

# Rugby as a Driver of Social Integration and Economic Development for Youth in the Working-Class Neighborhoods of Antananarivo

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**Abstract**—Rugby in the popular neighborhoods of Antananarivo, a vector for social integration and economic dynamism. Our research examines the structuring role of rugby in a metropolis where precariousness, youth unemployment, and the disintegration of traditional solidarities are experienced. It shows that rugby socializes young people and creates networks. No form of work organization seems to contribute to national economic development. This work uses a mixed approach (questionnaires, interviews, participant observations) aimed at questioning the structuring role of rugby in a metropolis where precariousness, youth unemployment, and the disintegration of traditional solidarities are experienced. The conclusions drawn here suggest that, through rugby, it is possible to build cohesion within the community space, strengthen social bonds, and prevent risky behaviors. Similarly, through a participatory observation work we conducted at the Cheminots stadium, we were able to estimate several million ariary injected daily into the local microcosm circuit (small street vendors, ticket offices, security, etc.) for each known rugby match. Rugby would thus be a space to build commitment and struggles for social recognition, just like an informal economic activity sector, or as we have proposed, a hub of urban resilience. A plea that leads us to make rugby the armed wing of democracy in territorial public policies and a transversal component of inclusive development.

**Keywords**—Rugby, working-class neighborhood, social integration, economic development, youth.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sport, as a total social fact (Mauss, 1936), is increasingly establishing itself today as a growing lever of public policies for social development, particularly in marginalized urban areas (Gasparini & Marchiset, 2008; Boulet, 2007). In such contexts marked by precariousness, young people are often confronted with disrupted life paths, combining school dropout, structural unemployment, and a lack of institutional recognition (Rouleau & Berger, 1997). While the notion that sport “saves” remains largely a deconstructed myth (Guérandel, 2016; Basson, 2018), it is worth noting that a

growing number of recent studies have, albeit cautiously, attributed to sport a potential structuring role in processes of social and professional integration (CDES, 2024; Pluricité, 2025). As a collective and codified practice, sport—when integrated into pedagogically supported programs—allows for the transmission of social values (discipline, solidarity, respect) (Guillem Turro i Ortega, 2011), the development of transferable skills (soft skills), and the creation of social networks that can facilitate access to employment (Jones & Green, 2006; Kay, 2009; Taks et al., 2015). The approach taken by certain socio-sports initiatives such as Rebonds! in Toulouse illustrates how sport can become a space for everyday citizenship, going beyond mere assistance or social control mechanisms (Basson, 2018). Rugby in Madagascar—introduced by colonial powers—has evolved from being a sport reserved for the elite to becoming a widespread practice, particularly in the Central Highlands (Combeau, 2011). Today in Antananarivo, it extends beyond recreational use, serving as a foundation for social structuring, a medium for taking economic risks, and a form of civic education (Bonnet, 2007). Far from being just a leisure activity, it has become a crucible for social structuring, identity formation, and economic integration. This research is conducted within this framework, seeking to examine how the practice of rugby in the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo might promote social inclusion and economic mobility among marginalized youth. It draws on theories of social capital (Putnam, 2000), particularly the concepts of bonding (intra-community reinforcement) and bridging (building links between social spheres), as well as on a critical perspective of sport-based integration (Spaaij, 2009) and the professionalizing function of sport (CDES, 2025; Pluricité, 2024). Within these analytical frameworks, we pose the following question: To what extent can rugby practice be a driver of social inclusion and an economic springboard for youth in Antananarivo's working-class neighborhoods? We hypothesize that the

