

The role of the European Union in Public- Private Partnerships: Towards successful sport infrastructure projects?

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Abstract

Partnership agreements have been widely established over the past decades for a variety of projects in response to the increasing societal demand in infrastructure. Particularly, the alliance of governments and private businesses, known as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), has proven to increase the effectiveness of facility and service delivery. Consequently, measuring PPPs effectiveness have become crucial to satisfy citizens' needs and various indicators have been made available for national governments. However, there has been little research about PPPs effectiveness in the context of sport infrastructure projects. At the wake of the Paris 2024 Olympics, the delivery of sport infrastructure is imperative and 10,500 athletes will be provided with training facilities such as pitches and pools. Additionally, a trend of opposition between the public and private sectors have elicited obstacles to the emergence of PPPs and solutions should be brought to combat difficulties that are encountered by involved stakeholders. The multiplicity of funding programs initiated by the EU Commission in various sectors suggests that the EU involvement into PPPs might constitute a positive impact on sport infrastructure projects. Accordingly, the research aims to answer the question: to what extent can the EU, as a financial partner, enhance the effectiveness of PPPs in the context of sports infrastructure projects? Through a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, the quality of relationship between involved stakeholders is assessed and the contribution of the EU investigated. The research expects to verify that positive power dynamics in the relationship between the EU and involved stakeholders increase PPPs effectiveness and hence increase the likeliness of sport infrastructure projects to be successful. Results show that the lack of communication and imbalances in power dynamics constitute a relatively negative impact on the quality of partners' relationship for a given project. More importantly, results show that, though bringing extra funding to PPP projects and fostering the dissemination of their values, the EU remains a marginalized entity vis-à-vis domestic public or private partners.

Key words: PPPs effectiveness; sports infrastructure projects; EU funding programs; Paris 2024 Olympics; Erasmus+ program; EU sports policy

Table of content

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Acknowledgements..... | 5 |
| List of abbreviations..... | 6 |
| List of figures and tables..... | 7 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 8 |
| 1.1. Problem statement | 9 |
| 2. Literature review..... | 12 |
| 2.1. Seeking collaboration: PPPs and their effectiveness | 12 |
| 2.1.1. The PPP phenomenon..... | 12 |
| 2.1.2. PPP typologies and PPP effectiveness | 13 |
| 2.1.3. PPPs for sports infrastructure projects..... | 14 |
| 2.2. Challenges posed by PPPs..... | 15 |
| 2.2.1. Difficulties to define partners' role | 15 |
| 2.2.2. Obstacles to collaboration | 15 |
| 2.3. Recommendations for PPP projects | 16 |
| 2.3.1. The benefit of PPPs for governments..... | 16 |
| 2.3.2. Involving various stakeholders: a criteria for PPPs effectiveness..... | 17 |
| 2.3.3. The incorporation of EU funds to PPPs: facing PPPs difficulties..... | 18 |
| 3. Theoretical framework..... | 20 |
| 3.1. Research question..... | 20 |
| 3.2. Discussed theories and conceptualization | 20 |
| 3.2.1. Financial and relational elements to assess PPPs effectiveness | 20 |
| 3.2.2. The quality of partnerships and power dynamics..... | 21 |
| 3.2.3. Incorporating EU Funds to models of PPPs effectiveness | 22 |
| 3.3. Hypothesis | 23 |
| 3.4. Operationalization | 24 |
| 4. Methodology | 26 |
| 4.1. Research design..... | 26 |
| 4.1.1. Selection of design: cross-sectional..... | 26 |
| 4.2. Data collection..... | 27 |
| 4.2.1. Selection of method: interviews | 27 |
| 4.2.2. Selection of participants | 29 |
| 4.2.3. Selection of questions: the interview protocol | 30 |
| 4.3. Data analysis..... | 31 |
| 5. Analysis | 33 |
| 5.1. Physical characteristics of projects..... | 33 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 5.1.1. | Partnership type and involved partners | 33 |
| 5.1.2. | Partnership objectives..... | 34 |
| 5.2. | Process of projects: stakeholders relations and partnership effectiveness..... | 35 |
| 5.2.1. | Operational efficiency | 35 |
| 5.2.2. | Power dynamics | 40 |
| 5.3. | The contribution and role of the EU in projects | 43 |
| 5.3.1. | EU added values | 43 |
| 5.3.2. | Difficulties of EU’s contribution to PPP projects | 45 |
| 5.3.3. | Solutions to difficulties..... | 47 |
| 6. | Discussion of findings | 49 |
| 6.1. | Addressing theme 1 – Physical characteristics of the project..... | 49 |
| 6.1.1. | Partnership type and involved partners | 49 |
| 6.1.2. | Partnership objectives..... | 50 |
| 6.2. | Addressing theme 2 – Process of projects: stakeholders relations and partnership effectiveness | 51 |
| 6.2.1. | Operational efficiency | 51 |
| 6.2.2. | Power dynamics | 54 |
| 6.3. | Addressing theme 3 – The role of the EU in PPP projects..... | 55 |
| 6.3.1. | Added values of the EU in PPP projects | 55 |
| 6.3.2. | Difficulties of EU contribution in PPP projects | 57 |
| 6.3.3. | Solutions and recommendations addressed to the EU | 58 |
| 7. | Conclusion | 59 |
| 7.1. | Answering the research question..... | 59 |
| 7.2. | Policy implications | 59 |
| 7.2.1. | Power dynamics: winners, losers and the influence of financiers | 59 |
| 7.2.2. | The marginalization of the EU | 61 |
| 7.3. | Limitations & further research | 62 |
| | References | 65 |
| | Appendix | 70 |

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Besides deepening my knowledge on Public-Private Partnerships and EU funding programs in the field of sports infrastructures, working on this Masters' thesis allowed me to develop my research and interviewing skills. I particularly enjoyed conducting individual interviews as participants' personal opinions and practical experiences rendered the topic more approachable and understandable. Being a strong believer in sport values and teamwork, I found it fascinating to investigate partnerships involving collaboration between stakeholders of different natures in this sector. Additionally, as an EU citizen, analyzing EU contribution in such partnership made the research process even more interesting. I hope that this thesis will bring new insights to readers and that it will be a pleasing journey to embark on.

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List of abbreviations

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

COJO: Organizational Committee for the Olympic Games

DFBOM: Design – Funding – Building – Operation – Maintenance

EFSI: European Fund for Strategic Investments

EHF: European Hockey Federation

EIB: European Investment Bank

ERDF: European Regional Development Fund

FFHG: French Ice Hockey Federation

IOC: International Olympic Committee

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

LTIC: Long-Term Infrastructure Contracts

MSE: Major Sports Event

MuNet: European Municipalities Network

NPM: New Public Management

PFI: Private Finance Initiative

PPP: Public-Private Partnership

VfM: Value for Money

List of figures and tables

Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. EU financial support for sport..... | 10 |
| Figure 2. Erasmus + funded sports projects..... | 10 |
| Figure 3. Simplified framework of KPIs for the performance of PPPs projects..... | 25 |
| Figure 4. Framework of KPIs for the performance of PPPs projects (Yuan et al., 2009)..... | 75 |
| Figure 5. Coding tree..... | 76 |

Tables

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1. Participants' details..... | 73 |
| Table 2. Interview protocol..... | 74 |

1. Introduction

For several decades, collaboration between actors from distinct legal entities at international and domestic levels has been crucial to address specific societal demands in the context of an increasingly globalized world. Interestingly, the critical environmental situation has triggered a quest for national governments to deliver more quality infrastructure services to more people and subsequently, “innovative partnerships between governments and private operators” have been initiated to address this contemporary challenge (International Finance Corporation, 2022). Such partnerships are known as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and illustrate the collaboration between two distinct types of entities: on one side of the spectrum stand public stakeholders, who are represented by governments and national authorities; on the other side stand private stakeholders, embodied by businesses and companies. As stated by the World Bank (2019), PPPs are used by governments who “contract” private concessionaires in order to leverage private investment for the benefit of national economies and their citizens. According to the European PPP Expertise Center, a PPP can be defined as a joint agreement between a public authority and a private partner in the development of products and services, as well as in the sharing of risks, expenses, and resources under a long-term contract (European Investment Bank, 2022). This definition will be discussed further in the literature review.

Proportionally to the societal demand that they generate in the field of infrastructure building, PPPs have been abundantly conceptualized and their level of effectiveness for partnership programs and projects extensively researched. Several scholars argue that the assessment of PPPs performance in infrastructure projects matters because it helps to determine the actions to undertake in order to ensure a project’s success (Kwak et al., 2009). Moreover, measuring PPPs effectiveness enables the assessment of financial risks and benefits encountered by involved stakeholders for a given project and thus envisions the projects’ success (Demirag et al., 2011; Zheng et al., 2008).

Essentially, public and private entities work independently from each other and on distinct projects, while in the instance of a PPP, the projects become bound together for a defined period of time by means of an agreement. This provokes interdependence, from the projects’ development to their implementation and realization between contractors and concessionaires, hence between the public and private sector. Overtime, this confusion has led

to a tendency of opposition between the public and private sphere, which poses a challenge to partnerships' effectiveness despite the collaboration that is expected when a PPP agreement is signed. Therefore, solutions should be brought to combat difficulties that are encountered by involved stakeholders.

1.1. Problem statement

While PPPs effectiveness for infrastructure projects is widely addressed by the academia, little research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of PPPs in the domain of projects dedicated to sport infrastructure (Fang et al., 2020). This is problematic since PPPs have been used at a number of scenarios, such as venue construction or regeneration in the context of the Olympic Games (Akhmetshina et al., 2017; Davies, 2016). The sports industry depicts an accurate picture of PPPs' polyvalent nature since PPPs have been recognized as creating job opportunities requiring expertise in a variety of fields and (Mishra, 2022). Indeed, at the wake of the Paris 2024 Olympics, the delivery of sports infrastructure is imperative and 10,500 athletes will be provided with training facilities such as pitches and pools (International Olympic Committee, 2020). Organizational committees must provide the public with capacity infrastructure, such as stadiums and arenas to host events (Geffroy et al., 2021; Rosentraub & Swindell, 2002). Such projects require support from governments at not only a financial level, but also territorial: existing urban projects' standards should be upheld, especially in the context of the increasing and rapid urbanization over the past decades (Abdel Aziz, 2007).

Additionally, given the credit market reluctance to finance large projects with long construction periods, the concept of blending EU funds to PPP projects has increasingly gained traction at the EU level since 2008 (Chirita, 2012; European Court of Auditors, 2018). It is certain that the Commission and EIB implemented funds for EU states such as the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSD) which mobilized private investment in the context of the 2008 financial and economic crisis (European Commission, 2019). The EU launched a variety of programs to encourage research & innovation, such as *Horizon Europe* or *Connecting Europe Facility*, which facilitates the collaboration of private companies and connects the delivery of key infrastructure across Europe. Moreover, the EU invests in the field of sport via the renowned *Erasmus+* program, which supports sport projects. Reciprocally, scholars argue that public authorities need EU support in the development of infrastructure projects since they require larger capital investments (Wereda, 2012).

Yet, the EU still lacks specificity in its support dedicated to sport infrastructure projects (Goldsmith, 2008). As shown by Figure 1, the EU Commission has funded many sports projects, notably by means of the Erasmus+ program (EU Commission, 2015). Yet, such funding is not dedicated to sport infrastructure projects despite launched initiatives like the *Europe 2020 strategy* or the funding program *Horizon Europe* (EU Commission, 2022;

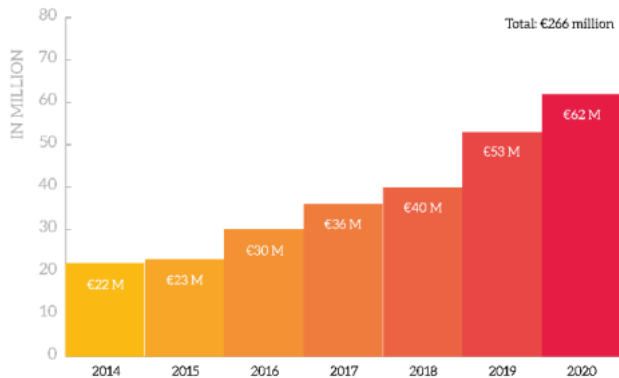


Figure 1. EU financial support for sport.

Data source: European Commission, *Sport in the EU*, 2015.



Figure 2. Erasmus+ funded sports projects

Data source: European Commission, *Sport in the EU*, 2015.

European Court of Auditors, 2018). Figure 2 displays the topics of projects funded by the *Erasmus+* program and confirms the lack of attention on sports infrastructure projects. Moreover, the Commission’s budgetary proposal for the *Erasmus+* program for the period 2021-2027 is conceived to tackle challenges such as physical inactivity, good governance and the integrity of sport through “values” rather than through “material” means, which highlights the importance of incorporating EU involvement with PPP projects dedicated to sport infrastructure (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019).

Consequently, the EU contribution to PPPs is ambiguous and would require further investigation, especially regarding its potential role of financier in sport infrastructure projects. I believe that a deeper understanding of partner relationships and that an encouraged mutual understanding between involved partners might contribute to assessing the effectiveness of innovative partnerships between the EU and domestic partners and thus have a positive societal impact to the benefit of sports users, local and regional areas and national economies. Thus, I propose the following research question: **to what extent can the EU, as a financial partner, enhance the effectiveness of PPPs in the context of sports infrastructure projects?** The structure of the thesis is as follows. In the next sections of the paper, a literature review of the

academia's work will be presented (2) to develop a theoretical framework and present the research hypothesis (3). Afterwards, the methodology section including the research design, data collection and data analysis is presented (4). In the analysis section (5), results of the empirical study are displayed. In section (6), results are summarized and discussed. A final section (7) presents policy implications and recommendations as well as a reflection on the research including its limitations.

2. Literature review

This section of the research aims to provide background information on the PPP phenomenon in order to justify the necessity to assess their effectiveness for sport infrastructure projects. The selected literature mainly consists of academic peer-reviewed articles from official journals, such as the *International Journal of Project Management*, the *Public Administration Review* or the *European Sport Management Quarterly*, in order to ensure high reliability of information, hence the research's external validity. The reviewed material is dated from the period 2000-2020 which testifies the societal and academic relevance of the research topic. The main body of the literature review is divided into three main sections which each define the scope of the literature review and explain the different thematical aspects of the PPP phenomenon: PPPs and their effectiveness, challenges posed by PPPs, and recommendations for the implementation of PPPs projects.

