

**INTERCULTURAL CITY**  
MAKING THE MOST OF DIVERSITY

# **Intercultural Sport<sup>1</sup>**

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Sport, especially team sports, holds a strong promise for understanding within cultures and across cultures. Yet that promise is not fulfilled. Football, netball, cricket and especially volleyball come to mind. It remains true that sports can reinforce group and sub-group connections and sports volunteering can make the development of pro- social and altruistic orientations easier, but as the 'Sport and ethnic minority communities: aiming at social inclusion' report notes<sup>2</sup>:

*'The core barrier is the experience or fear of racial discrimination. Racial discrimination is not just about physical or verbal abuse, but also includes institutional racism'.....'There are few community-specific barriers..... although cultural and religious beliefs can impact on individual attitudes to sport, there is no evidence that they overtly disallow participation. There are few cases where the needs of ethnic minority groups differ from the majority population. Differences generally relate to the nature of facilities or dress requirements'.*

This means that where a goal is to develop social capital in a minority group, or building links with the local sporting community, the selection of sports in which the minority community has strengths and where local clubs lack members, provides strong opportunities. Also at times competitive sports in which some individuals 'lose' may well prove to be inappropriate. To build confidence within teams, sport forms in which no one group has significant strengths, and activities such as outdoor pursuits where successful completion requires

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<sup>1</sup> The author acknowledges the advice of Ian Henry in compiling this report

<sup>2</sup> *Sportscotland*. Scott Porter Research and Marketing Ltd, Edinburgh:; 2001, Research report no 78

teamwork and mutual reliance, may be more appropriate. Where competitive team sports are employed, mixing teams and using non-invasion games (e.g. volleyball rather than soccer), may reduce the opportunities for inter-group antagonism.

How participation in sport can play a role in social inclusion and bring people together are summarised by Coalter<sup>3</sup> They include: physical fitness and health; mental and psychological well-being; personality development and importantly for our context socio-psychological empathy, tolerance, co-operation and social skills, team work; and sociological factors such as fostering community identity, a feeling of coherence or integration. One major piece of research<sup>4</sup> stresses that participation in sport on its own will not necessarily lead to mutual understanding. It is necessary to consider the broader picture and the various feature of the sport, such as whether it is individually focused, team based, competitive or recreational, as well as the goals and aims of provision such as individual physical and psychological well being, community development or social goals. Only when programmes are connected are possibilities maximized.

'Sport and Multiculturalism' is the most comprehensive research in the role of sport in fostering cultural exchange. In reviewing policies and initiatives in the 25 member states it makes the useful distinction whether the sport initiative is being used for the purposes of multiculturalism (experiencing diversity); for the promotion of separatism between (religious, national and ethnic) communities; as a means of assimilating ethnic groups into the host community and existing national sports cultures, 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). They characterize the British sports policy approach as focusing on the notion of cultural diversity, and cultural heterogeneity of ethnic minorities communities

Another important source is 'The Value of Sport Monitor' produced by Sports England<sup>5</sup> It deals with evidence and reasonably robust empirical material and not the more general academic and theoretical material.

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<sup>3</sup>, Coalter, F (2004) *Sport and Social Inclusion*. Conference presentation in Sport and Multicultural Dialogue Conference, 2004. Paris: INSEP.

<sup>4</sup> *Sport and Multiculturalism* (2004) produced by PMP in partnership with the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy Loughborough University as part of the European Commission's Studies on Education and Sport

<sup>5</sup> [www.sportengland.org/index/get\\_resources/vosm/research\\_categories/social\\_cohesion.htm](http://www.sportengland.org/index/get_resources/vosm/research_categories/social_cohesion.htm)

Its section on sport's contribution to social capital building and social cohesion highlights the methodological difficulties including the meaning of sport for minority ethnic groups with differing attitudes to social and cultural integration. Yet also stresses the need to identify, and be sensitive to, the perceived and real barriers to participation and reaching the potential that sport can provide.

Increased efforts are now being made to clear the ground, essentially racist attitudes in the various sports forms, from which a platform for intercultural sports exchange can be made. Given these problems there has been greater emphasis getting ethnic groups to participate in the first place as distinct from participating across cultures.