structured and structuring nature of rugby—as a team sport with a high degree of codification—can foster both the creation of interpersonal social relationships and the construction of economic pathways for marginalized youth.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining participant observation with both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to explore the impact of rugby on social integration and economic development among young people from Antananarivo's working-class neighborhoods. The goal of combining both approaches was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, drawing on statistical data while also giving voice to various stakeholders within the rugby world. The sample consisted of 87 intentionally selected participants directly involved in the practice and structuring of rugby: 40 players aged between 15 and 51, 40 coaches, and 7 representatives from sports associations (including sections, leagues, and the national federation). Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered primarily to players and coaches, focusing on their motivations, life paths, perceived impact of rugby on their personal development, and the economic future they associate with the sport.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with some of these participants—particularly coaches and association leaders—to better understand local dynamics, the challenges encountered, and the social transformation levers linked to sport. Participant observations were also carried out during training sessions and matches in various neighborhoods, including at the Maki Stadium in Andohatapenaka, the HJRA hospital training field, and the Cheminots Stadium. The latter is both an emblematic site of rugby in Antananarivo and a key location for our observations, hosting rugby matches every weekend. This allowed us to identify the potential economic impacts of sporting events, especially through the activities of street vendors, local service providers, and small economic initiatives that revolve around these matches.

This field investigation made it possible to assess the social atmosphere, with a particular focus on social interactions, community mobilization, economic valorization through informal mechanisms, and the expressions of solidarity surrounding rugby. Secondary data—drawn from association reports, previous research, and socio-economic databases—were used to reinforce the contextual analysis.

Data interpretation was carried out using comprehensive statistical analysis with SPSS for the quantitative data, and inductive thematic analysis for the qualitative material. The indicators used reflect both social integration (such as social ties created, sense of belonging, and inclusion in networks) and economic development (access to job opportunities, income generation, and local initiatives linked to rugby), using Likert-type scales and ad hoc observation grids. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for social science research: participants were informed of the research objectives and gave their informed consent to participate in surveys and interviews. Anonymity was guaranteed, and data

was securely stored to prevent unauthorized access or data leakage.

## III. RESULTS

The results of this research and study are based on findings from participant observation during rugby match days at the Cheminots stadium, as well as from three separate questionnaire surveys: one directed at coaches, another at players, and a third aimed at federations and associations. These questionnaires made it possible to collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the social impact of rugby in the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. Below are the main findings addressing the questions that help shed light on the social and economic dimensions of rugby.

### A. Impact On Social Integration

The survey conducted among rugby players reveals a wide range of motivations, structured around three main axes (Figure 1):

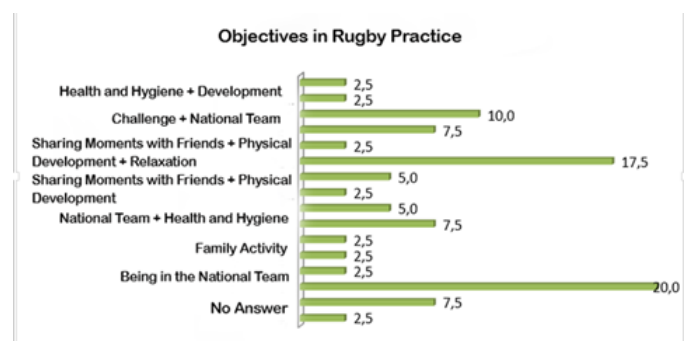


Figure 1: Distribution of Objectives Declared by Players (%)

In terms of health and physical development, 17.5% of respondents emphasized the importance of individual well-being. As for sporting ambitions, 20.0% of players expressed the desire to join the national team, reflecting a strong competitive drive. In the area of socialization, 21.5% of respondents prioritized spending time with friends, highlighting the role of rugby in fostering community bonds.

Some combinations of goals, such as “health + physical development + challenge” (5%) or “national team + health” (4.5%), illustrate a search for balance between performance and personal growth. However, two notable elements emerge: the very low mention of family activity (1%) suggests that rugby is still rarely perceived as an intergenerational practice.

These findings are supported by the strong structuring of social relationships within teams (Figure 2)

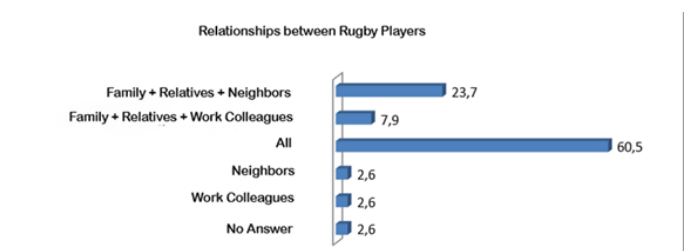


Figure 2: Distribution of Relationship Types Among Rugby Players (% of Coaches' Responses)

On this point, 60.5% of coaches stated that the players they train maintain familial, kinship, or neighborhood ties, highlighting a strong overlap between pre-existing social networks and sports practice. Meanwhile, 23.7% indicated that these relationships span all types—family, professional, or community—reflecting a wide diversity of social connections.