2.1. Seeking collaboration: PPPs and their effectiveness

2.1.1. The PPP phenomenon

Lapiente & Van de Walle (2020) state that the birth of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in the last decade of the 19th century marked the beginning of the cooperation between the two spheres with the assumption that business-like practices would enhance both the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations. Indeed, the contribution of private stakeholders to public projects enables governments to reduce public deficits while preserving the delivery of financial support and services. The earliest NPM changes were implemented in Anglo-Saxon countries, mainly the United Kingdom and New Zealand and they most notably expanded in OECD advanced democracies. Consequently, the first official and recognized PPPs were first launched in 1992 with the British Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and mark the beginning of the collaboration between both sectors (Demirag et al., 2011; Fischer et al., 2006; Zheng et al., 2008). Other scholars highlights the increase in the number of PPPs in the last two decades as a response to the demand for expertise on the high-quality delivery of products and services due to rapid urbanization (Van Ham & Koppenjan, 2001; Abdel Aziz, 2007). Finally, PPPs might even represent a catalyst for the reconciliation of private sector participation in public projects (Kopperjan & Enserink, 2009).

2.1.2. PPP typologies and PPP effectiveness

Accordingly, several typologies and models have been drawn to assess PPPs effectiveness, notably in the field of infrastructure. Van Ham and Koppenjan (2001) present the expansion of the port of Rotterdam as a project in which risks can be overcome through PPPs, via what the authors describe as a “combination model”. Similarly, Kwak et al. (2009) compose a literature review on infrastructure development by means of PPPs: from construction and project management to project finance, they position PPPs as a key government strategy for delivering public services and infrastructure. The exposed continuum of PPPs types shows the degree of private sector involvement at different stages of infrastructure projects: design, building, funding, transfer, operation and maintenance. Zheng et al. (2008) choose the “Design-Build-Finance-Operate” type of contracts to emphasize the need of trust for effective exchange between public and private sectors and to indicate the degree of ownership that both sectors hold in the project. Kennedy & Rosentraub (2000) allege that, through a signed contract, the private sector tends to maximize its control over revenues while the public sector aims to minimize public debt in the community’s interest.

Scholars argue that the ultimate goal for a PPP project to be judged a success, is to measure its effectiveness in order to enhance its performance, notably for infrastructure projects (Hodge & Greve, 2017). The authors assert that PPP performance for Long-Term Infrastructure Contracts (LTIC) should be based on the extent to which it fulfils certain objectives: financial and economic, project delivery, cultural change, policy, governance. Such levels are all meaningful when considering PPPs in the framework of infrastructure building or renovation. More importantly, what is special about Hodge & Greve’s (2017) conceptualization of performance is their distinction between political and business performance: through a review of previous empirical studies, the authors measure performance by focusing on policy success and Value for Money (VfM) for each side of the spectrum. They offer a framework of analysis to measure PPPs performance by concluding that performance is defined differently depending on one's point of view. Consequently, PPPs performance can be assessed from the societal level – which encompasses political dimensions –, from the program level – which adopts a utilitarian view –, from the process level – which includes legitimacy matters –, from the project or activity level – which involves the fulfilment of objectives – or from the point of view of how the organizations worked together to innovate, collaborate, and transform in order to deliver results.

2.1.3. PPPs for sports infrastructure projects

While there has been considerable research on the implementation of PPPs for infrastructure projects, there has been little research on PPP projects that combine sport and infrastructure. This is surprising since sport is perceived as a tool for development and peace, notably through the initiative of PPPs (Spaaij, 2009). Investigation of PPPs in the framework of sport infrastructure projects have been conducted, however not regarding their effectiveness which prejudices the assessment of projects' success. Kennedy and Rosentraub (2000) argue that sport facilities' construction in the form of a PPP project protects tax-payers' long-term interests, hence citizen's interest. Nevertheless, the authors do not measure the effectiveness of those partnerships as they omit the mention of performance indicators. Besides, their argument is based on American universities and sport culture in the US, thus representing a far larger part of society and market than in Europe. Therefore, this model might not be adequate for European PPPs. Similarly, Cabral and Silva (2013) state that PPPs can be used as a management tool by governments to minimize government investment without deterring attraction of private investors to build or renovate mega-event stadiums. Even though their public-oriented perspective on PPPs matter for the academia, the authors put forward the advice for investment decisions upstream of projects rather than for projects' implementation.

Yet, there are still few scholars who have analyzed sport infrastructure projects. Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015) focus on the implementation of sport infrastructure projects by adopting a bundling approach of PPPs which puts the public sector in charge of the design, building, funding and maintenance of the built infrastructure. The authors insist on financial risk sharing of both public and private entities as well as on the singular competencies brought by each partner. Furthermore, the authors' choice of interviews as a method of data collection enables the presentation of clear indicators for PPPs effectiveness at each stage of the sport infrastructure project (Van den Hurk & Verhoest, 2015). Moreover, Geffroy et al. (2021) assert that sport infrastructure projects, especially in the context of the Olympic Games can foster the collaboration between different actors as their effectiveness is key to the success of mega-sport events in addition to encouraging social and economic development of the selected area.

Additionally, Fang et al. (2020) argue that poor stakeholder relationship in multi-actor projects for sport infrastructure are the main source of a project's poor performance and that

the degree of power that stakeholders hold on the project is determined by a project's objectives: whether stakeholders are directly responsible for operating and finally, whether they are beneficiaries or more vulnerable regarding the outcome of the project. Yet, further research on stakeholder relationship require greater attention since Fang et al. (2020) systematic literature review has not been peer-reviewed, which poses a challenge to the validity of their argument.

2.2. Challenges posed by PPPs

2.2.1. Difficulties to define partners' role

The concept of PPP have been conceptualized to a large extent and is thus perceived as ambiguous (Kwak et al., 2009; Van Ham & Koppenjan, 2001). PPPs have been labeled in different ways with the common pattern of the public sector being opposed to the private sphere (Boyne, 2002; Hodge & Greve, 2017; Teisman & Klijn, 2002; Van Ham & Koppenjan, 2001). The distinction between public and private sectors' objectives is conceptualized by Boyne' (2002) dimensions of publicness and by Cabral and Silva's (2013) degree of ownership, which both encompass the two perspectives. Similarly, Van Ham and Koppenjan (2001) expose the key elements for the roles of the public and private sectors by posing that PPPs result from the combination of "contracting out" by the public sector and "partnership" on a joint project.

Nonetheless, Kopperjan & Ennsink (2009) perceive PPPs as "Private Sector Participation" which undermines the role of the private sector in project development. Similarly, Wereda (2012) states that the new involvement of private partners in the delivery of public duties was formerly completed by a public entity, which make the private sector appear as a third party rather than as a core partner. Yet, the private sector has been increasingly financially involved in sports projects, notably in partnerships with sports federations where public funding has been missed (Szymanski, 2011).

2.2.2. Obstacles to collaboration

Furthermore, if cooperation is an acknowledged requirement for the development of PPPs, actors in the public and private sectors have struggled to coordinate: the PPP phenomenon remains contested, which constitutes a negative impact on the functioning of projects under PPPs (Hodge & Greve, 2017; Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). Demirag et al. (2011) adopt

the private financiers' perspective and assert the divergence of interests in infrastructure projects between private and public stakeholders due to their different responsibilities. They argue that such divergence might provoke conflicts of interests between involved stakeholders and confirm the above-mentioned difficulty in defining the partners' role. Similarly, Teisman & Klijn (2002) adopt a pessimistic view on the establishment of PPP projects and state that in practice, actors tend to choose "contracting out" partnerships, which engage public and private partners in joint decision-making on the output only while PPP enables risk sharing between both entities. Finally, Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015) argue that PPPs globally fail to perform consistently due to technical, political and multi-actor complexities that interfere in PPP governance and thus hinders their performance. Authors claim that these complexities are essentially caused by the difficulties for different levels of governments (local, provincial, national) to coordinate, which elicits disagreements in mandates and disparities in policies. Such difficulties thus undermine the image of PPP as a viable solution for stakeholders.

2.3. Recommendations for PPP projects

2.3.1. The benefit of PPPs for governments

Yet, even though PPPs effectiveness have not been experienced in a positive way, many governments still see PPPs as key strategy and tool for overcoming market failures, delivering public services and infrastructure and believe neither a totally public nor a purely private strategy to infrastructure development is likely to be viable in the long-term (Kwak et al., 2009). Fang et al. (2020) state that governments should include the use of PPPs in their agenda rather than focusing on individual projects, which echoes the long-lasting quest for cooperation between the public and private sectors. The authors also find that governments dominate other stakeholders in PPPs for sport infrastructure projects.

Furthermore, Abdel Aziz (2007) suggests guidelines for the implementation of PPP programs which portray the need for a legal framework, institutional integration and fair consideration of the public and private perspective for PPP projects to be successful. Similarly, Kwak et al. (2009) find that success and failure of a PPP project depends on 1) competence of government 2) selection of an appropriate concessionaire 3) an appreciate risk allocation between the public and private sectors 4) sound financial package. This advice is drawn from a

complete literature review on infrastructure development with the review of authors from Europe, Asia, Australia which strengthens the external validity of the research.

In order to foster cooperation between involved stakeholders, Lapuente & Van de Walle (2020) find that governments need to implement systems of checks and balances as well as incentives of investment for the private sector in order to render PPPs successful. Interestingly, Hodge and Greve (2017) define successful partnerships on the basis of the achievement of stakeholders' goals, which are driven by self-interest rather than by social benefit. Therefore, this highlights the necessity to take the interests of each involved stakeholder into account when assessing the quality of their relationship, especially regarding financial concerns.

2.3.2. Involving various stakeholders: a criteria for PPPs effectiveness

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that collaboration for infrastructure projects has been achieved between other actors, who do not necessarily stand on the public-private spectrum. Fang et al. (2020) present stakeholders adopting different perspectives: non-profit organizations, autonomous institutions, research donors. Furthermore, Teisman and Klijn (2002) affirm that the drive for collaboration may be found in all areas of societal decision-making: between government agencies, between government and citizens, and, more recently, between government agencies and private-sector groups which create interdependence between the public and private sectors.

More importantly, Yuan et al. (2009) conceptualize collaboration for PPP projects by interviewing stakeholders who belong to four different sectors: the public sector, including government and public clients that have participated in PPPs; the private sector, including general contractors, consultants, advisers and lenders, who have experience in PPP projects; the academia which refers to researchers and experts in the field of PPPs; and the general public which is an experimental group of people who have some connection to PPPs, such as end users around PPP projects. Results present a model of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure PPPs effectiveness.

2.3.3. The incorporation of EU funds to PPPs: facing PPPs difficulties

The involvement of various types of actors in PPPs opens room for the potential contribution of the EU as a solution to PPPs difficulties. Several scholars discuss the incorporation of EU funds into PPP projects' budget. Van den Hurk and Verhoest's (2015) case study on the Flemish Sports Infrastructure Program sheds lights on the role of the EU in PPPs. Goldsmith (2008) assures that the "infrastructure gap" in Europe can be solved by combing PPPs with EU grants and categorizes four PPP models that specify the characteristics that PPPs for EU-funded urban projects should possess. Van Ham and Koppenjan (2001) address the relevance of the EU as a level of analysis for PPP infrastructure projects by drawing on the case of PPPs founded in the context of the largest port in Europe.

Moreover, Chirita (2012) claims that EU funds for PPP projects, such as the *Cohesion Fund* or the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*, often represent a better use of resources and enable a more accurate assessment of PPPs performance than domestic PPPs. Yet, the EU as a solution to PPPs difficulties is not unanimously agreed. Wereda (2012) presents several obstacles to local PPPs that are co-financed by the EU: the lack of cooperation across sectors, the lack of qualified personnel, or the involvement in the operations as a sub-contractor rather than as a partner. Lastly, Bruzzone and Boccaccio (2018) refer to EU state-aid control applied to infrastructure financing as an alternative path to EU funds to obtain a virtuous relationship between public and private stakeholders.

Overall, the literature review on academic work demonstrates a clear separation between the public and private sectors, which is paradoxical to the collaboration aspect that partnerships entail. Nonetheless, each sector is discussed in the same depth and authors rarely choose a side along the public-private spectrum. In cases where a clear positioning was voiced out, the latter expressed stakeholders' financial interests. This remark is feasible for my research because it will orientate the investigation towards the relationship between the public and private sectors, where stakeholders are driven by their respective interests and positions regarding the progress of the project they have committed to. Additionally, there is an evident gap regarding the assessment of PPPs effectiveness for infrastructure projects dedicated to sports, which also constitutes a path of investigation for my research. Finally, some of the identified recommendations to enhance PPPs effectiveness involve the EU as a financial partner, which suggests the positive impact that the EU might provoke on PPPs. Yet, the blending of the EU

into PPP projects is not supported by unanimity among the academia. Therefore, there is a need to further investigate the role of the EU in PPPs and to assess whether the EU can enhance the relationship between involved stakeholders with the objective of successfully delivering sport infrastructure to users.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Research question

In this section, a theoretical framework is presented in order to address the research question: **to what extent can the EU, as a financial partner, enhance the effectiveness of PPPs in the context of sports infrastructure projects?** Some of the theories presented in the gathered literature have already been discussed in the previous section. Given the abundance of concepts on the topic, the selection of adequate theories has been challenging. Yet, the theoretical framework is funnel-shaped to answer the research question in the most specific way and to discuss theories by topic. Therefore, to assess whether EU's financial support enhances the effectiveness of PPPs dedicated to sport infrastructure projects, the theoretical framework starts with theories that assess PPPs effectiveness: financial and relational aspects. Then, implications of stakeholders' incentives on the quality of their relationships and power dynamics is analyzed. Finally, theories about the incorporation of EU funds into PPP projects are presented and reveal the importance of the selected type of PPP for a specific sport infrastructure project.

3.2. Discussed theories and conceptualization

3.2.1. Financial and relational elements to assess PPPs effectiveness

To begin with, Hodge and Greve's (2017) perspective is adopted to address the research question and states that PPPs effectiveness induces the success of PPP projects. This causal relationship is used throughout the research and thus has a direct impact on the research's findings. Regarding the role of financiers in the partnership, Cabral & Silva (2013) discuss financial incentives in the implementation of sport infrastructure projects and construct a model based on real options theory that allows the assessment of the amount of financial incentive required for private entrepreneurs to invest in sport infrastructure projects. Identifying financial incentives of involved stakeholders matters because it allows the establishment of a written contract listing objectives of the PPP project. Moreover, this prediction model is useful for both contractors and concessionaires as it enables the drawing of recommendations for decision-making on large investments, especially regarding major sports events like the 2024 Paris Olympics or the European and World Championships. However, by exclusively focusing on

the financial or contractual aspect of PPP projects, the authors omit the discussion of partner relationships. Therefore, Cabral and Silva's (2013) cannot be considered as a theoretical benchmark for the research.

Zheng et al. (2008) argue that relational governance should be combined with the classical contractual governance for an effective exchange between public buyers – or contractors – and private service providers – or concessionaires. On the one hand, contractual governance consists in assigning transactions to governance structures in the form of a legal contract in order to facilitate effective exchange and prevent inappropriate stakeholder behavior. On the other hand, relational governance focuses on the importance of trust in creating mutually beneficial supply outcomes through repeated interactions which, in some instances, might substitute for contracts. Therefore, the emphasis on the relational aspect of PPPs reveals that the quality of relationship between partners is important to assess PPPs effectiveness.

