



*Beyond Diversity.
A Look at the Social Integration Paths in Sport Practices*

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Beyond Diversity.

A Look at the Social Integration Paths in Sport Practices

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Abstract

The article examines the unifying and identifying role of sport and sheds light on the paths of social integration through sports practice. The goal is to provide useful elements for the reasoning that the social sciences have played on the role of sport as a model of integration for immigrants and ethnic minorities. Reflecting on the issue of immigration necessarily leads to consider not only the numerical dimension of the phenomenon but also the socio-cultural aspects that constitute a resource and a challenge for the host country for the purposes of social integration of immigrants. However, this perspective analyzes whether sports practice can be considered primarily as a strategic resource for integration, socialization, for the consolidation of social bonds, or, on the contrary, if it generates violence and discrimination, or even if it involves experience of the denial of identity. Although the potential of sport as a strategic resource for the social integration of minorities is fully recognized, this article intends to stimulate some observations on the limits of its role and the barriers that hinder the integration of migrants and refugees into sports.

Keywords: Social integration, Sports and exercise, Diversity.

Introduction

When we talk about “integration through sport” (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010), we include sporting practice among the possible paths of social integration of ethnic minorities and migrants in the host society. This recognition, which confirms the attention paid to intercultural dialogue at European level, is a priority of the European political and institutional debate.

What we intend to emphasize is the important role of sport in social cohesion, thanks to its ability to create social bonds (Gasparini, 2008) and to foster moments of encounter-clash between different cultures (Russo, 2019).

Specifically, it intends to bring attention to the educational and socializing role of sport, which makes it an essential tool for the construction of identity and mutual understanding in an increasingly globalized Europe; a role recognized by all members of the Council of Europe (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

This interest in sport at European level was formalized in The White Paper on Sport (2007), which aims to intertwine sport with the integration of immigrant populations and to mobilize member countries to intensify the sports participation of migrant and refugee women. (Ibidem, p. 11). In this perspective, the ever increasing growth of migratory movements, amplified by the globalization process, has become a priority of the Council of Europe since 2008, in relation to the presence of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities.

Thus, the theme of integration, being a complex phenomenon, must be investigated following a multidimensional sociological approach that considers immigrants as new actors in global civil society (Russo, 2016) and examines in depth

the various cultural aspects, hitherto undervalued, social, political and economic (Martelli, 2015).

In addition, it highlights the work that sport must carry out in ensuring the perpetuation of society and guaranteeing the continuous process of social construction and the development of skills and identity.

Lastly, the contribution provides a starting point for reflection on the limitations of the social value of sport as a potential for promoting integration. In this sense, attention was paid to the Spin Women Project in order to identify the existing barriers to the involvement of migrant and refugee women in sports and possible strategies to overcome them (Schwenzer, 2020).

The conclusions will take up general considerations on the social value of sport which, playing a cultural, educational and socializing role for the immigrant community, must be enhanced in order to increase effective social policies for the integration of immigrants.

1. The universal language of sport

Sport understood as a universal language is able to unite men, strengthen and bring people, nations and races closer together, regardless of skin color, personal (disability), social, cultural, ethnic and religious differences; it represents a meeting place and a valid integration tool (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010).

Sport, in comparison to all other social spheres, speaks a universal language understandable to all, creates aggregation between people by placing them in communication, in spite of all national, political and philosophical differences, and against all religious and racial discrimination and sex (Ibidem, p.40).

In fact, sport offers extraordinary opportunities for knowledge, for the encounter between cultures, for the contamination of "socially responsible" sports practices (Russo, 2016). It has no social, cultural or religious borders, practiced by people from different social backgrounds, it has an educational and socializing effect that makes it a strategic tool for intercultural dialogue and social integration (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010).

Analyzing the issues of sport and immigration reflects the multidimensional dimension of sport, because sports practice acts as a place of inclusion or, on the contrary, has a discriminating power (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010) and "ordinary racism" (Russo, 2019).

Sport, by virtue of its role, its principles and its shared and internalized rules, has, in fact, been considered and observed by the social sciences as a model of integration for immigrant peoples and minorities of different ethnicity (Gasparini, 2013).