It is recognized that the clubs structures of cricket, rugby, football, tennis and golf focus on more middle class groupings to which people from different backgrounds feel excluded. As an instance despite cricket being a key sport for the Asian and Caribbean population in terms of participation, still insufficient members are coming through into county teams or the national team. A new study from the Centre for Sport Development Research at Roehampton Institute<sup>6</sup> has confirmed that cricket in England suffers a major racial divide which threatens the future of the game in this country. The England Cricket Board's 'Hit Racism for Six', campaign initiated in 1995, welcomed the report and the ECB's response to address the issue with urgency. The divide is that there is a mainly African-Caribbean and Asian, urban cricket confined to council-maintained public pitches, which 'largely exists outside the official structures'. The other is white, rural and endowed with well-kept private facilities, and 'exists largely as part of the official structure'.

Activities against racism are perhaps more strongly developed in football than rugby, cricket and the other sports. For instance the European network Football Against Racism in Europe, whose initiative in Austria was FairPlay. Different Colours. One Game and one of whose programmes in Vienna was the intercultural sensitization of referees or the Belgian federation and FIFA project: 'Show Racism the Red Card', (now also in the UK), 'The United Colours of Football' or 'Go for Girls' initiatives. These worked on two themes curtailing racism amongst football fans and discrimination in the clubs. The King Boudewijn Foundation also funded the Coloured Sport Clubs initiative, whereby 24 sports clubs were selected to receive financial support to

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<sup>6</sup> *Anyone for Cricket? Equal opportunities and changing cricket cultures in Essex and East London*

implement a sports and participation policy for foreign youth. Similarly in Britain in 1993 the 'Let's Kick out Racism in Football' initiative was launched and supported by the governing bodies; as well as at the club level projects like the 'Foxes against Racism' founded by Leicester football club or 'Football Unites, Racism Divides' campaign by Sheffield United. In addition stars such as Thierry Henry have highlighted the nature of racism experienced by refugees and asylum seekers.

Few cities have focused on sport and immigrant communities, although some headway has been made in Barcelona and Leicester. One such example is the Ramadan indoor football tournament, organised by the Socio-cultural Association Ibn Batula from the Raval neighbourhood, which has a large immigration population, particularly from North Africa. This competition was organised annually during the period of Ramadan after 8pm. Most of the participants are immigrants or members of ethnic minorities, but the tournament is open to everyone. Another example from province of Barcelona comes from the area of Sant Adrià de Besos, where the Hispano-Pakistani Cultural Association organise cricket courses in collaboration with the town hall. The courses are open to everyone and include a tournament.

Leicester has the 'Racial Equality & Sport Project' whose goals are to promote cultural awareness among providers through 'race equality workshops', to get more BME groups involved in sports and to become more involved in decision-making and provide more job opportunities through sports. The LRE&SP have also been integral in promoting a Racial Equality Standard for Professional Football. This charter, has been signed by all of Leicester's professional clubs – Leicester Tigers Rugby Club, Leicestershire County Cricket Club, Leicester Riders (professional basketball team), Leicester Women's Hockey and Leicester City Football Club.

For LRESP: *'race equality covers all races , not only black race but white race as well... ...we do not necessarily focus on multiculturalism but race equality in terms of sport and physical activity will be the message that we send out to the community , to the governing bodies and organisations...multiculturalism and race equality [are] separate issues....'* They recognize the dilemmas:: *'how can we in this project, support them to be integrated.....when we know that they are going to receive racial discrimination.... ...sometimes we are in awkward position we see the bigger picture we also see the localised picture.....it is kind of difficult ...'* The Leicester Women and Girls Project, a spin-off from the LRESP, provides training or black and ethnic minority women –

including, for example, netball coaching courses for black and ethnic minority women only.

In addition there is the Voluntary Action Leicester: Asylum seekers and Refugee Sports Development Project. The organisation focuses on sport as its primary vehicle for working with refugees and asylum seekers, and uses sport as a means of drawing refugees and asylum seekers into social networks. The group has focused predominantly on football but has also used netball as a vehicle for reaching female refugees. The group has been particularly successful in competitive sport, winning or doing well in a number of local football competitions. It was recognised that if introducing refugees to a local club it was best to identify clubs struggling for players so that new players were seen from the start as a contribution to a solution to a club's problem, rather than being seen as a 'problem' of integration to be dealt with by the club.

Other organizations in the East Midlands include the Algerian Association in Nottingham and the Bosnia Herzegovina Community Association in Derby. Political tensions from the homeland sometimes surfaced on the sports field so that the consequences of exposure to sport were not always positive." *When you play Algerians against Algerian there is always tension ...we bring the anger of the country with us...*". Sport was seen in the BHCA as "a universal language that can break down cultural and linguistic barriers" but it could have some element of separatism if it was not applied in the right environment. The first Bosnian teams that participated in local sporting tournaments experienced a sense of rejection (and even hostility) from other participants from the local community because of their difficulties in communicating in English. However, in contrast to the Algerian Association, intra-group difficulties were not evident in the sports ground, and sport was even seen to aid conflict resolution in ways that would not be possible in the country of origin.