Similarly, Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015) argue that the success of PPP projects does not solely depend on the final product or outcome of the project but also on processes – including relational processes between partners. Accordingly, process performance considers the relationship between stakeholders during the project, while product performance is associated with the extent to which project goals have been attained. Therefore, Zheng et al. (2008) and Van den Hurk and Verhoest's (2015) theories show that the quality of partner relationships should be considered when assessing PPPs effectiveness, which qualifies them as reference theories for the research.

3.2.2. The quality of partnerships and power dynamics

Considering that the quality of stakeholders' relationship is necessary to assess PPPs effectiveness, research's results should reflect on the implications of EU funds' incorporation into PPP projects for involved stakeholders, especially regarding power dynamics of partnerships. Yuan et al. (2009) identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in order to assess stakeholders' requirements which will improve PPPs effectiveness and thus partner relationships. The authors' use of questionnaires as a method of data collection to build a model of PPPs performance puts forward stakeholders' opinions, which adds value to the assessment of the quality of their relationship and notably to identifying power dynamics. Besides the

theoretical appropriateness, Yuan et al.'s (2009) methodological choices constitute a suitable model for my research as interviewees might increase the accuracy of the empirical data.

Furthermore, Fang et al.'s (2020) stakeholders theory alludes to the idea that stakeholders might be many different people or groups, all of whom have legal obligations to the company they work for. The authors use the degree of stakeholders' influence – or power – in the company to categorize them: those who have power over the project, namely decision makers or funders; those who are directly responsible for the project, such as project developers, managers and staff; those who indirectly benefit from the project, such as families and communities and finally those who lose out from the project, namely vulnerable groups. This theory allows the assessment of power dynamics between involved stakeholders in sport infrastructure projects, which allows judgement of the quality of partners relationships. More interestingly, Fang et al.'s (2020) theory places financiers at the highest position of project hierarchy and states that this role can only be endorsed by certain actors. Such findings shall be compared to my research's results and discussed in the discussion section (6).

3.2.3. Incorporating EU Funds to models of PPPs effectiveness

The role of the EU as a financial partner corresponds to the allocation of EU grants to public and private partners for financing of certain projects. Goldsmith (2008) offers a framework of models for merging PPPs for infrastructure projects with EU grants, which results in four models for PPP grant blending. The “capex” model has been used by most of EU grant-funded PPP projects in the past and consists in subsidizing the upfront capital investment. Secondly, the “co-finance” model is largely used too and presents the potential of division into several contracts. Thirdly, the “payment subsidy” model in which grants are used to subsidize future unitary payments to the PPP company by the granting authorities and the “debt repayment” model in which the contractor pays off a portion of the loan as soon as the project is up and running, lowering future unitary charges. Lastly, the “co-investment in PPP fund” model where, in a fund that invests in a number of PPPs, public sector grants are merged with private cash.

Goldsmith's (2008) model displays the reasons for member states to use EU funds for infrastructure projects. This implies that if national private entities are willing to engage in a PPP, it is member states' responsibility to engage in the partnership as the latter are granted EU

funds. This framework permits an identification of the type of model specifically used for the EU grant-funded PPP projects, which is strong for my research. However, Goldsmith's (2008) framework does not capture the relationship between involved stakeholders in a project. Therefore, this theory cannot be used as theoretical benchmark for the research. Instead, Wereda (2012), by focusing on partnerships between the EU and local partners, argues key aspects of PPPs functioning is the cooperation between partners and recognition of benefits they share. This theory considers the quality of stakeholders' relationship, which is more adequate to assess PPPs effectiveness from a relational perspective.

Interestingly, Wereda (2012) uses a framework of PPP types – contracting, BOT, DBFO, concession – for which she assesses various risks taken by stakeholders to assess PPPs effectiveness when blended with EU funds. This encourages partners to choose the type of partnership that fulfills their objective regarding the project. Therefore, the type of PPP might play a role in assessing PPPs effectiveness, in the context of EU contribution to PPPs. Similarly, Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015) understand PPPs as a model where stages of design, building, finance, operation and maintenance are incorporated in “one-covering” contracts that are sustainable for sports infrastructure projects. The authors' perspective corresponds to the European Court of Auditors' (2018) definition of Design-Build-Finance-Maintain-Operate (DBFMO) contracts as “whole life” contracts in which the private partner is in charge of all project phases, including funding, from design through building, operation, and maintenance of the infrastructure. Thus, the “one-covering” (or “whole-life”) contracts are the chosen PPP types for the research.

3.3. Hypothesis

The discussed theories show that, to evaluate PPPs effectiveness, the quality of partner relationships should be investigated. To assess the quality of partners' relationship, the analysis of power dynamics between stakeholders might constitute relevant path, as it supports theoretical benchmarks above-mentioned. Several predictions can be drawn from the discussed theories:

- *Contracts as well as trust relationships creates an effective exchange between public and private partners. (Zheng et al., 2008).*

- *The process of partnerships – including competition and transaction costs – constitute preconditions for sports infrastructure projects to be successfully implemented. (Van den Hurk & Verhoest, 2015).*
- *There is a successful PPP and development of public benefit only if a consensus on policies exists. (Fang et al., 2020).*
- *Funding partners have more influence over their public demanders. (Fang et al., 2020).*

Consequently, through hypothesis testing, I expect to verify that a **positive** power dynamic between PPP partners – assessed through the analysis of partners’ relationship – enables the success of the sport infrastructure project. Applied to EU co-financed partnerships, such expectations translate into the following hypothesis:

H: Positive power dynamics in the relationship between the EU and involved stakeholders increase PPPs effectiveness and hence increase the likeliness of sports infrastructure projects to be successful.

Therefore for my research, I design a conceptual framework based on reference theories that were identified above. Particularly, I select theories that address power dynamics between involved PPP stakeholders and the EU: the type of PPP chosen for the partnership; the quality of partners’ relationship in the PPP; and the implications of EU contribution on partner relationships in the PPP. The importance of the relational aspect when measuring PPPs performance has been put forward by Zheng et al. (2008) and Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015). Power dynamics in PPPs relationships has been introduced by Fang et al. (2020). Since our research aims to assess the contributing role of the EU in PPP for sport infrastructure projects, it is necessary to evaluate power dynamics in such partnerships. To do so, opinions of stakeholders engaged in PPPs projects should be collected, based on Yuan et al.’s (2009) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), presented in the section below.

3.4. Operationalization

Indicators should allow the assessment of the extent to which the EU enhances the performance of PPPs effectiveness and hence ensures the success of sport infrastructure projects. As presented in Figure 3, Yuan et al. (2009) elaborate five categories of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), namely the perspective of physical characteristics of projects

(KPI₁), financing and marketing indicators (KPI₂), innovation and learning indicators (KPI₃), stakeholders indicators (KPI₄), process indicators (KPI₅). The indicators are critical for both the public and private sectors to make informed decisions throughout the project life cycle in order to maximize the value of PPP initiatives. Given that power dynamics is the critical variable to answer the research question, indicators (KPI) are given a greater attention for the research: “public client’s satisfaction”; “general public/social satisfaction”; “good relationship among the concessionaire”, “subcontractors and suppliers”; “good team management”, “organization structure and culture” (see Figure 4 of the appendix). Additionally, I select several indicators that have been used in the discussed theory and that I judge valuable to answer the research question: “trust relationship”; “contract relationship”; “processes: competition and low transaction costs”; “consensus”; “defined purpose of the partnership”; “delimitation of non-transferable responsibilities”; “mutual knowledge”; “inclusiveness and equality of partners”.

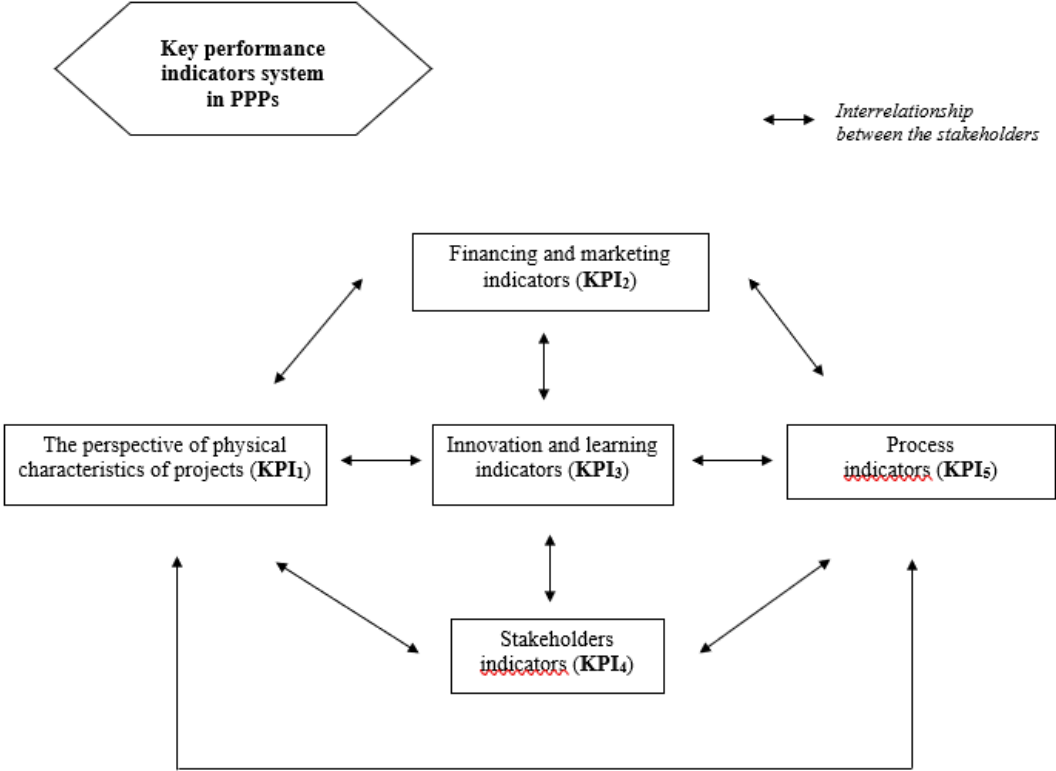


Figure 3. Simplified Framework of KPIs for the performance of PPPs projects

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

Since the 1970s, the co-variation strategy has dominated discussions on small-N research designs (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). To construe causality, the co-variational approach gives empirical evidence of co-variation between an independent variable X and a dependent variable Y. In the research, I aim to investigate the influence of the EU, as independent variable, on the effectiveness of partner relationships for sport infrastructure projects, as dependent variable. Therefore, the selected research strategy is adequate to address the objectives of the research, hence strengthening the credibility of the research.

4.1.1. Selection of design: cross-sectional

For my research, I choose a cross-sectional design where variables of interest are collected via interviews over the period April-May 2022. Cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on a sample of cases and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are then analyzed to see whether there are any patterns of relationship (Bryman, 2015, p. 56). The choice of cross-sectional design is justified by its research process. Unlike experimental study, cross-sectional design is an observational study which enables the research to capture information on participants without affecting or influencing the natural environment in which they reside, hence strengthening the internal and external validity for the research.

One challenge that the researcher might face with cross-sectional design is its inability to establish a definitive cause-and-effect relationship, that is to verify whether one action makes another event happen. This is precisely provoked by the study of variables at a single point in time which forces the omission of both the background and subsequent actions of participants, unlike in other observational studies such as longitudinal design. Consequently, internal validity in cross-sectional design can be negatively impacted by the causal effect relationship as the design produces associations rather than findings from which causal inferences can be unintentionally drawn. Yet, considering the limited time frame to conduct my research, the advantage of using a cross-sectional design over longitudinal design is that the data is gathered at once, which mitigates the risk of not assembling the adequate sample in time. The choice of

case study design combined with interviews by Van den Hurk and Verhoest (2015) and Zheng et al. (2008) constitutes an adequate way for an analysis of PPPs' performance at the program level. However, since my research focuses on PPPs performance at the (sport infrastructure) project level cross-sectional design is the most adequate design for the research.

Finally, cross-sectional design enables the study of different variables for a given sample whereas longitudinal design allows only one variable to be utilized for the study. In my case, the multiplicity of variables is crucial for the research because it refines the selection of interviewees. This argument outweighs the downside of cause-and-effect relationship, at the benefit of a more rigorous selection of participants, which strengthens the research's internal validity. Another attribute of cross-sectional design that could hamper the research's external validity is the selective way of collecting data – opposed to randomization – which might cause replicability issues. Yet, the fact that interviews will be conducted at a single point in time – throughout the period April-May 2022 – makes the research more easily replicable as the opinions will be influenced by similar external factors, like the global pandemic.

4.2. Data collection

4.2.1. Selection of method: interviews

According to Bryman (2015, Chapter 20), interviews are the most widely used method in qualitative research. Stakeholders' opinions can be collected by means of quantitative empirical survey from which various statistical analysis is conducted (Yuan et al., 2009). However, for the research, I choose the qualitative semi-structured interviewing method because I aim to put an emphasis on participants' own perspectives rather than on research techniques of reliability maximization and measurement validity as it is the case in quantitative structured interviews or empirical surveys.

Additionally, qualitative interviews are more flexible than quantitative ones, which enables a more detailed and diverse perspectives of stakeholders, in order to assess the effectiveness of EU co-financed PPPs. This flexibility provides the possibility for the interviewee to depart from the interviewer's guide and to let him or her use the space to express the relevant and important elements (Bryman, 2015, p. 467). the generation of answers with the potential to be coded and processed quickly with structured interviews might hamper the

assessment of stakeholders' interests, hence the assessment of power dynamics within their partnership. Semi-structured interviews are more adequate as they generate rich and detailed answers which enable the evaluation of the relationships between different stakeholders involved in PPP projects, hence strengthening the research's internal validity. Accordingly, I choose semi-structured interviews over unstructured interviewees because this research aims to tackle specific issues in order to answer the research question.

Nonetheless, conducting interviews induces some methodological limitations that the researcher should be aware of when investigating the effectiveness of EU co-financed PPPs for sport infrastructure projects. Interviewees' answers can be biased because of their reactions to the interviewer's ethnicity, social status, age, or physical attractiveness. When conducting interviews the researcher should always take individuals' backgrounds and social context into consideration. The diversity of participants being interviewed ensures the transferability of the research to other research fields and contexts. Interviewees should come from a variety of professional and cultural backgrounds, as well as representing various geographic locations around Europe. Yet, for the research to be academically integrated in all respects, it would prerequisite peer-reviewing enabling confirmability by the academia. Furthermore, even though the same questions are asked to all participants, some interviewees might get around the issue by elaborating on another aspect of the question and go off-topic, which makes the answer less detailed and relevant and hence might undermine the conformability of the data collection.