To this end, the lack of effective migration policies has led to the consideration of alternative models of integration and among the most practicable paths sports activity is a strategic resource for the purposes of socialization and interaction with the host community. (Gasparini, 2018, 2013; Gasparini & Talleu, 2000).

Starting from the principle that socialization is a process through which individuals learn the habits, attitudes and behaviors related to their social role in the environment they are part of, ultimately sport socializes all those who practice it, regardless of their social background. of belonging, according to variable processes. This is why sport is a secondary socialization agent that relates the body, the movements with the rest of the community (Gasparini, 2018).

In this sense, more than other sports, amateur football (Gasparini, 2018), is a social environment in which the symbolic manifestation (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010), is particularly interesting for studying the construction of dialogue and confrontation between foreigners and natives, moves around the socialization processes favored by practice, which usually achieve positive effects (Vinnai, 2003). These positive effects can be seen in the ability to be

Football represents an important vehicle for inclusion, it is an expression of strong feelings of identity belonging and represents a valid solution to defeat stereotypes and redeem oneself in the face of perpetuated discrimination (Gasparini, 2013).

It thus becomes a place of contact and comparison, a “relational space” in which individual choices are made (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010), a place of aspirations, a limit between values and people, peoples and cultures, and capable of reconstructing identities more solid (Siebetcheu, 2015).

According to this perspective, it would be useful to investigate the daily socio-cultural practices of migrants in the host country, paying attention to the social bonds that are created and strengthened in their free time (Martelli, 2015).

Sport is, therefore, an innovative social space (Russo, 2019) useful for observing the moments of encounter between natives and immigrants for its ability to generate social capital, favoring or hindering integration.

The social space of sport sets itself the difficult objective of integration and is constantly looking for an identity process (Zoletto, 2010)

2. Paths of social integration in sporting practices

During the Victorian age, it was believed that sport could mainly teach virtues, such as group loyalty, physical endurance, and self-esteem – these being, at the time, at the heart of Victorian ideology. This ideology exalted “the aspiration to perfection, to success, to universal confrontation”; which were found later, in Pierre De Coubertin (the creator of the modern Olympic Games), the most enthusiastic supporter.

Victorian sport demonstrates how conflict can be disciplined and rationalized through rules that oust violence, define roles, and sanction differences. It is the complete allegory of a restricted democracy, which, however, strives to build a set of norms and principles capable of bloodlessly regulating social conflicts. Sports game becomes an exemplary configuration, through which the reasons for cooperation and those of conflict are recognized, stylized and “miniaturized” in a plastic allegory of social dynamics (Porro, 2001).

If the first wave of sportification can be connected to the progress of Western civilization, and the second can be connected to the dynamics of nationalization and construction of the political rules of parliamentarism, it is between the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that a third wave is generated, mainly associated to the globalization of sport by configuration theorists. The third wave of sportification develops in function of British colonialism, as well as the sportification of continental Europe that precedes the controversial issue of globalization.

Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, the reasons of emotion dominate over those of regulation, in apparent harmony with that postmodern sensitivity that enhances the value of expressiveness, play, and spontaneity.

Sport is often only an instrument in the hands of cultural imperialism, and colonization: in short, a seductive instrument of capitalism for the westernization of the whole world.

Besozzi refers to sport as a context of experience of bonding, help, support, solidarity, and responsibility; he also refers to the experience of the other, comparison, exchange and dialogue (Besozzi, 2005, p.26).

Specifically on cultural diversity as a cause of exclusion and discrimination, Allport argues that sport is fundamental for first contact: “first contact is pleasant, it leads to think together about the result and change attitudes. The principle is clearly illustrated in the multi-ethnic team. Here, a scored goal is important; the composition of the team is irrelevant” (Allport, 1954, p. 254).

Sport can constitute for the subject a fundamental field of experimentation in the socialization process; it promotes a common sense of belonging and participation.