Relationships strictly among neighbors accounted for 7.9%, while those among work colleagues represented 2.6%. Respondents who did not provide an answer formed a small minority.

### B. Reduction Of Risky Behaviors

From this perspective, 25% of players did not identify any specific reason for dropping out, while 15% mentioned a combination of health, time, and financial constraints. Lack of time accounted for 7.5%, and professional pressures represented 6%—the most common clearly stated reasons.

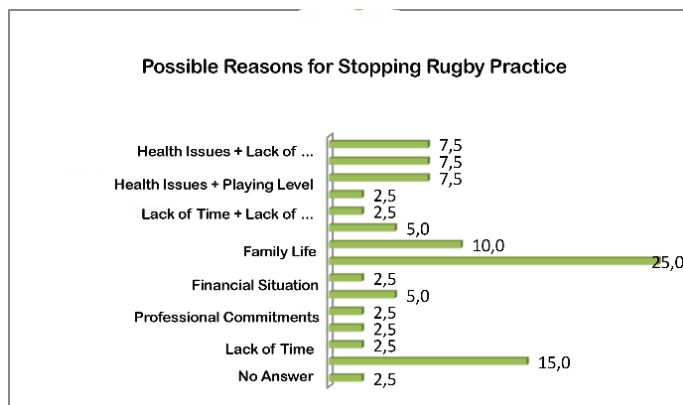


Figure 3: Distribution of Reasons for Dropping Out as Reported by Players (% of Respondents)

Only 15% of players cited health issues or lack of time as potential reasons for quitting rugby. This suggests that regular participation in rugby provides structure and a positive activity, thereby helping reduce delinquency and risky behavior. According to responses from the Federation and association questionnaire, 42.85% of respondents emphasized that player involvement is a key indicator of behavioral development and commitment to rugby. This involvement is seen as the result of a structured collective environment, fostered by teamwork, repeated practice, and mutual motivation among players.

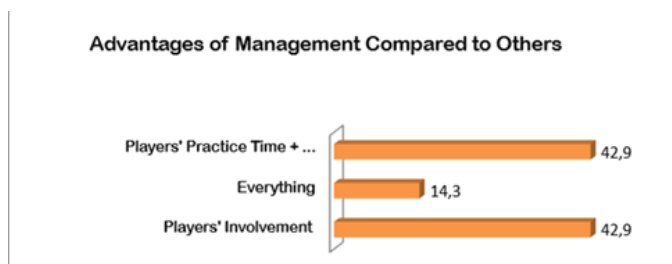


Figure 4: Player Engagement Recognition Rate According to Federation Representatives (%)

### C. Effects on Economic Development

To begin with, 97% of coaches view rugby as a socio-economic driver, emphasizing its capacity to generate employment and foster community cohesion.

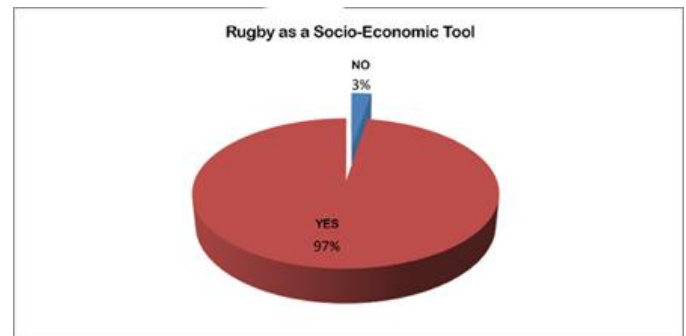


Figure 5: Perception of Rugby as a Socio-Economic Tool (% of Coaches' Responses)

The next two figures help us better understand the principles and motivations of coaches in Antananarivo regarding their involvement with different clubs.