Finally, approaching and communicating with respondents might be time-consuming and delays in response or last-minute cancelation can hinder the research. Therefore, when conducting interviews, the researcher must be prepared to have alternative options and be able to contact other participants. For my research, I choose to conduct all interviews online, which constitutes advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, the online environment expands the accessibility to a diverse range of participants that might find themselves in other parts of the world. The conducting of interviews in person would have constituted transaction costs such as travelling. On the other hand, interviewing an individual online makes it more difficult to perceive body language, which might be relevant in some cases. Yet, as my research focuses on participants' opinions, facial expressions represent a minor aspect compared to participants' statements. Furthermore, the networking advantage that one seeks in conducting interviews might be hampered by the online environment. Thankfully, today's social media and platforms like LinkedIn make social connections possible.

4.2.2. Selection of participants

In order to justify the nature and number interviewees, I perform nonprobability sampling that does not represent the population's size – like probability sampling does – but that rather focuses on the population's organization, or in my research, about stakeholders' opinion on partnerships and PPPs effectiveness (Bryman, 2015, Chapter 18). For the research, purposive sampling is selected over snowball, quotas and convenience sampling because the selection of participants is based on seeking elements that meet specific criteria to answer the research question (Bryman, 2015, Chapter 18). Participants' affiliation to the type of organization or company in which they work is more relevant than their age or gender as we focus on understanding power dynamics between stakeholders that belong to public or private entities. Consequently, the main selection criteria – or variables of study – are a) participant's job sector, which permits the position of the organization/company on the public-private spectrum, b) participant's experience with PPP projects and c) participant's experience with EU-funded projects. Even though gender does not represent a key study variable for the research, it is important that the data is drawn from a relatively equal number of female and male interviewees in order to gather at least the minimum background and social context data of participants that the research lacks with the choice of cross-sectional design.

Theoretically, as the research aims to investigate the impact that the financial contribution of the EU might have on partner relationships for sport infrastructure projects, interviewees should be selected according to their affiliation to job sectors. In other words, interviewees should work for local or regional managing authorities, regional agencies, non-profit organizations – in the field of sport or infrastructure – sports federations, private stakeholders – such as construction or energy supplier companies – sport units or department of the studied institutions, the European Olympic Committee. The focus on the *Metropole Européenne de Lille (MEL)* emerges from my personal background and is supported by the assumption that the participation of business organizations in the sphere of offering services of public utility for local government units is a new form of cooperation for solving problems of the infrastructure shortage, both technical and social (Wereda, 2012). Yet, the research is not a case study since interviewees belong to different organizations and contribute their input on behalf of different sport infrastructure projects in order to gather various opinions.

However, in practice, there might be a larger part of interviewees belonging to the public sector, at the cost of the private sector's representation. That is because the EU is itself a political institution, which works for the benefit of society, albeit of the close ties with private entities, notably within the framework of projects called by the European Commission. Firstly, during the selection process of participants, I realized that a single organization might be involved in different partnerships for different projects at different levels, and not only at local levels like I would ideally expect. Secondly, participants might work in other sectors than sport and infrastructure and some participants belong to the academia, which was not expected at the beginning of the research. This is positive regarding the analysis of stakeholders' relationship because adding another type of actor brings more nuance to the research. However, this might have a negative effect on the analysis of PPPs effectiveness: the academia neither belongs to the public nor to the private sphere. Thirdly, some companies and organizations might have experience with EU-funded projects or have been involved in EU co-financed PPPs in the past, however have no ongoing projects involving the EU contribution. Therefore, I shall accept those imperfections and bear them in mind for the rest of the research.

The fourteen selected interviewees are informed by the consent sheet that there are no physical, legal or economic risks associated with their participation in the study. Participants have the right not to answer all questions and to stop at any time. Table 1 of the appendix displays the job position of each participant and the organization or company in which they work. Voluntarily, the position of companies and organizations on the public-private spectrum is not mentioned in Table 1 as I choose to let interviewees themselves define the type of entity for which they work, which puts forward the opinions of involved actors for the research.

4.2.3. Selection of questions: the interview protocol

4.2.3.1. Preliminary section

Given the explanatory nature of the research, guiding questions are open-ended and encourage respondents to provide information in their own terms (see Table 2 of the appendix). Yet, closed questions, if they are more scarce, are not strictly excluded from the guide. Based on the research question, guiding questions seek certain types of information (Bryman, 2015, p. 468). Additionally, all questions should be asked to all interviewees in a similar wording but not necessarily in a similar order to respect fairness (Bryman, 2015, Chapter 20). Yet, tailor-

made questions that specifically fit each participant's industry or job sector are asked in order to perform thoughtful and targeted interviews, which increases the conciseness of participants' answers and hence improves the quality of the results.

4.2.3.2. *The interview protocol*

The interview guide is sent to all participants before the actual interviews are conducted in order for interviewees to be as specific as possible in their answers, hence strengthening the internal and external validity of the research. Yet, making questions available beforehand might constitute a risk of bias as some interviewees will prepare more to answer the questions than others. Being aware of this possibility, I still believe that reinforcing the internal and external validity of the research outweighs the costs of a possible bias in the preparation of participants. Questions are conceived in order to address the main research question as well as other questions raised by discussed articles from the literature review.

Accordingly, elements from the different theories discussed were retrieved to design preliminary themes to provide an interpretation of the data. From the conceptualization section, six elements were primarily retained to build the themes used for the interview guide: the amount of financial incentive, the type of PPP, the type of model for PPP blending with EU funds, the type of EU fund, the type of PPP project and the different stages of the project. From the operationalization stage, theoretical concepts were turned into indicators measuring successful relationships between partners. Firstly, indicators from all articles were retained namely, "contract relationship", "mutual trust", "mutual information sharing", "level of competition and transaction costs", "level of consensus", "inclusiveness and equality of partners", "purpose of the partnership". Secondly, since the research predictions are mainly based on those, I choose to use Yuan et al.'s (2009) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

4.3. Data analysis

Grounded theory and analytic induction are not adequate methods of analysis for my research as they aim to generate a new theory, while I aim to answer the research question that was based on specific theories (Bryman, 2016). Accordingly, critical discourse, qualitative content, narrative or thematic analyses are more suitable methods to address the research question. Since my research began with several theories about PPPs effectiveness in specific

projects that are equally compelling, a deductive approach is used. This implies that there is no pre-determined framework of data analysis: the interpretation depends on common patterns in the data. Yet, even though the research is deductive, being able to add new patterns to the research through the use of themes renders the research more accurate and valuable. Consequently, a thematic analysis is conducted, by coding responses into different categories.

One of the advantages of a thematic analysis is the structured and comprehensive analysis since each section of the analysis represents a specific theme (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, this type of analysis enables flexibility in the research process. Nevertheless, when conducting thematic analysis, the process of coding might pose several challenges to the research. Bryman (2016) raises awareness about the possibility of altering participants' social background and social settings when conducting interviews. Therefore, in order to contextualize participants' answers, the working background of the interviewee should be consulted before the interview and, during the interview, specific information should be collected such as their position in the company and the legal entity of their company.

Yuan et al. (2009) find that, although stakeholders have similar views on the quality, pricing, time, and services supplied by PPPs, there are clear disparities in the objectives of the public sector's budget limits, risks, revenue, and guarantees due to diverse stakeholder preferences. This argument constitutes a hint for the strategy of the data analysis, as the data collection will result in different views from different actors. Yet, in order to be more precise, the analysis of the data collected in the interviews will be performed with the support of specific themes that were based on the research indicators: 1) physical characteristics of PPP projects, 2) operational process of PPP projects and 3) the added role of the EU in PPP projects. A coding tree exposes the themes and sub-themes for the analysis (see Figure 4 of the appendix). The choice of thematic analysis enables the modification of sub-themes during and after conducting the interviews and not having fixed themes before the interviews, which allows the elaboration of findings to answer the research question. Themes are designed based on the research's indicators and discussed theories, which strengthens the internal validity of the research since the obtained results stem from initial theoretical expectations.

5. Analysis

In this section, results drawn from the fourteen interviewees are presented. As mentioned in the methodology section (4), the choice of themes can be justified by the indicators used to elaborate the interview guide, and especially from Yuan et al.'s (2009) KPIs for stakeholder relationships (KPI₄). However, after conducting the interviews, I realized that other categories of KPIs were mentioned by participants, namely physical characteristics of projects (KPI₁), financing and marketing (KPI₂), innovation and learning (KPI₃) and process (KPI₅). Therefore, I decide to refine the angle of analysis by focusing the five categories of indicators instead of solely using stakeholders indicators (KPI₄). Accordingly, three themes are identified to conduct the analysis: 1) physical characteristics of projects; 2) process of projects; and 3) EU added value to projects.

5.1. Physical characteristics of projects

5.1.1. Partnership type and involved partners

Initially, the analysis of PPPs effectiveness intended to follow the narrative of PPP stages as exposed in the theoretical framework: Design, Funding, Building, Operation and Maintenance (DFBOM). However, participants' experiences in the field of PPPs have proved to belong to different types of partnerships which are complementary models to the DFBOM model. This confirms the diversity of PPP types for sport infrastructure projects and foreshadows the thin lines to consider when assessing PPPs effectiveness for given projects. Indeed, while Interviewee #7 discussed partnerships between private companies – or business to business (B2B) partnerships –, Interviewees #4, #8, #9 and #13 discussed partnerships that are very similar to PPPs but that vary relatively to the level of public ownership. Concession partnerships give the right to the concessionaire – or constructor – to exploit the infrastructure that it built but the latter is fully owned by the state (Interviewee #4). Another type of partnership is when “the state plays a role of guarantor only and the project is by majority funded by the private sector” (Interviewee #13). Lastly, Interviewees #8 and #9 discussed partnerships between the state and sports clubs or associations which are delegations of sports federations.

Despite the variety across partnerships types, all participants had a relatively good notion of the functioning of PPPs to give their opinion on the topic. The PPP perspective refers to projects based on DFBOM contracts – also named as “global contracts” (Interviewee #5) – but also other models such as Design-Building contracts (Interviewee #14). Such perspectives were adopted by participants that were either part of governmental authorities (Interviewees #2, #5, #9, #11), of energy and infrastructure companies (Interviewees #4 and #7) or of the European Commission (Interviewee #6). Interviewee #14 states that “DFBOM contracts might be more adequate than Design-Building contracts for infrastructure projects” as the latter ensures the maintenance of high standards and expertise that the infrastructure requires on the long-term.

Furthermore, the PPP perspective was adopted in the framework of Erasmus+ projects by non-profit organizations (Interviewees 1 and 3), European sports federations (Interviewee #10), and public universities (Interviewee #12). However, Interviewee #1 defines partnerships including above-mentioned stakeholders as “corporation partnerships” and not as PPPs. Therefore, the nature of involved partners to define the partnership type matters as much as the type of contract. Lastly, Interviewee #1 mentioned that “private businesses have been allowed to participate in projects [from the Erasmus + program] since only two years”, which is an important aspect to bear in mind for the contribution of the EU in sport infrastructure projects.

5.1.2. Partnership objectives

It is important to stress that all interviewees have been or are involved in partnership projects, which increases the relevance and credibility of their statements. Consequently, a participant’s perspective equates to the perspective of a stakeholder involved in a given project. What is crucial to understand is whether this perspective is shaped by the nature of the project or by the interests of each. To understand the impact of interests on the partnership project, participants were asked to place their organization or company on the public-private spectrum. Interviewee #4 qualifies his/her company as a “public service delegate” and discusses concession partnerships and PPPs. Similarly, Interviewee #5 speaks on behalf of the local municipality of which he is the mayor when discussing PPPs.

On the other hand, Interviewee #12 describes her responsibilities within the public university of Lisbon and discusses corporation partnerships in the context of Erasmus+ projects.

Similarly, Interviewees #8 and #10 respectively state that national and European sports federations are highly financed by government but the former focuses on PPPs whereas the latter discusses Erasmus+ projects. Lastly, Interviewee #7 and #13 qualify their working entity as “hybrid” since the former is a “private company with 80% of public investment” and the latter is “private at a rate of 97% but is guaranteed by the state”. Therefore, the nature of the PPP project has a larger influence on participants’ perspectives than the position of their working entity on the public-private spectrum.

Objectives of discussed partnerships are identified by means of defining the main role and responsibilities of each involved partner. Interviewees #1 and #12 state that partners are clearly designated either as “coordinators”, “disseminators”, “experts and developers” or “researchers”. Interviewee #12 inserts that the “skilling [process] is more often endorsed by private institutions... [such as]... NGOs, agencies, associations” and Interviewee #2 puts emphasis on the role of “experts [that can be] fulfilled by consulting and technical companies”. Such expert companies are privately owned and employed by the government (Interviewee #14). Similarly, Interviewees #4, #5 and #7 agree that the “Operation” phase of the project is conducted by private construction companies such as *Eiffage Construction*. Additionally, Interviewee #13 states that “domestic partners” for the Paris 2024 Olympics are mostly private companies but that some public service companies in the field of energy – such as *EDF* or *Enedis* – are also key partners to the project. Therefore, the affiliation of involved partners to the public or private side through their company or organization does not necessarily influence their perspective on PPPs effectiveness.

5.2. Process of projects: stakeholders relations and partnership effectiveness

5.2.1. Operational efficiency

Interviewees statements can be organized according to the timeline of mentioned projects – before, during and after – in order to put emphasis on the projects’ development and on its impacts, which are factors allowing the assessment of a PPP project’s success. Nonetheless, one should be aware that some PPP projects discussed by interviewees are still ongoing, which compelled interviewees to explain the post-project aspect by using the conditional tense. Interviewee #5 raised an interesting point by asking whether PPPs

effectiveness was understood from the “operational effectiveness perspective or the judicial effectiveness perspective”. Thus, it is important at this stage to remind the reader that the research focuses on the operational aspect of PPP projects in order to assess their effectiveness and hence to estimate the level of success for a given project. Yet, even though judicial effectiveness is not the chosen viewpoint, the latter also “contributes to the evaluation of PPPs performance”, especially upstream of the project to decide which partnership is to be used as the most adequate “tool for the project’s success” (Interviewee #7).

5.2.1.1. Before the project

There is a major agreement among participants regarding the work realized prior to the start of the project, even “before the design stage” (Interviewee #12). This is illustrated by statements confirming the cruciality of a framework for the partnership to be effective. The “quality of the preliminary evaluation increases the likeliness of the PPP to be effective” (Interviewee #5). Interviewee #7 mentions the importance of “having a well-written and concrete contract” and of “following specific term of references over the entire period of the PPP” (Interviewee #9). Interviewee #1 insists on “clear objectives and expectations” that partners should agree on with the help of “clear guidelines and protocols”. Moreover, “a well-written contract provides room for stakeholders to address unexpected situations” (Interviewees #1 and #4) and “avoid imbalances between contractors and concessionaires” (Interviewee #7). Interviewee #2 notices the need to get a “clear view of opportunities” that each partner has in order to be as realistic as possible and avoid failure. Similarly, Interviewee #6 puts emphasis on “the co-creation of roadmaps [that] guide involved partners throughout the project” by defining the responsibilities of each. Therefore, such documents establish a framework approved by all involved stakeholders, hence increasing the effectiveness of the partnership and encouraging the project’s success.

