

Sport and ‘multiculturalism’ in the EU: the use of sport for integration/assimilation of ethnic minorities into European hosting societies. Case studies of UK, Germany, France, and Poland

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Introduction

In order that the project of multicultural, multi-racial, plural Europe can move towards realisation there is a need to address certain tensions relating to nationality and citizenship (on the part of government) and of multiculturalism (on the part of government and civil society). The development of a multicultural project requires steering a course between cultural assimilation, the paternalistic notions of a ‘civilising mission’ on the part of the host culture on the one hand, and on the other ‘cultural extremism’ or separatism, the rejection of any bridging of cultures. Achieving a balance between these extremes is, however, not a simple matter.

Therefore, the paper¹¹ focuses on the use of sport for the purposes of fostering multicultural dialogue, with specific reference to different systems of integration of ethnic minorities in the EU, particularly in the UK, Germany, France and Poland. The rationale behind choosing those four case studies is as follows:

1. They provide different interpretation of nation-state, citizenship and nationhood.
2. Offer different positions in the EU, Germany, France and the UK (core states), in comparison to Poland (a newly acceding state).
3. Different histories and processes of immigration.

Principal goals of the study

1. To find out how culturally diverse/or homogeneous the populations in the EU nation-states are in terms of:
 - a) ethnic make up of those born and/or living in the country
 - b) ethnic make up of foreign-born persons
2. To review existing projects and policies that use sport as an instrument for multicultural dialogue between citizens from different cultures.
3. To examine the ways that sport is employed, both as an instrument of non-formal and formal education, in the social integration of immigrant populations into their hosting European societies.

Method

The review of various sporting policies/ programmes that target ethnic minorities in Europe will be based on analysis of data collected from the 25 member states. The research tool employed for obtaining this data is an open-ended questionnaire designed to capture qualitative data on the diverse nature of sporting policies/ services aiming at integration of ethnic minorities. The aim is to explore the different meaning systems of concepts such as integration, social cohesion, and cultural diversity which are (largely implicitly) adopted in these programmes.

¹¹ The paper is a summary of an EU funded research project, supervised by the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy and PMP consultants, and conducted in collaboration with (academic/ administrator) research partners from the 25 EU nation-states.

Discussion

The aim of this paper is to raise the issue of the use of sport for integration/assimilation of ethnic minorities into European 'host societies'. Furthermore, the paper aims to develop a classification of the various approaches adopted by different states relating to integration its minority (religious, ethnic, linguistic) groups.

The first part of the debate concerns the concept of multiculturalism in Europe. It can be argued that the debate on multiculturalism in Europe and in the West in general is faced today with a new challenge, which is to find a mechanism through which to reconcile Western culture and histories of modernity (based on a secular and Judeo-Christian traditions) with non-Western and ethnically more diverse cultures (with dominantly non-secular traditions and belief systems). The idea of multicultural Europe is further challenged by two antagonistic and conflicting definitions of national identity and citizenship; the first based on a demand by some members and groups from immigrants and ethnic minorities for more inclusive and comprehensive conceptions of citizenship, thus more sensitive to their particular circumstances and culture; and the second demanded by some 'nationalist' movements for more exclusionary forms of citizenship.

The other challenge concerns nature of sport itself and whether it is used for the purposes of multiculturalism (experiencing diversity); for the promotion of separatism between (religious, national and ethnic) communities; or as a vehicle for experiencing a sense of togetherness (interculturalism with the goal of promoting shared cultural experiences that privilege neither the host nor the 'minority' population).

It should be noted however that the study which is divided into three stages namely gathering information, findings examples of good practices and in-depth analysis, is still in its first stage. The final report of the study is intended to be produced by the end of August will form the basis for this presentation.

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