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to bring people together in a way that few other things do. It speaks to young people in a language they understand. Sport can bring hope where once there was only despair”. Siebtcheu himself (2016, p. 9) takes inspiration from this sentence by Nelson Mandela to define sport in its global value as a phenomenon of great importance capable of embracing both the merely competitive and playful dimension as well as the socio-cultural and educational one. In this sense, it manages to promote values such as solidarity, unity, team spirit, tolerance, equality, integration, respect for rules and acceptance of differences. The scholar, regarding the migratory phenomenon, takes up what is expressed in the “White paper on sport” (Commission of the European Communities, 2007: 2), where it is stated that sport is an effective tool to facilitate the integration of immigrants into society through intercultural dialogue and a common sense of belonging and participation. In addition to recognizing the strong contribution that sporting activities offer, it also stipulates that EU member countries develop initiatives with the aim of promoting inclusion through sport. In this sense, it is essential to have spaces for sport and to increase sporting practices (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

Therefore, the long-term objective of the “White Paper on Sport” can be reviewed as the implementation and promotion of some useful practices in order to develop personal and collective identity and, in a broader social dimension, to promote active citizenship (Zoletto, 2010).

It will be fundamental to develop the concept of sports citizenship and, in our opinion, first of all the development of a civic and sports culture capable of building a lifestyle that overcomes all forms of prejudice and discrimination. The episodes of racism in the stadiums testify that sports-based does not only concern the athlete of foreign origin, but also has the obligation to involve families, schools, sports clubs, fans, and politicians as well.

In 2003, the European Commission identified five sport/cultural policy intervention models adopted in favor of ethnic and cultural minorities with different approaches to national identity and citizenship.

The first three orientations, culturalism, market pluralism and fair development opportunities for each ethnic group, reinforce the diversity within the host society, therefore they refer to pluralism and multiculturalism; on the contrary, the last two orientations of sports policy, assimilation and the non-interventionist position, enhance the social cohesion and unity of the national culture of the host country.

1. intercultural: when trying to foster mutual and continuous exchanges between different games and sports and between groups of migrant and indigenous players and sportsmen, valuing diversity as a cultural and political resource;
2. multiculturalist: when there is a tendency to promote development separated from the values of sport practiced by natives and migrants, guaranteeing at least in principle equal opportunities to sports associations of ethnic minorities;
3. market pluralist: when it is, above all, the private sector and the voluntary sector that respond to the various demands for sporting activity and, consequently, it will be the market and not the state that will promote sporting and cultural diversity;
4. assimilationist: when there is a tendency to include individuals and minorities in sporting practice and pre-existing sporting cultures in a local or national context;
5. non-intervention: when the population of the various countries continues to recognize themselves as homogeneous and when, consequently, the presence of a plurality of sports and sports cultures is not perceived.

These models allow us to broadly identify the political implications between sport and multiculturalism of the individual member states of the European Union (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

However, multiculturalism represents the reality of contemporary sport today.

Multiculturalism, however, nowadays represents the reality of contemporary sport as the social sciences have shown a growing interest in analyzing the conceptual relationship between sport and multiculturalism, (of how sporting practices can promote the social integration of ethnic minorities). The terms used to describe the factors that determine cultural heterogeneity (multiculturalism, multicultural, multiethnic and intercultural and their derivatives) differ from each other but refer to the concept of “culture” (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010).

Therefore the term multiculturalism refers to the “culture of difference” and “in many cases it is used to describe a specific social reality, characterized by the presence of different values and rules of reference” (Ibidem, p. 128).

From the five intervention models presented above, however, the intercultural one appears to be the most appropriate to overcome the challenges posed by multiculturalism. The practice of interculturality has always raised a different debate in different countries. For some societies, intercultural means “multicultural”, which provides for the coexistence of different cultures in a single space. For others, “interculturality” is to be understood as a process of cultural interpenetration.

These two definitions of interculturalism refer to two models of integration of individuals in a nation-state: multiculturalism in the first place and, secondly, the “melting pot” and national integration (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

Interculture should be the goal to aim for, through sports education of individuals. In fact, interculturality is often associated with terms that specify it in an educational sense: intercultural competences, intercultural learning, intercultural teaching practice, intercultural dialogue (Ibidem, p.13).