In addition to the framework of the partnership, involved stakeholders should share mutual expectations regarding the objectives of the project in order to ensure cooperation and collaboration from preliminary stages. More importantly, Interviewee #14 states that “without collaboration, some projects could not even emerge”, hence the importance of mutual understanding between public and private partners. Eleven out of the fourteen participants discussed the need to have a common understanding of the project goals and a common understanding of each other, which confirms the necessity of mutuality for a PPP project. The

three participants who omitted the mention of “common understanding of goals” rather focused on the “quality of the contract”, which also requires the share of objectives. Interviewee #2 states that the challenge posed by the divergence in involved stakeholders’ interests and preferences could be solved if partners “find a common ground and understand each other”, in addition to “collective negotiation” and “joint work” between involved stakeholders (Interviewee #9 and #8). Similarly, Interviewee #10, #11, #12 and #14 state that “consensus between involved parties” should be generated by understanding the capabilities of each and how each partner can add value to the partnership in their way. By defining responsibilities of each in a mutual way, partners are empowered and thus more involved in the project, which increases cooperation as well as the likeliness of the partnership being successful.

5.2.1.2. During the project

Together with the need for mutuality, which implies common goals and common understanding, communication has been noted as a main aspect for a successful partnership. Interviewee #2 notes the importance of “regular checks and talks” to make sure that all parties are still “aligned to the same goals and objectives”. Interviewee #10, #12 and #13 put emphasis on the importance of “involving all partners” for a successful partnership. Additionally, Interviewee #10 recognizes the responsibility of each partner to “be interested in each other’s results, projects or initiatives” to create a sense of community which will be to the benefit of the partnership. Similarly, Interviewees #4 and #10 suggest “listen[ing] to involved stakeholders” to assess the possibilities of action for a given project. Interviewee #4 mentions the importance of “communicating information to citizens” or users of a certain type of infrastructure, which is an communication element in PPPs that has not been discussed by other interviewees.

“Information sharing” has been recurrent in several interviews. Participants agree that keeping all stakeholders informed on the progress of the project enables transparency, hence facilitating coordination. Interviewee #3 calls for a more “hierarchical structure” regarding the access of information for partners as it will “increase the efficacy of the project” while Interviewee #1 recognizes the difficulty in granting “fair access to all partners” as some “sensitive information cannot be shared” due to the nature of entities – public or private. On the other hand, Interviewee #8 calls for softening hierarchical status for the benefit of communication by asserting that “the relationship between sports clubs and federations

facilitates information sharing” and that “communication should be improved between sports federations and regional authorities”. Information sharing can be done via “digital tools” (Interviewee #9 and #12) and platforms or by means of “frequent” (Interviewee #6, #9) or “periodical” meetings (Interviewee #12) between involved partners.

Furthermore, “trust” between partners is mentioned by participants as an element facilitating coordination and transparency. Interviewee #14 suggests that “mutual trust lifts the temptation of game-playing” between stakeholders as the latter are encouraged to respect each other. Interviewee #12 makes a relevant point by stating that “the EU [network and] platform can ensure institutional trust”, hence encouraging partners at initial stages of a given project to start collaborating and create a partnership. This aspect will be further discussed in the section about the EU added value to projects. On the other hand, some interviewees make a noticeable point by arguing that what makes successful partnership is “the quality of the human relationships” (Interviewee #1 and #4) between people representing their respective organization or companies as “good relations do not depend on formalization and norms” (Interviewee #8).

Additionally, “transparency and coordination can be ensured by tools such as follow-up reports” of concessionaires to contractors or by institutional third parties or mechanisms to monitor the relationship (Interviewee #14). Interviewee #13 discusses the role of “the inter-ministerial delegate to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games [in] facilitate[ing] interactions between the state – who is the project guarantor – and the Organizational Committee for the Olympic Games” (COJO). Committees guarantee the legal representation of each stakeholder (Interviewee #1 and #6). Administrative tribunals can also be used as a “reconciliation tool” in case of conflict (Interviewee #5 and #9). Furthermore, Interviewee #7 discusses the mediator role of the energy company’s delegations which are based in Brussels and which directly contributes to negotiation processes for nuclear and gas production.

Half of the participants mentioned the value of time when assessing PPPs effectiveness. Interviewee #14 stressed the importance of “meeting strict and clear deadlines when adhering to a project’s terms of references”. The latter used the example of the 2010 FIFA World Cup where infrastructure facilitating public hosting were to be ready regardless of contingencies when the major sports event started. Interviewee #3 affirms that partnership projects required

time and that a hierarchical organization was “needed to save time” when looking for a specific piece of information.

Furthermore, several participants – from private entities as well as from regional authorities – identified the public sector as a limitation to the quick execution of projects. Interviewee #7 claims that “processes are faster with private partners than with public ones”, hence the preference of B2B partnerships when projects require collaboration with other parties to emerge. Similarly, Interviewee #13 states that when the private partner is subject to public order for a given project, it constitutes a “drawback” for a project requiring collaboration since “procedures involving the public sector are long” due to the “heavy and inflexible” nature of the public order system. Interviewee #9 qualifies the communication process during the emergence of a PPP project as “long” because it requires a “large number of meetings between regional authorities before establishing common goals and guidelines” for the project. Interviewee #2 raises a new point by justifying public delays with political changes, such as regional elections, which directly impact ongoing projects.

5.2.1.3. Legacy of the project

Several participants discussed the relevance of a project’s impact when assessing its success and the effectiveness of its partnership. Interviewees recommend to “start focusing on the project’s legacy from the initial stages, even before the Design phase of the project”, regardless of the project outcome: sport infrastructure and equipment (Interviewees #4, #5, #7, #8, #14) mega sports event (Interviewees #9 and #13), investment programs (Interviewee #6) or action plan programs (Interviewees #1 and #3). Participants’ statements enable an identification of the main interconnected impacts which are on territory and on innovation.

The territorial impact of a project is the most noticeable among others as it provokes a material change in the environment where it is built or implemented. Interviewees #7 and #9 state that sports infrastructures evolving around a PPP are generally launched for the purpose of making a “mark in the territory” in order “to improve the economic, social and cultural development of the area”. Interviewee #13 puts emphasis on “elements which remain a posteriori of a project”. The latter illustrates its statement with the example of the French Ministry of Education rendering mandatory sports practice on a daily basis for secondary schools, which foreshadows the social impact of the project. Similarly, Interviewee #14 inserts

that “one of the main concerns at the Design stage is the alignment with the environment” of the area where the project is to be established. The latter affirms that “the maintenance of the projects’ standards ensures its legacy” and that, accordingly, this stage requires “high-skill standards” and “expertise”.

Another aspect of a project’s legacy includes its impact on innovation. In the context of the Olympic Games, Interviewee #14 argues that the collaboration between public and private entities is the right path to provoke innovation. Moreover, Interviewee #4 states that one of the main aims in the construction of the Pierre Mauroy Lille Metropolis stadium was innovation by “delivering a stadium of the future” to the public. Interviewee #5 supports this argument, by however adding that “the construction of a multi-functional stadium – or show house – was a private-led project”. Along similar lines, Interviewee #6 favors private industries and companies over public entities for the field of industrial innovation by focusing on co-programmed European Partnerships – which are partnerships between the Commission and private partners. This constitutes an important point regarding the evaluation of power dynamics between public and private partners that will be further discussed in the discussion section. On the other hand, Interviewee #8 stresses that innovation, and particularly in stadiums like the Pierre Mauroy Lille Metropolis, “might have a negative effect on sports users as the aims of the project have focused attention on innovation and show” at the expense of the initial aim that is to satisfy athletes.

5.2.2. Power dynamics

5.2.2.1. *Defining balance*

During the interviews, several participants addressed the question “how balanced can a partnership be?” as a supplement to the main question “what are the keys to a PPP project’s success?” in order to understand power dynamics. Consequently, a “balanced” relationship is one where “each stakeholder feels fairness within the partnership and towards each other” (Interviewees #4 and #7) and where “each partner is responsible” not necessarily by means of a hierarchy but by means of consensus (Interviewee #12). Additionally, a “balanced” relationship is one where “objectives are defined and common to all partners” (Interviewee #11) and where “collaboration is enabled by communication and transparency” (Interviewee #14). Summed up, the definitions of “balanced relationship” provided by interviewees can be

assimilated to elements of *operational efficiency* discussed in the above-mentioned section. As presented in the theoretical framework, “power” implies the domination of one party over the other. Thus, the following section focuses on the causes for imbalances that could prejudice the effectiveness of PPPs, hence prejudice the success of partnership projects.

5.2.2.2. *Imbalances: conflicts of interests*

Some participants provide their perception of the public and private sectors, which can be used to analyze the power dynamics from a practical perspective and thus allows for the identification of potential imbalances within the partnership. Interviewee #8 states that “the private sector aims at not having a deficit” while “the public sector provides the built infrastructure to sport users” or citizens. Similarly, Interviewee #2 argues that “private partners’ objective is money”. Interviewee #5 describes banks as “major partners on sport infrastructure projects” who “have all the power” and who grant necessary funds to private construction companies. On the other hand, Interviewee #8 inserts that the French Federation of Ice Hockey (FFHG) is funded in large part by the “state” and that “revenues from clubs memberships and private sponsors are least”.

Accordingly, most participants argue that the relationship between partners on specific projects is “imbalanced” as noticed by answers to the questions “what stage of the project requires the most negotiation?” and “how balanced is the relationship?”. One of the main reasons for imbalanced relationships is the failure to find a common ground from early stages that prevents partners from defining the common objectives and roadmap for the project (Interviewees #2 and #6). This is explained by a conflict of interests between different partners: regional and local authorities, organizational committees, energy companies, sports federations, public universities, international organizations and non-profit organizations. Interests that provoke conflict between partners can be divided into three areas: financial, public and sports values.

Financial interest

The financial interest can be identified as the area that provokes the most tensions between partners. Without taking into account their answer regarding the role of the EU, only three (Interviewees #1, #3 and #12) out of the fourteen participants omitted the mention of funding,

which depicts the strong concern about financial resources. The common goal for partners regarding funding is not to eventually “end up making a loss” (Interviewees #4, #5, #7, #9, #13) and to rather “achieve profitability” (Interviewee #8). The source of funding represents a crucial concern from the earlier stages of the project as potential “partners must follow the terms of references which is costly” (Interviewee #9).

Yet, despite the evident conflict of interest, funding also happens to be relatively balanced between partners. Interviewee #4 mentions that for the Pierre Mauroy Lille Metropolis stadium, “56% is funded by the selected construction company and the resident football club, while 44% is financed by the regional authorities”. Nonetheless, regarding the “exploitation” of the infrastructure, the PPP is “unbalanced since the resident football club has primacy over other partners”. Similarly, Interviewee #13 states that the construction of infrastructure in the context of the 2024 Paris Olympics is “equally financed by the public (50%) and private (50%) partners”, while regarding the organization of the project, “3% is financed by the state and 97% is financed by the private domestic partners, the CIO and users via the sale of tickets”. Therefore, as Interviewee #5 stresses, a “balanced relationship does not solely depends on the financial aspect enabling the construction of the infrastructure but also on its governance”, that is its exploitation on the long-term.

Public interest

The public interest of partners is connected to the funding interest, however for different purposes: funds are used to address citizens’ need. Interviewee #11 raises awareness about the importance of “managing public money” and to “deliver adequate services to local citizens”. Interviewees #7 and #13 allege that state’s shares in sport infrastructure projects are granted with the perspective of “improving urban planning” from which citizens will benefit in the long-term. Nevertheless, when confronting respective objectives of the private and public sector, Interviewee #2 states that public partners, though at the service of the public, aim for “solutions that are aligned to policies” as they seek reelection of the public. This is a credible point as it comes from a public servant perspective.

Sports interest

Another element shaping partners' interest is the delivery of services for sports users. Interviewee #10 identifies the European Hockey Federation (EHF) as “a big club representing hockey players in Europe”. Interviewee #8 also identifies the FFHG as “a big club” which must represent the “sports movement” and “address sports users' needs”. The latter states that the main “funders of sport infrastructure projects tend to forget the main purpose of partnerships [that is sports practice] at the expense of sports users”. Along similar lines, Interviewee #10 states that the EHF's decision-making is constrained by public financing as “the federation must align to imposed guidelines in order to benefit from public funds”. Interviewee #3 ensures that “Erasmus+ projects contribute to the consolidation and dissemination of sports values that are common to Member States”, hence reinforcing connections between EU citizens who are sports users. Therefore, the EU, as an outsider party to PPPs, might appease conflicts of interests between partners.

5.3. The contribution and role of the EU in projects

This section is particularly relevant to address the research question as participants' opinion on the role of the EU on the effectiveness of PPPs is discussed. Results from interviewees are divided into three subsections: EU added values to PPP projects, difficulties posed by EU's contribution to PPP projects, and solutions to encountered difficulties.

5.3.1. EU added values

5.3.1.1. Before and during the project: the EU as a financier, platform, and safeguard

Results show that the contribution of the EU to PPP projects brings several advantages to the effectiveness of partnerships, throughout the entire period and at different stages of a specific project. The three under-mentioned functions can be categorized as useful, mainly prior to the start of the project, but also during the project. Firstly, participants who referred to projects funded by the EU during interviews identify the EU as a “financier”. Interviewee #7 stated that the energy company “benefits from Brussels' funds” while Interviewees #10 and #12 focused on the necessity of the EU's support to launch employability projects through sports

practice or sports events like the European Hockey Championships. Other participants qualified the EU as “a supplement to private banks” (Interviewee #1) and put emphasis on the “extra funding” that the EU could provide to PPP projects (Interviewees #2 and #11) as the “EU’s contribution could lighten the bill for all partners” (Interviewee #7).

Secondly, participants working for the EU Commission or discussing Erasmus+ projects identify the EU as a “platform” that either enables interactions and “community-building between different stakeholders” (Interviewee #6) or that intuitively certifies stakeholders’ status, which enables mutual trust and encourages the building of partnerships (Interviewee #12). Interviewee #3 states that sport values, disseminated via Erasmus+ projects, “unite citizens from different members states”, hence favoring partnership building.