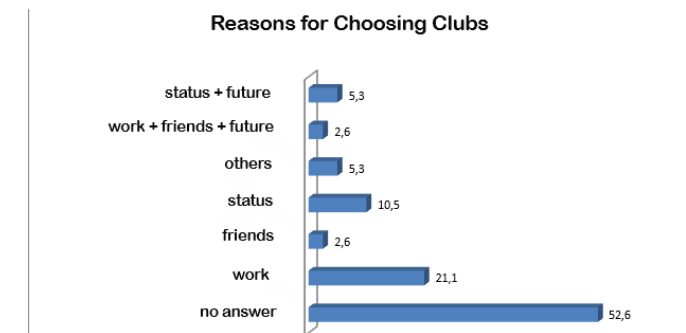


Figure 6: Coaches' Reasons for Not Joining a Corporate Club in Addition to Their Main Club

Figure 6 shows that 52.6% of coaches are not interested in joining a corporate or government-affiliated club in addition to their main club, citing strong loyalty to their original club and a lack of availability. Conversely, 31.6% expressed interest, viewing corporate clubs as offering more attractive financial compensation than neighborhood-based clubs.

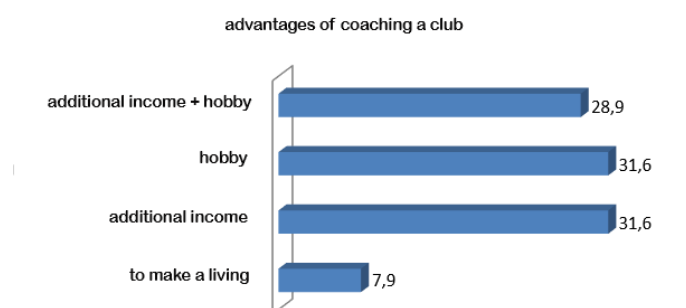


Figure 7: Perceived Benefits of Coaching in a Rugby Club

Figure 7 presents the perceived benefits of being a coach. The most frequent responses were 31.6% who see it as a source of supplementary income, and another 31.6% who consider it a useful pastime. Additionally, 28.9% selected both



options, while 7.9% believe they can rely entirely on coaching as a source of income.

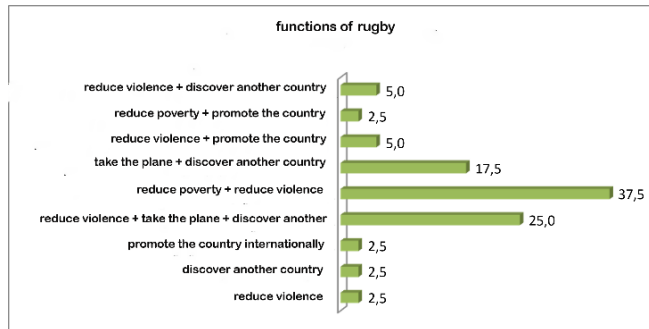


Figure 8: Functions Attributed to Rugby by the Players

According to Figure 8, 37.5% of players associate rugby with reducing violence and promoting the nation, while 25% link it to the fight against poverty. In total, 65% of players indicated that rugby is a means to alleviate poverty and enhance the country's international visibility. This demonstrates that young people perceive rugby as a tool for economic development and social recognition.

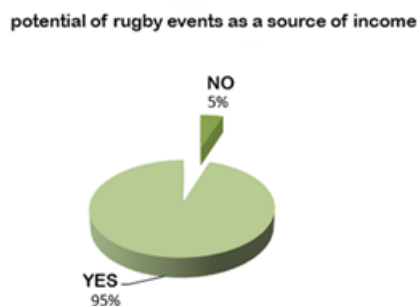


Figure 9: Perception of the Economic Potential of Rugby Events in Antananarivo

According to Figure 9, 95% of respondents acknowledged that rugby events represent a significant source of income through various activities occurring before, during, or after match days. Only 5% believe that these sporting events have no direct economic impact.