3. Sport’s intercultural approach

In a society that reduces distances and is connected by a communication system formed by a worldwide network, sport, compared to all other social spheres, represents a universal means of expression, it is able to create the conditions in which people coming from different cultures or ethnic groups (intra- or extra-European) unite, coexist or even interpenetrate (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010). It creates, in a profoundly symbolic way, commonalities between men and puts them in communica-

tion, in spite of all national, political and philosophical differences, and against all religious, race and sex discrimination (Ibidem, p.13).

If he remains confined to the dimension of doing only, sport is not automatically an experience of inclusion.

To be such it must be promoted and animated by an intentionality and a cultural vision oriented towards inclusion, instead of including it risks deluding or in the worst cases excluding and marginalizing (Ibidem, p.13; Martelli, 2015).

An inclusion-oriented vision of sport must be based on some cultural and educational choices, which often run counter or in contrast with the dominant cultural paradigms.

“Assimilation, integration, insertion, inclusion” are concepts that characterize an excluded and marginalized population that deviates from the dominant social norm. Indeed, migration policies aim to incorporate, motivate, reintegrate these individuals through formal and non-formal institutions, and sport contributes to this goal.

For this reason, the terms “inclusion” and “integration” unite very different types of “excluded” or “disintegrated” populations for some characteristics that distinguish them such as deviance, stigma and are aimed at categories such as the elderly, disabled, unemployed and immigrants (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

Just think of competitive sport which can also be considered as a form of differentiation because based on physical performance, it not only differentiates women from men but also sportsmen with disabilities from others (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010).

In this case, sport becomes an individual promotion tool, based on physical performance, involving aspects such as rivalry and conflict, to the point of determining forms of effective and symbolic violence (Russo, 2019).

Sport is by its very nature a competitive game, in which you put yourself to the test by competing with yourself and with others. However, it is necessary to teach that competition is not to be understood and lived as an agon, that is, a fight or clash with the opponent aimed at winning over the other. The deep meaning of competition must be recovered from the etymological meaning of the latin expression *cum petere*, which expresses the tension that aims to obtain a result in a shared way with others, in relation with the other and not in overpowering the other. Understood in this way, competition refers to the socializing dimension of sport, to its strength to share goals and results with others, whether they are teammates or opponents. A sporting activity, lived with a healthy competitive spirit and with this sense of competition is an important ally in a project of integration and inclusion (Gasparini & Talleu, 2010). If left to the now common and dominant sense of an activity aimed at obtaining victory, the sport will easily slip into degenerations that will tend to marginalize the less able and less performing athletes.

Among the extraordinary opportunities that the arrival of other people offers to the populations that welcome them, learning to listen to others. And the possibility of crossing life stories, thoughts and emotions, dreams and projects, hopes and disappointments, to compare and mix them with your own. Listening to the other, however, should not be understood as a simple emotional transport aimed to run out with great speed and ease, but must instead be nurtured and built through the confrontation (and also the constructive clash) with epistemologies and thoughts diverging from one's , therefore supported by a meeting of knowledge, multiple and different, through which to bring out the dissonances between the different versions of the world but also the common cognitive tensions and a shared patrimony of ideas. It is a reciprocal movement of encounter through which individuals

carrying different cultures, using the positivity of differences, known and revealed through the use of a gaze not clouded by stereotypes and prejudices, are able to understand themselves and others).

Sport is a project that requires a plurality of ideas and a multiplicity of initiatives capable of soliciting the ability to cooperate, to face conflicts and tensions “together”, to experiment connections and interdependencies, to build links and connections to develop new forms of solidarity and friendship.

The future of a multicultural society cannot depend only on school learning but also on the enhancement of non-formal educational contexts and open-air spaces; and, mainly, from how the school institution and non-formal educational contexts are able to combine to build together this path towards shared values and spaces, non-formal educational moments (Zoletto, 2010).