Thirdly, participants perceive the EU as a “safeguard” thanks to its “reliability in the long-term” (Interviewees #2 and #14) and “accountability” (Interviewee #6). Interviewee #5 believes that the implementation of EU regulations would enable “an accurate pre-evaluation of the project which will help prevent financial illusion and loss-making” (Interviewee #5). Additionally, Interviewee #1 identifies the EU as a “monitor”, not only regarding funding procedures but also regarding “human rights & competition regulations” that ensure standardization in all member states. Similarly, Interviewee #8 believes that the EU would play the role of a “guardian of norms and standards”, especially regarding the standardization of territorial policies regarding sports infrastructure. Lastly, the “financial security that the EU grants to its partners allows the freedom to experiment new projects without the fear of partners making a loss” (Interviewee #12). This aspect encourages innovation and adds up to Interviewee #6’s statement that the EU contributes to various research and innovation projects.

5.3.1.2. After the project: the EU as a role model and innovator

Regarding the added values for the legacy of a project, participants attributed other main functions to the EU. The EU is perceived as a “role model” by Interviewee #3 and #10 which constitutes an advantage for the dissemination of values like sport, which gather stakeholders from different backgrounds around similar interests hence encouraging collaboration. Interviewee #1 states that “the EU is necessary for a project’s sustainability” as it encourages member states to work collectively on projects that they could not implement otherwise. More importantly, Interviewee #12 states that “outcomes of Erasmus+ projects can be transformed

into new EU policies” which makes a positive impact on both member states’ social development and on the EU as “taking into account each country’s needs makes the EU more aware”.

Similarly, the EU can generate green energy policies by “facilitating the mediation between member states” for the production of gas and nuclear energy (Interviewee #7). Additionally, the EU plays a role of “innovator” as it “encourages financial investments of private industries” which contributes to fostering technological development in member states (Interviewee #6). Interviewee #2 states that “the EU creates a playing field between stakeholders that encourages competition” and that hence boosts innovation.

Lastly, the EU’s contribution to PPPs in sport infrastructure projects might be beneficial and profitable for the EU itself. Interviewee #9 affirms that if the EU would happen to fund the local projects, the entity would be “more visible to local voters, which would enhance EU’s credibility at local levels”, especially valuable for the European elections which ended with an abstention rate of 49,88% in 2019. This reversed perspective placing the EU in the beneficiary position rather than in the supporter position makes it interesting for the internal validity of the research as it offers a different point of view on the position of the EU in PPPs.

5.3.2. Difficulties of EU’s contribution to PPP projects

5.3.2.1. Lack of awareness and complexity of EU-funded programs

Several participants noted the general lack of information and awareness regarding the existence and accessibility of EU funds. Interviewee #4, who was in charge of the undertaking of several sports infrastructures on behalf of the Lille regional authorities (MEL), inserts that “EU funds have, to my knowledge, never been considered regarding the construction of regional stadiums, swimming pools or ice rinks”. Interviewee #9 states that “EU financial sources are not visible enough”, which makes it difficult for local and regional authorities to even consider EU-funded partnerships through funding programs like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Some participants explain that the evidently observed lack of information regarding EU funds is partly due to “miscommunication between sports federations (national and European)

and the EU and national governments” (Interviewee #8) or “between the EU and local elected officials” as they represent local citizens’ interests (Interviewee #11). Similarly, Interviewees #2 and #4 state that “the number of partners involved in the partnership might compromise PPP effectiveness”, especially regarding coordination. Interviewee #4 asserts that the incorporation of the EU in partnerships between local and regional stakeholders might “exacerbate existing tensions caused by the miscoordination between a multiplicity of territorial layers in France”. Furthermore, Interviewee #14 claims that the grant of EU funds for projects outside of the EU like the *Warwick Triangle Viaduct: Outbound* project, conceived for the municipality of Durban in South Africa, might elicit “misunderstanding between the EU and South African citizens” and that, therefore, “private and local partners might be more adequate than the EU” for certain projects.

Lastly, even when participants are aware of the potential contribution of the EU to sports infrastructure projects’ funding, they argue that procedures to obtain EU subventions are complex. Interviewees #7, #8 and #14 state that “grant application is time consuming and expensive” as the “density of its volume force applicants to hire experts” in order to compose the application. Moreover, Interviewee #9 argues that the “follow-up of projects is complex” and that “local authorities are even less equipped than national governments to obtain EU subventions”, which undermines the legitimacy of the EU at local levels.

5.3.2.2. *Difficulty to align with EU requirements*

Some participants noted that there is a misalignment between the role of the EU in theory versus in practice. While Interviewee #3 emphasizes the Erasmus+ program in highlighting sport as a tool of collaboration between actors and EU citizens, Interviewee #10 states that “in practice the EU served as a role model during the European Championships but did not necessarily contributed to the success of the event”. The EU is “bureaucratic” and “tend to give greater attention to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or to National Olympic Committees (NOCs) than to European and National Federations” which prejudice its contribution in rendering projects successful. Thus, from a sport federation’s perspective, there is a gap between sport ideologies and values and actual actions to make an event like the European Hockey Championships successful. Moreover, Interviewee #11 asserts that, if “the EU helps structures to develop, EU funds are rather structural [or directed at investment] than

functional”, which increases the distance between the EU and regional beneficiaries, hence confirming the mismatch between the EU’s intended statements and actual actions.

Furthermore, the granting procedure of EU funds requires partners to respect certain conditions imposed by EU laws and policies. Interviewees #1 and #7 notice the necessity for applicants to “align to EU conditions and standards when benefiting from EU funds”. Interviewee #1 claims that “member states’ influence is weaker” than the EU’s because “the EU disposes of larger resources”. Interviewee #7 states that “the EU is not always a facilitator” on certain energy projects as “the EU dismisses the idea of the monopoly scheme on which energy supply is based in France” and this might therefore compromise the emergence of partnerships between the EU and domestic stakeholders. Similarly, Interviewee #10 states the importance of the European Hockey Federation (EHF) to “do exactly what the EU asks otherwise the funding is cut”, which might result in a hostile relationship between the EU and the EHF.

Lastly, “rights associated to partnerships are defined within the national legislation framework and not within the framework of EU law”, which poses a challenge to the alignment of partners with EU conditions and impeaches the grant of EU funds for certain projects such as the Olympic Games (Interviewee #13). Interviewee #13 states that “the Organization Committee (COJO) for the Paris Olympics represents the French National Olympic Committee [which is under the command of the CIO] and as the CIO system is highly territorialized, partnerships are limited to domestic stakeholders”, hence excluding the EU’s contribution.

5.3.3. Solutions to difficulties

Despite various participants’ critical view on the contribution of the EU to PPP projects, some interviewees still discuss potential solutions to encountered difficulties. Firstly, communication between partners should be improved and enhanced, beyond existing hierarchy. Interviewee #11 states that “the EU should rely on local elected officials as they represent local citizens”. Similarly, Interviewee #10 suggests that if the EU is limited in terms of infrastructure building for sports practice, “European or international sports federations should be consulted upstream of the project”. Interviewee #10 argues that “hierarchy within the EU should be put aside for the benefit of partnerships’ effectiveness and of projects’ success” like in the context of the European Championships where there is a lack of communication between the IOC,

NOCs and national sports federations. On a more practical level, Interviewees #3 and #12 advocate for an EU platform dedicated to information access about the location and purpose of potential partners available to collaborate on PPP projects.

Secondly, the objective of sports infrastructure projects should be re-centered on sports practice and on individuals who make direct use of built infrastructures. While Interviewee #3 argues that “the EU should be focused on sports values support rather than on the material [or financial support]”, Interviewee #8 opposes this argument by recommending that the EU be “more financially involved in sports equipment projects in order for sports users’ interests to be represented”. Additionally, Interviewee #8 states that “sports users’ interests can be represented through the consultation of national sports federations as those represent local sports club and regional leagues”. Nonetheless, Interviewee #10 stresses that “the EU Commission is very political” and favors hierarchy for sports policy-making, hence placing the IOC and NOCs over national sports federations. This produces negative consequences on partner relationships and hence comprises projects’ success.

Thirdly, if the EU were to contribute to PPP projects, the entity should support partners in the long-term. Interviewee #11 suggests that “long-term support would help partners to progress on the project”. Interviewee #14 states that “the EU should focus on the maintenance and legacy of projects by providing commitment” in addition to financial support in order to “create lasting skills” for the longer term to the benefit of the local territory.

6. Discussion of findings

This section aims to answer the research question by offering an interpretation of results. To confirm whether the chosen theory applies to results, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) drawn by Yuan et al. (2009) are compared to interviewees' statements that were displayed in the results. Each of KPIs' five categories are placed in the matching themes for the interpretation of results. Additionally, main theories that were introduced in the theoretical framework are used to summarize and discuss results.

6.1. Addressing theme 1 – Physical characteristics of the project

6.1.1. Partnership type and involved partners

Regarding the project's physical characteristics, PPPs effectiveness was identified by assessing the type of agreement chosen for the project, which also defines the partnership type and sets the project's objectives. Despite the diversity of partnership types that were discussed during interviews, the DFBOM or "global contract" type has been identified by interviewees as the most adequate PPP type for sports infrastructure projects, which confirms Van den Hurk and Verhoest's (2015) and Wereda's (2012) use of a bundling approach for measuring PPPs effectiveness. This type of partnership is beneficial before and during the project as it enhances coordination between stakeholders and overcomes tensions caused by the lack of information sharing.

Moreover, global contracts are beneficial for the legacy of the project as their long-term nature forces involved stakeholders to ensure the maintenance of sports infrastructures. Yet, the PPP type cannot be limited to its type of contract and should also be defined by the nature of the stakeholders that it congregates. Results show that Erasmus+ funded sports projects involve stakeholders whom are explicitly described as neither belonging to the private nor to the public sector, contrastingly to construction projects. This can be explained by the recent allowance of private businesses into the participation of Erasmus+ funded projects, which also highlights that EU policies on partnerships for sports infrastructure projects are limited.

6.1.2. Partnership objectives

The affiliation of involved partners to the public or private side through their company or organization does not necessarily influence the objectives of a PPP project. As displayed by results, different participants might discussed partnerships that share similarities in their Design, Funding, Building, Operation and Maintenance stages. Rather, it is the perspective of involved partners that shapes the objectives and goals of the discussed project. This corresponds to Fang et al.'s (2020) argument that stakeholders' power is determined by their respective objectives. Furthermore, results show that the type of chosen partnership has a larger influence on the project's objective than on the position of their working entity on the public-private spectrum as, when locating their working entity, interviewees simultaneously referred to the type of partnership they will discuss during the interview. This is mainly caused by the multiplicity of involved stakeholders which goes beyond the binary denomination of PPPs and encompasses all types of stakeholders in "corporate partnerships".

Lastly, the division of responsibilities, similarly to partnership objectives, is defined by the partnership type rather than by the affiliation of involved partners to the public or private sector through their company or organization. An interesting contrast can be established between "DFBOM partnerships" and "corporate partnerships" regarding the definition of role and responsibilities of each partner. While under DFBOM partnerships tasks are divided by periods accordingly to stages of project, corporate partnerships encourage partners to simultaneously execute tasks of coordination, research, development or dissemination for the whole project's duration. Yet, for both partnership types, results show that the expertise and added value of each partner constitutes the main criteria to define tasks for a given project, and that affiliation to the public or private sector that the partner might have had in past projects is of no significance. This triggers an important aspect regarding the role of financier for a given project: when financial support is needed, partners are more likely to be open-minded about the funding source. Consequently, even when there is a lack of awareness regarding a potential partner like the EU, partners might be inclined to initiate a partnership as it disposes of a large amount of resources.

Overall, regarding the physical characteristics of PPPs, the partnership type over partners' position on the public-private spectrum allows the elaboration of a fixed agreement or contract between partners, which is crucial in shaping involved partners' perspectives on the

partnership and in defining their role and responsibilities. This corresponds to the Yuan et al. (2009) first category indicators, particularly to KPI₁₋₁ “type of construction” and KPI₁₋₁₄ “project technical feasibility, constructability, and maintainability”.

6.2. Addressing theme 2 – Process of projects: stakeholders relations and partnership effectiveness

Partnerships’ effectiveness for sport infrastructure projects was assessed in two parts: one encompasses technical elements, which constitutes the operational efficiency, and the other encompasses relationship elements, which depicts power dynamics between involved stakeholders. Even though discussed separately from each other, results highlight the linkage between operational efficiency and power dynamics as both elements allow the analysis of stakeholders’ relationships. The quality of relationships corroborates with Van den Hurk and Verhoest’s (2015) argument stating that understanding processes of projects through an appreciation of involved stakeholders’ relationships is crucial in assessing PPPs effectiveness.

6.2.1. Operational efficiency

6.2.1.1. *The quality of communication*

Regarding operational efficiency, most participants indicated communication between partners as a key element for the PPP project to be successful. Even though it is first mentioned when explaining the process during the project, communication is also important prior to the project and after the project to ensure its legacy by maintaining the built infrastructure or by ensuring the dissemination of sports values. Surprisingly, results show that participants make a distinction between “communication”, and “mutuality” when assessing the effectiveness of partnership projects. However, common understanding facilitates communication processes, especially in early stages of the project when elaborating the written contract framing the agreement. Partners should find common ground before taking action and favor consensus prior to the project in order to minimize the sources of conflict once the project is ongoing. Therefore, mutuality can be seen as the golden rule that precedes and enables communication between stakeholders. This confirms one of the research’s predictions that “*consensus on policies between stakeholders is required for a successful PPP*”.

Then, tools facilitating communication were identified and these correspond to Yuan et al.'s (2009) KPI₅ "process indicators". First, a written contract enabling the definition of clear guidelines for the project in terms of objectives and partners' responsibilities. Second, the sharing of information, via digital tools or frequent meetings. Third, accountability that is ensured by trust or in some case by third parties such as reconciliation committees and mechanisms. The collection of such indicators for the partnership's effectiveness confirm one of the research's predictions that "*contracts as well as trust relationships create an effective exchange between public and private partners*". However, another research's prediction stating that "*competition and transaction costs constitute preconditions for sports infrastructure projects to be successfully implemented*" cannot be verified as participants omitted the mention of such indicators when discussing partnership effectiveness.

6.2.1.2. *Trust relationships*

Regarding trust, results highlight the role of individuals in improving communication between partners as more important than the nature of their working entity itself. Even though this statement might go without saying, it is important to note that the selected method of interviews enables the depiction of the "human" aspect of the partnership, which strengthens the internal validity of the research. On the other hand, results show that trust can also be ensured by institutions which either have a purpose of networking or of monitoring. The former especially relates to the EU as a platform to ensure mutual trust when actors seek potential partners for a specific project and to enable community building. The latter was mentioned as part of the "natural" procedure for partnership projects by a number of participants, which shows that monitoring should always be complementary to "informal trust" in order to enhance communication between partners. Lastly, results show that communication processes should also apply to citizens and users of built infrastructures, which shows that the nature of PPPs tend to exclude actors who are not private companies or public entities from the development of a given project.

