Sport Experiences and Social Integration of Women in/from Developing Countries

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Background and Aim

Sport and physical activity (PA) are fundamental aspects of cultures around the world. Participation in sport and PA can enhance physical, emotional and mental well-being as well as promote social relationships, networks, and civic participation (Spaaij 2012, Elling, de Knop & Knoppers 2001). Studies have shown that sport is particularly relevant in binding people to the society, creating sense of belongiong and loyalty (Walseth, 2006). However, women and girls with migrant backgrounds show decreased participation, along with a narrower range of activities in organized sports settings (Walseth, 2006). In the ongoing effort to integrate migrant women to the general society through sport, it is crucial to gain better understanding of the interplay between participation and social integration through their sport experiences. Thus, the aim of the research is, firstly, to explore the role of sport and PA in social integration of Ethiopian women from migrant backgrounds in Switzerland. Secondly, it intends to identify the different types of conditions that promote, as well as hinder, sport and PA participation in this target population.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Spaaij (2012) argues that for migrants, social encounters are more important than the sport activity itself. Sport provides opportunities for social interaction with migrants, from similar backgrounds, different backgrounds, and non-migrants, which in turn increases their social support and sense of belongingness, thus reducing isolation (Walseth 2006; Elling et al., 2001). Contrarily, social encounters in sport environments are not always harmonious. Experiences such as racism, discrimination, conflicts, and bias against migrants in sport grounds hinder social integration. (Elling et al., 2001; Walseth 2006; Spaaij 2012. These studies have also shown that sport environments can further perpetuate existing sense of "otherness" and ethnical divide.

The analysis of social integration is based on *"The indicator of Integration Framework",* developed by Ager and Stranger (2004), used to examine the role of sport as a 'means and maker' of social connection. Using the concept of social capital (Woolclock 1998 & Putnam 2000), it looks at the different forms of social relationships that serve as critical driving forces of integration.

This framework describes how social integration develops in a sporting context in three dimensions. The first dimension, "**s**ocial bonds", points out the social connection/ties between "like persons" who share similar experiences and values through their ethnicity, religion, and/or country of origins. These relationships are established within communities, which in return could create a sense of identity within. The second dimension, "social bridges" indicates to the social connection between groups who come from a different ethnicity, religion, and/or country of origin. It is the relationships between communities that demonstrate social mixing in which one could expand his/her day to day social circle. Finally, "social links" refers to the social ties between people in dissimilar social situations, through shared access to services and resources (Ager and Strang 2004, 18-20). This framework

argues that individuals or groups are socially integrated when they are "connected with member of communities they identify, with member of other communities and with relevant services and function of the state" (Ager and Strang 2004, 5).

Research Design and Data Analysis
A qualitative case study design will be used, incorporating semi-structured interviews and focus groups to accentuate how migrant women in Switzerland experience social integration both in and through sport, focusing informal sport settings. In order to do, participants will be recruited through visits to informal sport settings (i.e. neighborhood sports), community organizations and migrant offices, and the utilization of social media platforms (e.g. facebook, 'whats up', 'Meetup').

Initial results are projected to support the benefit of sport in easing the difficulties (i.e. language, lack of social support, etc.) migrant women experience in integrating into Swiss society. However, it is also possible that their involvement might spark conflict and social isolation as a result of the conflicting socio-cultural differences and discrimination.

Conclusion
The research hopes to challenge the existing homogenization of women in sports sociology research, addressing the lack of sensitivity to the differences in the experiences within the diverse population. Focusing on the voice of the specific target groups allows for a greater and more detailed understanding of current barriers to participation, and also what is needed to further promote social integration of women in sport and society as a whole. Looking through the lens of informal sport and sport settings will complement the existing research on organized sport clubs and programs in the social integration of women with migrant background.

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