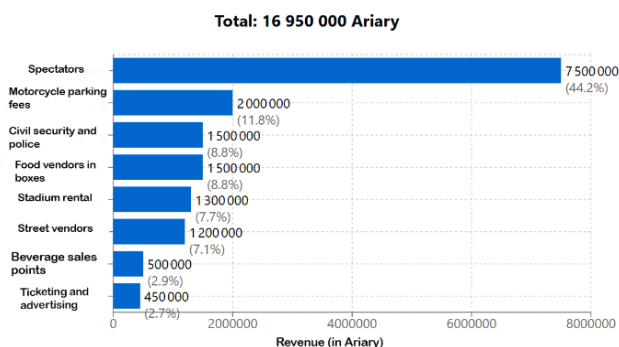


Figure 10: Estimated Economic Flows by Activity on a Rugby Match Day in Antananarivo (Case of the Cheminots Stadium)

This brings us back to the survey and participant observation conducted over three years at the Cheminots

Stadium. Figure 10 illustrates the average earnings generated by the various stakeholders involved during a rugby match day at Cheminots Stadium in Antanimena, a venue located in the heart of downtown Antananarivo.

This illustration highlights a diversified economic ecosystem, organized around both direct and indirect services associated with rugby.

The majority of revenue comes from ticket sales, accounting for 44.2% of total financial flows. Spectators thus remain the primary source of funding for rugby matches to date. This figure reflects the considerable impact and widespread enthusiasm that rugby generates in the city of a Thousand. The mobility and transport sector—particularly parking for cars and especially motorcycles—generates 11.8% of the income, pointing to a parallel logistical system that supports the event. Street food accounts for 8.8%, while street vendors contribute 7.1%, totaling 16% of revenue from informal trade, highlighting the strength of the local informal economy.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the significant impact of rugby on social integration and economic development among youth in the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. Three main areas emerge: social integration, the reduction of risky behaviors, and economic development.

##### A. Interpretation of the Main Findings

###### a) Social Integration

The research results clearly show that rugby plays a central role in the dynamics of social integration for youth from the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. The responses gathered from administered questionnaires, along with interviews conducted with players and coaches, demonstrate that this team sport fosters the development of socialization and, consequently, social networks. It also strengthens community bonds, as around 30% of the surveyed youth reported being socially, physically, or personally motivated to practice rugby—beyond the prevailing competitive dimension. This reflects a multifaceted and contextualized appropriation of the sport.

These findings reveal a reality in which rugby is seen not only as a means of individual advancement, but also as a structuring collective space—one that potentially facilitates identity reconstruction, behavioral regulation, and sociability (Alexander, 2024). The ambition to join the national team, expressed by 20% of respondents, coexists with aspirations of social elevation, community belonging, and the pursuit of psychophysical well-being. This diversity of motivations illustrates how rugby becomes a “revealer” of socially and culturally diverse forms of engagement among these youth, functioning as a kind of “hybrid social tool” combining sporting goals, social inclusion, and efforts to address personal inequalities.

These results align with Putnam's (2000) social capital theory, which asserts that collective leisure activities generate horizontal social ties—“third places”—that underpin local cohesion. They also support Coalter's (2007) view of sport as

a bonding agent conducive to building positive networks: informal, short-lived neighborhood circles where leisure activities like rugby act as entry points for social engagement among youth from disadvantaged urban areas. Through mutual acquaintance, peer solidarity, and access to broader social circles, rugby is not simply about joining sports clubs to form networks—it becomes a social tool that structures and sustains community participation.

*b) Reduction of Risky Behaviors*

The results from the questionnaires and interviews confirm that regular rugby practice serves as a major structuring factor (and partly explanatory) in preventing risky behaviors among youth from the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. Both the players themselves and the associations working in this field highlight that engagement within a collective setting is beneficial for individual attitudes. The structured framework—punctuated by regular training sessions—and the strong sense of camaraderie within teams help create conditions for success.