Amongst the conclusions to be drawn from organisations providing sport for refugees and asylum seekers are the following:

- there is a demand from refugees and asylum seekers themselves for access to sporting opportunities though probably not in the early days following arrival where other preoccupations such as health, housing and security dominate
- sporting activity is recognised as able to provide benefits at the individual level of health and psycho-social well-being

- sport can play a role in increasing the levels of interaction between refugees and local host communities, and thus in decreasing tensions and misunderstandings, but there is also room for the increase of tensions unless sporting situations are managed appropriately. Mixing teams so that an 'us and them' mentality does not develop would be an example of situation management to reduce the possibility of tensions arising
- where refugees are introduced into clubs, this is likely to be more successful where such an influx can improve the viability of the club (in terms of numbers) or the success of the club (in terms of available talent)
- team sports provide the greatest potential for increased interaction with host communities
- while funding may be available from various sources the bureaucracy associated with making an application discourages applications from even the more permanent let alone the more transient refugee and asylum seeker groups
- the dominant sporting practices will tend to be associated with male participation predominantly, thus care may be required to ensue gender equity
- sports leadership training can be useful as a source of training volunteers, but also as a means of enhancing other competences (e.g. language and communication skills), improving self esteem and enhancing employability.

An interesting German example of using sport to overcome barriers between cultures is the 'Olympics of understanding: Doing sports together'. 500 participants from Bosnia, China, Germany, Yugoslavia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Ukraine and Uzbekistan spent a week together. Focusing on active sport and peaceful meeting of different cultures the event set an example of how immigrants could be integrated. Contact with 14-20 year old youngsters from Berlin and Brandenburg was made via sport clubs, dormitories and independent organisations. In the course of the four days tournaments in beach-volleyball, streetball, street soccer, beach-handball, table tennis and chess were staged. Other activities, workshops and competitions included human-table-soccer, wall climbing and darts. The goals were to publicly present the initiative "Integration through Sport", to develop mutual understanding between 'natives' and 'immigrants' through sport, to overcome the isolation of asylum seekers through searching them and encouragement to

participate, to introduce immigrant groups to the project and the sport organisations<sup>7</sup>.

Another example in the region is 'Street football for tolerance' in Brandenburg. In the street football events; boys and girls play in mixed teams and come from different backgrounds; wherever it is possible (for example, streets, parking areas, empty halls, under-used meadows). The referee is replaced by an advisor and the rules are to be discussed before every new match. Apart from sport talent social talent is also valued. Interestingly for boys' scores to count girls have to score a goal. Self-responsibility is supported as well as being aware of the other, 'the foreigner' using this opportunity to develop positive attributes such as teamwork and courage.

The overall concern of the examples highlighted in relation sports and social inclusion has been to identify the conditions under which, and the nature of the sports through which, both individual competences, and also social capital in terms of community networks, a sense of local identity, and a sense of solidarity can be produced, thus promoting the kinds of norms of trust, reciprocity and support required to foster a positive cultural climate for ethnic minorities to cross boundaries.

What is evident is that an understanding of the role which sport can play in fostering cross-cultural dialogue is at times inhibited by the background and knowledge of those working in the sports field. They tend to be relatively expert in sports development but do not always have a clear understanding of the various policy positions in relation to cultural difference, by contrast those from fields such as social and community work do not always recognise the potential of sport for achieving different types of goals in the field of multicultural or intercultural policy. Importantly the messages transmitted by organisations such as Show Racism the Red Card are perhaps more effective because they derive from the world of sport rather than from regulatory or governmental bodies.

Finally, perhaps, one should not underestimate the potential for an iconic sporting event or individual to capture the imagination of the public and to create a new common space or understanding. In this respect, the emergence of the young boxer from Bolton Amir Khan has

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<sup>7</sup> .Source: [www.integration-durch-sport.de](http://www.integration-durch-sport.de)

aroused interest, far beyond the world of the ring, in sport as an intercultural bridge:

*He has provided a public space for all those British youth for whom Pakistan is both a foreign country, far removed from their own experience, and a strong emotional presence... And he offers us something no other sporting champion has ever offered: new insight into multiple identities and what it means to be simultaneously British, Muslim and Pakistani.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Three Lives – one identity, by Ziauddin Sardar. The Observer Sport Monthly, February 2006.