followers and raise interest in the discipline ever higher.

Another relevant aspect of social development is the WhatsApp groups used by the various clubs, often divided by player level, which act as a tool to allow lovers of this sport always to find opponents of a similar level. The same happens with the use of booking apps: above all, the Spanish Playtomic, which, in addition to accessing the worldwide courses availability, helps to find teammates and opponents.

In the social world, even professional padel players can use social media to their advantage. They then choose platforms to promote their business and for self-promotion, increasing their commercial value to potential sponsors and investors.

Another fundamental aspect is the so-called challenges: many players like to propose challenges to their followers (in particular, shots from a sitting position or from outside the field) that amateurs from around the world can try on every field. This move increases the fun, sharing, and, therefore, the bond between the player and his followers.

For these reasons, padel has become a social phenomenon with great development possibilities, both in Italy (where it has already reached many enthusiasts and practitioners) and in the rest of the world (where there is still plenty of room for growth). The proof is in the calendar of world circuits, which are increasingly oriented towards an activity capable of embracing the most significant number of different countries to make the discipline of global interest.



Discussion

The expansion of padel sports practice in Italy has territorial and landscape implications that deserve consideration. In particular, in the case study followed, padel is a relatively new sport in Sicily, but it is gaining popularity both as a daily practice and as a competitive activity. Many people engage in it for physical activity or simply for the pleasure of socializing; it seems to have become a lifestyle as it brings joy and creativity. Others consider it a full-fledged sport and participate in local and regional tournaments.

This growth in padel sports activity not only contributes to the physical and social well-being of individuals but also impacts the local communities and landscapes. New padel facilities and courts may lead to the revitalization of underutilized spaces, contribute to the development of recreational infrastructure, and stimulate economic activity through increased tourism and related services. Additionally, the integration of padel into the cultural fabric of Sicily adds diversity to the region's sporting landscape and provides opportunities for individuals of all ages and backgrounds to engage in physical activity and social interaction. Overall, the expansion of padel in Italy, including in Sicily, reflects the evolving sports culture and preferences of the population, with positive implications for both individuals and communities.

It's important to emphasize that the growth of the padel industry doesn't solely rely on infrastructure development. The padel ecosystem involves various stakeholders who are establishing a broad commercial sector beyond just court facilities.

In particular, from the results of the survey, considering the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders, it was possible to obtain a more appropriate understanding of the issues and challenges that padel must address to develop and consolidate development strategies, also for the economic enhancement of the territory. It appears that to better meet the needs and interests of all stakeholders, this sport should promote a leisure and inclusive environment towards all target groups to be involved (especially children and adolescents). Furthermore, new technologies are having a significant impact, both in terms of performance and consumption, as they facilitate and reduce the time for organizing sports activities, along with the increasingly attractive social aspect among amateurs.

All of this is to contribute to promoting the sustainability and long-term success of this sport and to ensure that it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

The opening of new padel courts can involve the conversion of land previously used for other purposes, such as tennis courts, soccer fields, or green areas. This could and has led to the loss of space for other sports or recreational activities, or the transformation of natural or agricultural areas into urban areas. Additionally, the location of the courts, especially in urban environments, could influence land planning, necessitating the identification of new suitable sites and ensuring adequate access for players. Furthermore, from a landscape perspective, the installation of new sports facilities may involve the construction of infrastructure such as fences, lighting, and stands, which can alter the appearance of the local landscape. In addition, the intensive use of the courts may require regular maintenance, such as turf shaving and irrigation, which could affect the appearance and management of the surrounding areas.

Not forgetting the potential impact on biodiversity, namely the loss of natural habitats for local fauna and flora. For example, the removal of trees or the destruction of meadows or shrubs are



important for local wildlife. At the same time, padel is having a positive impact on the economy, with an increase in the construction of playing fields and the growth of commercial activities related to it, such as equipment sales and event organization. Additionally, it is important to consider the knowledge of countries, cities, and places where sports activities take place, as it can contribute to a better understanding of the specificities and opportunities of each location and can be useful for promoting the development of sports at both local and global levels. The tourism associated with this sport is contributing to the increase in income from the island, with many players visiting Sicily to participate in tournaments or simply to play padel during their vacation. However, it could also lead to the gentrification of surrounding areas, with an increased influx of players and visitors resulting in increased traffic and parking issues, especially if located in urban areas.

Conclusions

This study uses the development of padel in Sicily, Italy as a case study to discuss the conditions of a rapidly emerging sport and its impacts on territory. This study has limitations to consider when interpreting the results. The scope of the investigation is limited. We believe in sport as a driver of development and social integration. Future research should explore more sports related to padel. It should also cover other regions of Italy and other countries. Padel might not attract as much study interest or attention compared to other sports with larger followings. This can result in fewer researchers focusing on padel-related topics, leading to a scarcity of comprehensive studies in the field. In addition, there is limited and insufficient access to data, especially in regions where the sport is less popular or less organized. In fact, padel's popularity varies significantly across different regions and countries. Research efforts may be hindered by geographical constraints, with some areas lacking adequate infrastructure or resources to support extensive research activities.

New insights from padel research can emerge in various areas, contributing to our understanding of this sport and its impact. One particularly interesting research area involves investigating the social dynamics of padel. This includes examining participation trends, the demographic profiles of players, and the role of padel clubs in local communities. Such research can provide valuable insights into the sport's cultural significance and its potential as a tool for social integration and cohesion.

With the increasing use of technology in sports, research into the integration of innovative technologies such as wearable sensors, virtual reality training systems, and data analytics platforms into padel can provide new avenues for enhancing coaching methods, player development, and spectator engagement.

In addition, assessing the environmental impact of padel facilities, equipment manufacturing processes, and tournament operations can shed light on opportunities for promoting sustainability within the sport. In fact, a padel manager, a company that owns more than 10 padel centres in Sicily, ought to have greater financial and human resources and capacity to invest in environmental sustainability than small businesses.

Research in this area can inform initiatives aimed at reducing carbon footprints and promoting eco-friendly practices. By exploring these and other areas of inquiry, researchers can contribute to the ongoing development and growth of padel as a sport, while also addressing important societal and environmental challenges.



Author Contributions

Conceptualization, E.N. and D.P.; methodology, E.N.; validation, E.N. and D.P.; investigation, E.N. and D.P.; resources, E.N.; data curation, E.N.; writing—original draft preparation, E.N. and D.P.; writing—review and editing, E.N. and D.P.; supervision, D.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the authors.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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