Responses from 43% of those surveyed emphasized player engagement as a key symbol of potential behavioral change, noting that this evolution occurs within a relational environment built on mutual support, collective assistance, shared investment, and care for others. These findings are consistent with Nichols' (2007) analysis, which views structured sport as an effective tool for juvenile delinquency prevention, offering young people a safe space for expression and socialization. Rugby practice, in this sense, helps channel tensions and build positive life paths, both by valuing effort, instilling rules and respect for others, and fostering peer recognition. By entering the domain of sociability, this participatory activity fits within the logic of building social capital as theorized by Putnam (2000), who posits that "collective activities serve to reactivate norms of cooperation, mutual aid, and civic engagement." However, these positive effects can only be sustained if appropriate political support is provided. The ongoing challenges faced by youth amid the socio-economic constraints of working-class neighborhoods underscore the need for public policies that ensure access to sports resources and encourage flexible engagement among young people. In this regard, rugby stands as a potential lever for transformation, provided it is part of an inclusive and territorialized strategy.

*c) Rugby as a Catalyst for Local Economic Activities in Antananarivo*

The results of our survey and field observations highlight the structuring role of rugby as an economic lever in the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. Each rugby match day held at the Cheminots Stadium in Antanimena activates a diversified local economic ecosystem, injecting approximately 17 million ariary into the local economy. This dynamic benefits various actors: street vendors, small restaurant owners, ticketing and security service providers, and parking managers.

Economic analysis shows that revenues mainly come from ticket sales (44.2%), followed by motorcycle parking (11.8%), and street food services (16%), demonstrating the vitality of the informal economy. This activity generates around 141

direct and indirect jobs per event day, across sectors such as logistics, hospitality, street vending, food services, and other service provisions.

In an urban environment marked by a high youth unemployment rate—a paradoxical situation where compressed spaces limit formal opportunities—these practices provide a form of employability for individuals often excluded from the formal labor market. Rugby thus acts as a vector for economic integration, offering young people and vulnerable groups the opportunity to reconnect with production and income circuits, even if only temporarily.

Such a process clearly falls within the logic of productive social capital (Putnam, 2000), mobilizing territorial resources and cultivating endogenous skills through social networks built around collective projects. Rugby, therefore, is not merely a sporting practice; it stands as an embedded engine of growth: stimulating entrepreneurship, encouraging the emergence of small businesses and cooperatives, and contributing to the economic and social dynamism of the capital.

These findings advocate for the institutional recognition of rugby as a lever for national development. To sustain and amplify its impacts, it is essential to structure this dynamic through inclusive and territorially anchored public policies. Such policies must value young local actors, support informal economic initiatives, and strengthen the links between sport, employment, and social cohesion. Adopting such an approach would position rugby as a transversal tool for socio-economic transformation at the heart of a sustainable urban development policy in Antananarivo.

*B. Contextualization of the Results within the Framework of Antananarivo*

The results of our study must be understood in light of the specific socio-urban context of Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, characterized by rapid urbanization, a high youth unemployment rate, and the gradual weakening of traditional social structures. These factors form the backdrop against which rugby operates as a tool for integration and development.

*a) Rapid Urbanization and Social Precarity*

Over the past two decades, Antananarivo has experienced uncontrolled urban expansion, leading to spatial fragmentation, pressure on infrastructure, and increased marginalization of working-class neighborhoods (Razafindrakoto et al., 2017). In this context, our data show that rugby serves as a strong community lever: it structures the time and space of young people, fosters collective mobilization around neighborhood clubs, and introduces dynamics of solidarity that partly compensate for institutional disengagement. Local initiatives, such as the creation of clubs in isolated areas or the rehabilitation of urban spaces for training purposes, illustrate rugby's regulatory function in addressing urban imbalances.

*b) Youth Unemployment and the Search for Economic Opportunities*

With a youth unemployment rate estimated at 30% (ILO, 2021), young people in Antananarivo are particularly

vulnerable to social exclusion. The results of this study highlight that rugby is perceived not only as a leisure activity but also as a potential pathway to social advancement—through professionalization, competitions, and even opportunities for training abroad. Some respondents mentioned rugby as a means of accessing indirect employment (such as educators, coaches, or social mediators) or benefiting from material support (equipment, travel), contributing to a form of economic inclusion. Rugby thus emerges as a vector of employability, especially in areas where formal professional insertion opportunities are almost nonexistent.