6.2.1.3. *Respecting time constraints*

Another indicator for the effectiveness of partnership projects that emerged from results is for the project to meet fixed deadlines. It was expected that results would show that time would be perceived as a determinant of the type of partnership for the project. For instance, the

choice of a PPP as a partnership type is adequate to conduct a long-term project. However, results rather show that the time concern reveals elements of power dynamics between partners. Indeed, time has been stressed as precious by several participants and might elicit tensions between partners if no hierarchy is established. Furthermore, several participants agreed upon the rapidity of private partners in executing certain processes as opposed to public entities whose system are less flexible and more sensitive to negative impacts caused by political changes. Therefore, governmental entities might be less reliable partners than private businesses, but the EU might influence the balance of such relationships.

6.2.1.4. Impacts on territory and innovation

The last element of operational effectiveness was assessed by investigating the project's legacy. This factor was initially expected to occur during the project rather than after its ending. However, the success of the project does not solely depends on the project's development since participants noticed that a project could constitute two main impacts: its area of implementation and its innovation. Territorial impact mainly relates to the economic, social and cultural development and improvement of the area where the material change was caused, which implies a direct impact on local citizens. This confirms the Geffroy et al.'s (2021) statement that sports infrastructure projects, notably in the context of the Olympic Games, encourage social and economic development of the selected area. Environmental protection was also mentioned by participants when building new infrastructure. However the emphasis was rather put on citizens and users, which opposes the idea that PPPs focus on public or private stakeholders only. Moreover, the maintenance of built infrastructures contributes to enhancing the area's influence, which is an element that might interest regional authorities to a greater extent than private companies whom are also involved in national or global projects and hence do not prioritize an area's benefit but rather their own gain.

Regarding the impact on innovation, participants discussed the innovative side of the "show" that newly built sports infrastructures offered to users rather than the research & development or technological advances as suggested by Yuan et al.'s (2009) KPIs. Just like the concern of time, the impact on innovation reveals an aspect of power dynamics between involved stakeholders since participants described the private sector as leading innovation over public partners. This confirms Koppenjan and Enserink's (2009) theory that PPPs are catalysts for private partners' participation in partnership projects, which fosters international and

domestic collaboration. Additionally, innovation was depicted as a potential harm to sports values as the objective of delivering a “show” outweighed the objectives related to sports, in the context of sports infrastructure building. Therefore, the impact provoked by innovation unveils the influence of certain stakeholders over others, which confirms the relevance of using power dynamics to assess the quality of partners’ relationship.

6.2.2. Power dynamics

6.2.2.1. *Power imbalances*

Regarding power dynamics, results show that the more power imbalances in stakeholder relationships, the less effective the PPP and the less successful the sport infrastructure project. Results show that poor communication between stakeholders causes imbalances within the partnership. Most of the KPI₄ “stakeholders indicators” are reflected in the results, which once again verifies the choice of Yuan et al.’s (2009) framework for PPPs projects. In terms of funding, participants’ perceptions of their counterparts show that public and private partners are equally driven by financial interest, which proves that funding is not only an interest for private entities but also represents the main concern for governmental authorities. Nonetheless, even though funding might be perceived as relatively fair among involved partners, results still depict it as the main factor causing conflicts of interest, especially during the elaboration of the written contract and difficulties in establishing common objectives suiting all partners.

6.2.2.2. *Conflicts of interests: financial, public and sports dimensions*

Additionally, divergence in partners’ opinions was noted as creating conflict of public interest and of sports interest. This confirms Demirag et al.’s (2011) theory that PPPs induce a divergence of interests between involved stakeholders, which elicits conflict. Results show that stakeholders who are driven by either public or sports interests are also driven by financial interests, however for distinct reasons. On one hand stakeholders from the government manage the “public money”, hence own a funding power over other involved stakeholders. On the other hand, stakeholders from sports federations are constrained to have a financial interest on some occasions as they benefit from public funds. This substantiates Hodge and Greve’s (2017) argument that stakeholders are driven by self-interest rather than by social benefits, regardless of the position on the public-private spectrum.

Furthermore, if the interconnectedness between financial, public and sports interests confirms Zheng et al.'s (2008) theory that relational governance should be equally considered to financial governance, it also highlights imbalances between involved stakeholders in sport infrastructure projects. More importantly, results show that even when working for the general interest such as the improvement of urban planning in the concerned area, stakeholders from the public sector might be self-interested and might be driven by political power through re-elections. The fact that sports federations are tied to public finance reveals that there is less opportunity for them to slide from sports values and users' representation to self-interests. This suggests that stakeholders who own the funding power for a given project have more influence over beneficiaries, which confirms Fang et al.'s (2020) argument that funders are the most powerful stakeholders in the PPP project. Consequently, if financiers hold most power in PPPs and since the EU disposes of larger resources than individual partners, then the EU might hold the most power over domestic partners in PPP projects.

Nonetheless, the divergence in stakeholders' interests might also be the consequence of having used different scales of analysis for the data collection. Indeed, participants represent companies or organizations at local, regional, national, European and global levels, which might pose a challenge of comparability between entities of the same sector, such as between the national and European sports federations or between the local and regional authorities. Yet, the criteria enabling the assessment of partnership effectiveness remains the same for all involved stakeholders regardless of the level of analysis. Thus, for operational efficiency and power dynamics, a project's success respectively depends on the quality and level of communication between stakeholders and on the balance of power and influence in their relationship.

6.3. Addressing theme 3 – The role of the EU in PPP projects

6.3.1. Added values of the EU in PPP projects

Results show that the EU was identified as adding value to partnerships upstream and during the project's term, hence suggesting the positive impact of the EU on the effectiveness of partnership projects and notably PPPs. The EU's role is stated as "supportive" in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), which implies the use of "soft" sport policy tools such

as “dialogue, cooperation and funding for projects, networks, studies, surveys and events” (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019). Certainly, participants identified the EU as such by asserting the supplementary nature of the granted funds and the financial aspect which remains the added value that has been the most recurrent. The financial aspect is emphasized by the noted reliability of the EU as a partner and the security system it disposes, which ensures accountability and monitoring, hence encouraging mutual trust and preserving common norms and standards between partners who might come from different EU states. This element reinforces the relevance of the research question and directly addresses the research question.

Furthermore, the EU is also perceived as an catalyst for collaboration as its platform allows interactions between actors of different natures and sectors, hence favoring the development of partnership and fostering community building. It is important to stress that the guarantor function of the EU does not imply the harmonization of norms among EU states, which might constitute a challenge to the effectiveness of partnerships as each partners’ interest might lead to conflicting objectives for the elaboration of the written contract.

Additionally, the EU was noted as a crucial stakeholder for the legacy and sustainability of partnership projects. Participants who were involved in Erasmus+ funded projects presented the EU as a role model which has the power to disseminate values via recommendations or good practices identified at the end of projects. Beyond value spreading, participants noted that EU contribution to partnerships enabled the generation of new sport policies which might be beneficial for the development of some EU member states. Such power puts forward the influence of the EU over national stakeholders.

Furthermore, both private and public stakeholders from the infrastructure industry named the EU as enhancing innovation in partnership projects. Yet, results show that, from an internal perspective, the EU prioritizes partnerships with private industries to enhance innovation. This can be justified by the accessibility and reactivity of private businesses by contrast with the public system order, hence implying that private partners might be more adequate than public partners to render a sport infrastructure project successful. Conversely, results show that the EU might benefit itself from being involved in partnership projects as they would expand its visibility and credibility at the local level, hence increasing its awareness amongst EU citizens, particularly in the context of European elections.

6.3.2. Difficulties of EU contribution in PPP projects

Nonetheless, results show that difficulties provoked by the EU contribution to PPP projects might constitute the main source of imbalances between involved stakeholders, which might alter their relationship and hence create negative power dynamics. Involved partners noted three main challenges namely, the awareness of EU funding programs, the complexity of EU funding programs, and the difficulty of alignment with EU standards. Firstly, the lack of awareness regarding EU funds has been proven to be connected with the lack of communication and coordination between the European, national, regional and local levels. As this scheme creates more layers among governmental entities than private businesses which extend projects' delays, private partners might be more adequate for EU-funded projects. This substantiates Van den Hurk and Verhoest's (2015) statement that PPP complexities are caused by the lack of coordination between governments' layers.

Secondly, the complexity of application procedures for EU grants was identified as a major obstacle by partners since it might provoke longer delays and incur higher costs to the initial budget. Thirdly, participants noted the difficulty to align with EU requirements when already involved in a partnership which is caused by the inflexibility of its bureaucratic organization and the absence of case-by-case practice. Even if not perfectly matching, difficulties identified by participants share similarities with Wereda's (2012) obstacles to local EU co-financed PPPs, namely the lack of cooperation across sectors, the lack of qualified personnel, or the involvement in the operations as a sub-contractor rather than as a partner.

Results show that the EU/PPP blending theory mainly discussed by Goldsmith (2008) was not mentioned by any of the participants. This can be justified by the dominance of practical aspects of EU contribution to PPPs over theoretical aspects, provoked by interviewees' personal experiences. Yet, the theoretical discrepancy might also be explained by the fact that the EU does not "merge" into partnerships projects and rather stands as an "outsider" vis-à-vis other involved stakeholders in a project.

Indeed, several participants discussed EU contribution in the field of research and development rather than in the field of sport, which highlights the EU's lack of contribution to sports infrastructure projects. This might be justified by the late recognition of the EU having direct responsibility for sport policy, which allowed the procurement of EU funds for specific

projects. Yet, despite the existence of a budget for sport since the Lisbon Treaty came into effect in 2009, the EU's scope of intervention in sport is limited since its main competence is to "develop and promote the European sport dimension" and excludes any harmonization of law and regulations in EU member states as well as any control over sport's governing structures. Indeed, participants' statements testify to the heterogeneity between EU states regarding their power over sports policies as well as of the autonomy of European sports federations vis-à-vis the EU. Therefore, the role of the EU in sport infrastructure projects is least in comparison to the contribution of national and regional stakeholders, regardless of whether they are governmental authorities or private companies, which suggests the marginalization of the EU vis-à-vis other partners. This might be explained by its "supportive" role only, defined by Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) (Katsarova & Halleux, 2019).

6.3.3. Solutions and recommendations addressed to the EU

The last section of results displays solutions that were identified by participants to address difficulties emerging from EU contribution to PPP projects. Such recommendations constitute policy implications for future partnership projects involving the EU and are discussed in the conclusion section. The main difficulty that has been identified is the distance of the EU vis-à-vis national stakeholders. More precisely, results for operational efficiency demonstrate that a project's success can be hampered by the lack of communication between stakeholders, and the identified solution by interviewees is "interlevel" communication. The latter suggests that involved stakeholders prescind from hierarchical statuses and prejudices that such hierarchical structures elicit. Additionally, results for power dynamics demonstrate that a projects' success can be altered by imbalance in power and influence among partners and the identified solution by interviewees is to provide balance by "re-prioritizing sports values". This entails the consideration of sports values ahead of infrastructure building processes. Recommendations from interviewees shape policy implications for EU contribution to PPP projects and are discussed in the final section (7).

7. Conclusion

7.1. Answering the research question

Overall, the lack of interplay between the EU and national stakeholders hampers the appreciation of power dynamics in partnerships, which thus implies a partial answer to the research question. The research's initial goal to investigate the quality of PPP partners' relationship was reached, however the contribution of the EU in PPPs effectiveness for projects dedicated to sport infrastructure has been difficult to appraise. Indeed, the analysis of PPP projects' physical characteristics, as well as their processes enabled to conclude that the type of PPP chosen for a given project matters on the same level as the quality of communication and the balance in power dynamics between partners do. Nevertheless, complexity of launching a partnership projects between the EU and national stakeholders, such analysis does not encompass EU involvement into PPPs, which prevents from determining whether the EU contribution to PPP projects increases PPPs effectiveness. This justifies the absence of EU policies on sport infrastructure projects specifically. Therefore, the tested hypothesis that *“Positive power dynamics in the relationship between the EU and involved stakeholders increase PPPs effectiveness and hence increase the chances of sports infrastructure project to be successful”* can neither be verified nor falsified.

7.2. Policy implications

7.2.1. Power dynamics: winners, losers and the influence of financiers

Assessing power dynamics in stakeholders' relationships enables a judgement of the success of PPP projects. Results show that on one hand, actors who hold the least power or have the least influence in PPP projects are those who stressed imposition and domination, those who adapt and finally, those who provoke loss-making. On the other hand, stakeholders who have the most power or have the most influence are ones who are defined as autonomous or beneficiary. Participants from regional authorities, organizational committee for mega sport events (MSEs) and sport federations – European as well as national – stressed their submission to other actors involved in the discussed partnership. The latter two emphasized their deference to the public sector, which reveals a certain pressure from the state regarding other involved stakeholders within a partnership project. Moreover, the majority of participants agreed that

private entities were more reactive and flexible than the public order system, which highlights that the choice of private partners over public ones might be more beneficial for the PPP project.

Furthermore, results show that funding is a concern that has been expressed by all types of partners, regardless of the position of their companies or organization on the public-private spectrum. Participants who discussed the construction of sport infrastructures at the regional level argued that stakeholders using the built infrastructures were loss-makers at the benefit of funding actors who are perceived as the owners. Moreover, financial interests that can provoke conflict and lead to imbalances in partnerships is connected to public and sports interest. Therefore, financiers are the most powerful partners in partnership projects, which confirms previous theories and hypotheses of the research and suggests that the EU might even be the most powerful partner when collaborating since it is recognized as having larger available resources than certain national public or private entities.

Surprisingly, results depict sports federations as rather excluded from concessionaires (private partners) and contractors (public partners), even though their relatively little financial support compared to other PPP partners might have anticipated such a finding. The focus on either public or private entities has been criticized by sports federations and results show that sports infrastructure projects' objectives should go beyond stakeholders' financial and innovation interests: sports-oriented objectives benefitting sports users and citizens should be reached prior to objectives benefiting involved partners. Therefore, domestic public authorities should consult sport federations upstream of a given project since the latter represent sports users through their delegations: regional leagues and local clubs.

Lastly, results proved that power levels of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) amount to those of the EU as participants affirmed that the IOC was the highest entity on the sport's governing bodies' spectrum, above National Olympic Committees (NOCs), sports federations at the international, European, national levels, and regional leagues and clubs. However, unlike the IOC, the EU's scope of action is limited concerning sports and is oriented toward social values rather than material values, which suggests that the IOC's contribution to sports infrastructure projects might be more adequate than the EU's.

7.2.2. The marginalization of the EU

The multiplicity of identified positive values brought by the EU for PPP projects shows that the EU constitutes a real potential in enhancing the effectiveness of PPP projects. This finding increases the credibility and academic relevance of the research as it adds a new dimension to Yuan et al.'s (2009) framework of KPIs by incorporating the EU into the model of measurement for PPPs performance. Besides the EU's system for accountability and monitoring that makes it a reliable partner, the EU enables value dissemination through its multiple platforms and favors the generation of development policies that might be beneficial to improve domestic areas at the social and economic levels. More importantly, the EU could contribute to bringing back sport-oriented objectives at the center of sports infrastructure projects by representing the interests of European and national federations with national governments and regional authorities.