#### c) *Weakening of Traditional Social Structures*

The breakdown of traditional instruments of socialization—such as extended family networks and neighborhood solidarity (Lenoir, 1985)—is now well documented in the peripheral neighborhoods of Antananarivo (Randrianja, 2018). In this context, rugby clubs have become functional substitutes, providing spaces for youth structuring and supervision where young people can reconnect with normative frameworks, intergenerational guidance, and social recognition. This integrative function is reinforced by collective gatherings during sporting events, the codes of conduct established by coaches, and the bonds of fraternity among players—all identified by respondents as key drivers of attachment and perseverance.

Overall, rugby in Antananarivo is far more than a simple sporting activity: it acts as a hybrid mechanism for social integration, community mobilization, and a response to economic precarity (Michel Koebel, 2012; Bonnet, 2007). These findings encourage a reevaluation of local sports policies, emphasizing the potential of rugby as a transversal tool for inclusive urban development (Bonnet, 2008), as expressed here.

#### C. *Comparative Perspectives with Other Studies*

##### a) *Sport and Social Integration: Convergences with Coalter's Study (2015)*

Our findings corroborate Coalter's (2015) analysis regarding the integrative function of sport in disadvantaged urban environments, highlighting comparable effects of rugby in Antananarivo on social cohesion. However, beyond mere social bonding, Malagasy rugby appears to be structured by strong community roots, a pronounced intergenerational character, and a significant identity-building role for the youth. Concerning the Kenyan case, our data also reveal a more structured professional impact, with considerable employment opportunities in sports coaching, event management, and local animation.

##### b) *Gender and Empowerment: A Dimension Still Underexplored Compared to the Study by Mwaanga & Prince (2016)*

In contrast to the study by Mwaanga & Prince (2016) in Zambia, which highlights the structuring role of sport in the empowerment of young girls, our research adopts a less gender-focused approach. Although the issue of women's participation in rugby was addressed, its impact in terms of empowerment remains poorly documented. This limitation invites further exploration of the sociocultural barriers to girls'

access to rugby in Antananarivo, as well as the conditions needed for truly inclusive sports practices.

##### c) *The Weight of the Local Context: Confirming Kay's Conclusions (2009)*

The present study aligns with Kay's (2009) assertion that the impact of sport for development depends heavily on contextualization. In Antananarivo, rugby plays multiple roles—social, economic, educational, and identity-related—functioning both as a formal institution and as a practice rooted in the realities of urban precarity, massive youth unemployment, and weakened social structures. Youth engagement through rugby goes beyond the realm of sports; it is embedded in a logic of survival, recognition, and community anchoring, emphasizing the need to adapt any sports development model to local realities.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This initial research has highlighted the strategic role of rugby as a lever for social integration and economic development for youth from the working-class neighborhoods of Antananarivo. Based on an empirical approach combining surveys, interviews, observation, and participation in field activities, it became clear that rugby practice cannot be confined solely to the realm of sport or seen merely as a tool for identity construction (Andy Smith, 2000). Rather, it fosters the formation of communities, nurtures a sense of belonging, and opens concrete pathways for both social and economic integration (Hubert Cahuzac, 2007).

Through the embodied practice of rugby, it contributes significantly to preventing deviant behaviors (Collard, 2002), regulates interpersonal relationships, and mobilizes young people around shared values (P. Mignon, 2000). On the economic front, the results pertinently indicate that rugby generates tangible local impacts through the creation of formal and informal jobs, micro-enterprises, and transferable skills. These findings align with the theoretical frameworks of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and community development through sport (Taks et al., 2015), while also enriching the work of Nichols (2007) on prevention through physical activity.

However, the study also points to certain risks linked to the precariousness of support structures and the absence of coordinated public policies, which could undermine the sustainability of the positive effects achieved. In this perspective, it is crucial to integrate rugby into social and sports policies by structurally linking it to territorial development, through support mechanisms tailored to local contexts—an essential step to ensure the continuity of existing dynamics and to provide sustainable responses to issues of social exclusion and economic precarity.

The study also opens promising avenues for further research, particularly concerning the differentiated impact of rugby based on gender, life trajectories, and the transferability of the model to other Malagasy or African urban contexts. In conclusion, rugby is not merely a sport; it stands as a lever of hope, stability, and empowerment for a youth in search of direction and a better future.



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