Nonetheless, various difficulties were raised by participants regarding EU contribution to partnership projects and the EU was portrayed as marginalized in comparison to other PPP partners. The term "subvention" has been used by most participants when describing the EU's financier role, which suggests that, though the EU financially supports certain projects, the entity stands as an "outsider" vis-à-vis other partners. Additionally, despite various added values to partnership projects, several participants expressed the difficulty in reaching the EU at early stages of the project. Even though national public order systems have been identified as less reactive and flexible than private businesses, the hierarchical and political nature of the EU's order system might even cause a greater harm to the effectiveness of PPP projects, which might encourage private partners to collaborate with domestic authorities rather than with the EU.

Furthermore, the lack of available EU programs and initiatives dedicated to the funding of sports infrastructure projects adds up to the separation between domestic stakeholders and EU. Indeed, national authorities, just like construction companies, might not even consider EU support as an option for a project that will be launched. Results show that, most often, local and regional entities are aware of the existence of EU Funds such as the ERDF, yet no application procedure is initiated from their side since they favor domestic partnerships over the EU's contribution. Therefore, the EU should commit and further engage in local and regional action,

as some participants noted elements that would directly benefit the EU if the entity were to engage in PPPs.

Consequently, the concept of “European municipalities and regions” – that was introduced by the creation of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in 1951 by the European Commission and that is mostly known for its attempt in building a European town twinning network – should be reinforced in order to develop sustainable connections with local stakeholders of member countries. Indeed, one of CEMR’s main goals is to “provide a forum for debate between local and regional governments via their national representative associations”, which precisely addresses the lack of awareness regarding EU action for sport infrastructure projects that was noted by participants. Another recommendation to facilitate interactions between the EU and local authorities is the promotion of networks between the EU and member states from a specific region, such as the European Municipalities Network (MuNet) which unifies various actors from the Mediterranean region: municipalities, EU local authorities and local NGOs. Therefore, if the EU apply such recommendations in practice, its credibility might be strengthened, among EU citizens, among member states and among the international community.

7.3. Limitations & further research

On the substantive level, the research might be distorted by a lack of accuracy regarding terms and meanings that are caused by translation. Half of the interviews were conducted in French and translated to English, which might undermine the internal validity of the research. On the substantial level, I realized throughout the research that a multiplicity of stakeholders were involved in sports infrastructure projects, beyond the public-private scope: authorities at the local, regional or national level, private construction and energy companies, private consultancies, non-profit organizations, European and national sports federations and national organizational committees. Results show that the majority of entities involved in sports infrastructure projects are owned by and interact with both private and public entities, which dispels the binary notion of “Public-Private” partnerships (PPPs). This aspect might constitute the main reason for the incapacity to neither confirm nor to reject the research hypothesis.

The confusion between PPPs and multi-stakeholder partnerships might result from methodological limitations. Indeed, when constituting the research sample, participants from all types of entities were selected, beyond the public-private scope. Selecting governmental (public) authorities and (private) companies only would have led to gathering opinions from public or private fields, which is more relevant in investigating the role of the EU in PPPs as it lifts the bias brought by other types of entities. However, since the research focuses on sport infrastructure projects, I felt the need for participants from sports federations and non-profit organizations to be represented as they still play a key role in the development of sport infrastructure projects. Yet, if including entities beyond the public-private spectrum was inevitable due to the sports nature of studied projects, criteria for participants' selection should have been stricter: every participant, even if not necessarily standing within the public-private spectrum, should have experience with PPPs projects.

Additionally, semi-structured interviewees as the selected data collection results in making research findings less “technical” since participants use practical cases and personal experiences to address questions, while secondary sources like documents are more theoretical. Results might not match the theories initially used to define the terms of the research – or conceptualizations – that were mentioned in the theoretical framework section (3). For instance, results show that none of the theoretical models of EU grants blended to PPPs were mentioned: models are theoretically relevant but they fail to be applied in practice.

Besides methodological limitations, complications brought by the difficulty to distinguish PPPs from multi-stakeholder partnership projects highlights the gap between the sports and infrastructure sectors, which confirms the relevance and interest for the study of sport infrastructure projects. Indeed, projects dedicated to sports infrastructure are deprived from the funding programs that are especially designed for their purpose, while sport and infrastructure projects, when separated from each other, benefit from having their own funding programs designed for their respective purpose.

For further research, I first suggest the consideration of the above-mentioned limitations in order to eliminate certain flaws that may alter the research. Additionally, I suggest a modification of the research question to rather discuss “partnership” effectiveness instead of “PPP” effectiveness in order to assess the contribution of the EU to a project that is respectful of the diversity of partners that sport infrastructure projects involve. The research proves that it

is necessary to take all involved stakeholders' perspectives into account in order to understand their relationship's dynamic and to assess the effectiveness of their collaboration. Therefore, if PPPs exclude some partners, by their private-public nature and the principles they entail, then the contribution of the EU to multi-stakeholder partnership projects might be assessed in a more effective and relevant manner than with its contribution to PPP projects.

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Appendix

| Interviewee reference number | City | Representative | Interviewee role / job position | Technical partner name |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Interviewee 1 | London | Non-profit organization | Project Manager – Sport as a tool for inclusion & employability | ICSS – Save the Dream |
| Interviewee 2 | Rotterdam | Ministry | Senior advisor – Infrastructure projects | Rijkswaterstaat |
| Interviewee 3 | Brussels | Non-profit organization | Chief Operating Officer & Director of Sports Public Policy | ICSS Insight |
| Interviewee 4 | Paris | Limited liability company (Public Service Delegation) | Director of Institutional Relations, Development and Marketing | Equalia |
| Interviewee 5 | Lille Metropolis | Municipality | Director General of services | MEL |
| Interview 6 | Brussels | International Organization | Head of Unit “Industrial transformation” – | European Commission |

| | | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| | | | DG Research & Innovation | |
| Interviewee 7 | Lille Metropolis | Energy company | Director of the regional action | EDF |
| Interviewee 8 | France | Sports federation | Director Committee member, in charge of education, territorial development and citizenship | Fédération Française de Hockey sur Glace (FFHG) |
| Interviewee 9 | Lille Metropolis | Municipality | Vice President of the MEL – Youth and Sport, Major Sport Events | MEL |
| Interviewee 10 | Brussels | Sports federation | President – Member of the High Level Group on gender equality in sport | European Hockey Federation (EHF) – EU Commission |
| Interviewee 11 | Lille Metropolis | Municipality | Deputy mayor in charge of Associations, Participatory Democracy and Intercommunity | Ville de Wasquehal |

| | | | | |
|----------------|--------|--------------------------|---|---|
| Interviewee 12 | Lisbon | Public university | Researcher and coordinator of the project S4MED | Iscte-IUL |
| Interviewee 13 | Paris | Organizational Committee | Director of Commercial Affairs | Organizational Committee of the 2024 Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games |
| Interviewee 14 | Durban | Consultancy firm | Head of project – Warwick Triangle Viaduc: Outbound (FIFA 2010 World Cup) | Royal HaskoningDHV |

Table 1. Participants' details

Masters Thesis:

The role of the EU in the effectiveness of Public Private Partnerships

❖ Background

- What is your current job position?
- What are your main responsibilities ?

❖ Partnership

- Description of current partnership / project
 - From which sectors are the partners involved in the project?
 - What is the role of each partner?
- Public-Private Partnership (PPP) effectiveness
 - In your opinion, what are the keys to the success of a PPP?
 - In your opinion, what works best in a PPP? What could be improved?

❖ Role of the EU in the partnership

- In your opinion, what is the role of the EU in funding sport infrastructure projects?
- In your opinion, what is the added value of the EU for the effectiveness of a PPP?

Table 2. Interview protocol

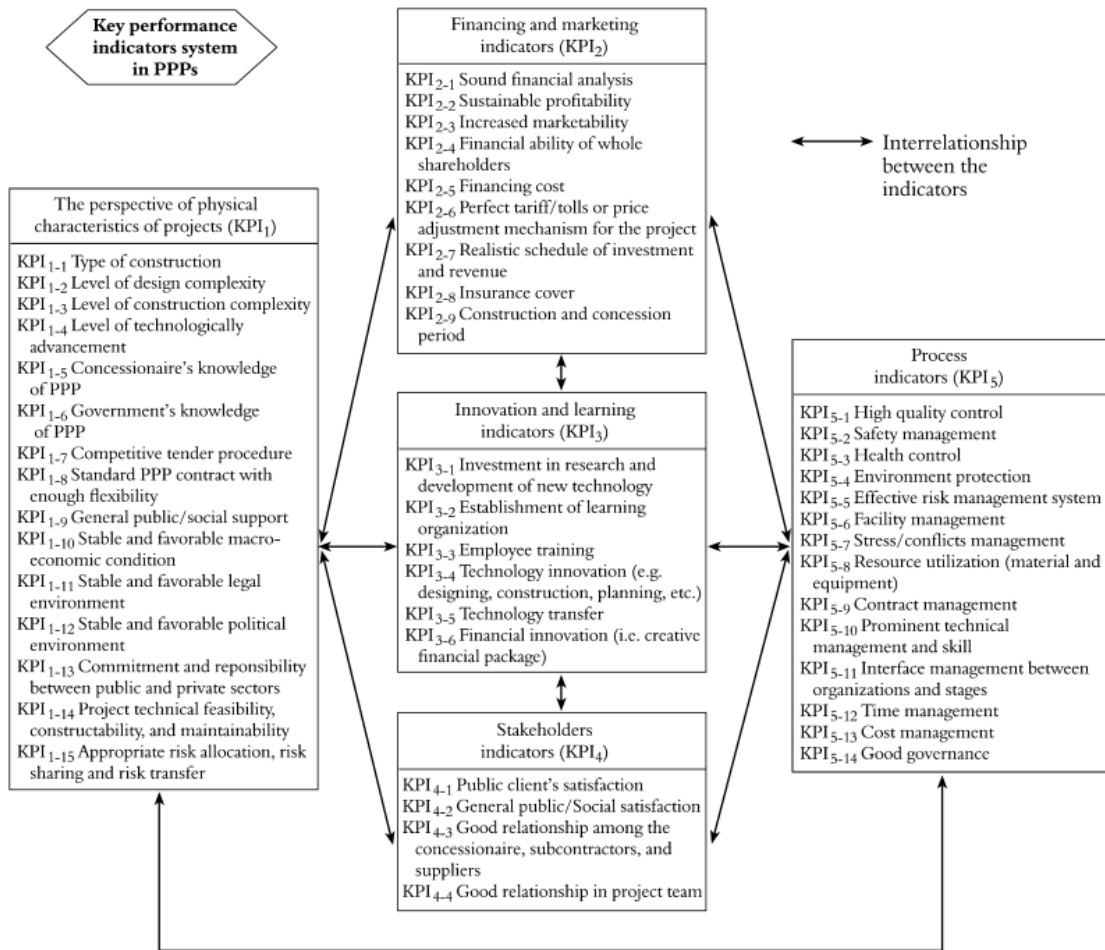


Figure 4. Framework of KPIs for the performance of PPPs projects (Yuan et al., 2009)

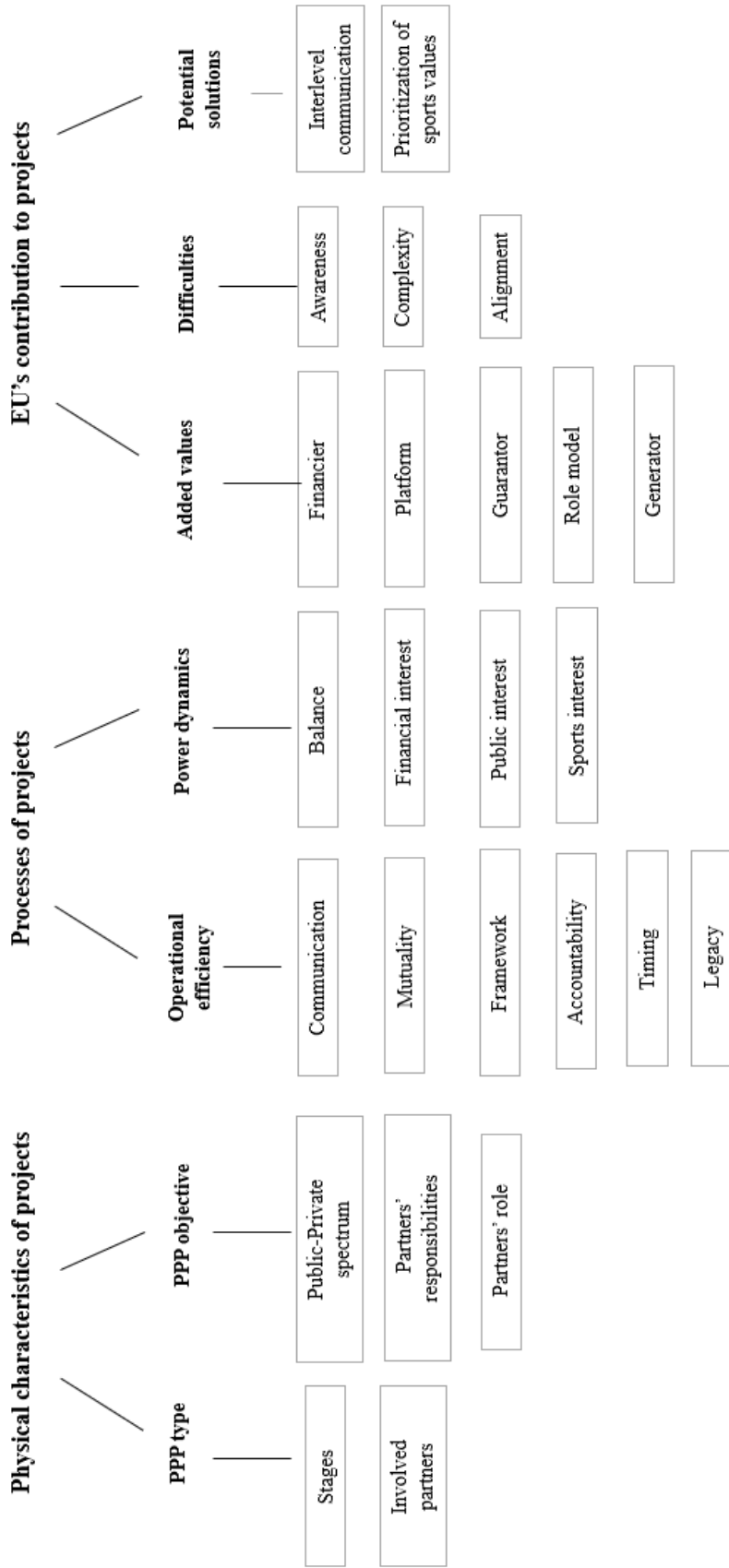


Figure 5. Coding tree