In fact, it is a question of enhancing the experiences, problems and affiliations that natives and migrants have in common and we must therefore start from all educational contexts to make them situations that favor the interaction between natives and migrants as much as possible (Ibidem, p. 11).

A sociology that starts from sport cannot therefore lead to understanding the values of a single culture today, but must put itself to the test of many values that characterize the so-called “multicultural societies” with which we find ourselves working today.

One of the possibilities, in this sense, consists in keeping Caillois program “tell me what games you play and I'll tell you who you are” and declining it simply in the plural: the characteristics of a multicultural society could be inferred from those of the many games that are played. This is how “the multiculturalism of games” was born. Let's keep the equation: “games = cultures” by Caillois, and with it a whole series of dangerous ambiguities, being careful not to let them lead to new forms of racism.

Today, racism of such an explicit kind has fortunately almost disappeared from our discourses and paths on intercultural. However, it remains creepy in the intercultural approach to games. Although “multiculturalist” racism tends not to make explicit judgments of superiority or inferiority, it still tends to imprison and separate individuals in cultural cages that are often associated with powerful stereotypes.

An example can be the belief, still difficult to eradicate, that some peoples are particularly suited for their physical and mental characteristics to certain types of sport and not others (Zoletto, 2010)

In this sense, an intercultural approach that starts from games teaches that the experience of playing unites all individuals, that all games are similar (so we can discover the other more similar to us than we thought) and that playing together feels more united and separated from other belongings (Ibidem, p. 68)

But, in addition, an intercultural approach that starts from games invites us to another reflection. While a multicultural approach to the

game presupposes that cultures come first and then some games that derive from them, an intercultural approach instead looks at games and playing as a field in which cultures re-take shape starting from who plays and from where, when and why it does (Ibidem).

Thinking of sport as a social opportunity and as a field for experimenting with new rights means assuming a perspective that places [...] the expansion of citizenship first (Porro, 1995, p. 168).

Another important aspect of sport is conflict education, which in an intercultural perspective means teaching how to manage conflicts so that they are not

destructive but constructive for a relationship, well knowing that the existential values of solidarity and democratic coexistence are not given a priori but must be built and defended together day by day. On the other hand, managing conflict does not mean suffering it. The person who yields postpones the conflict, does not resolve it, or transfers it to the weaker (Minerva, 2002, p. 38).

For years, efforts have been made in the various social sectors to tackle these problems through cultural mediation interventions. In the field of intercultural communication, it is necessary first of all, the recognition and an in-depth knowledge of these problems and the possible use of mediation to facilitate communication. Mediation can facilitate the understanding of the language and codes relating to the immigrant's culture of belonging, it can favor integration processes, resolve conflicts through discussion and exchange, and prevent social discomfort.

The need for mediation arises today as a need typical of multicultural societies projected into the intentional construction of intercultural societies. In particular, mediation needs arise when people belonging to different cultures find themselves involved in reciprocal communication activities; this type of relationship takes place in institutional contexts where there is a clear imbalance of power between those who take part in the interactions; relations are established between members of a dominant culture and members of minority cultures towards which the majority develops prejudices and/or stereotypes (Johnson & Nigris, 1996, pp. 373-374).

Knowing in order to communicate and meet another culture means learning to go beyond representations that for defense and fear (if not for the will of exploitation and domination) we make of others, transforming them into stereotypes and prejudices, real barriers cognitive and emotional. The primary objective of intercultural education therefore becomes, as already mentioned, learning to build a concrete perspective of mutual enrichment (intellectual, emotional, relational, ethical, and aesthetic) starting from a knowledge of otherness capable of looking and recognizing the personal and cultural identity of the other, seeking and observing it with the tools of a reason that we have defined as open and problematic, decentralized and plural (Minerva, 2002, pp. 32-33).

In sport, those social actors who, participating in it, implement a process of active participation, "meet" and "clash".

The power of attraction exercised by sport on the individual in search of a collective soul derives from the fact that sport brings together thousands of men across borders, races, classes, ages and allows them to identify themselves in the exercise of an activity without being separated by cultural and linguistic barriers through its codes.

4. Access and participation of migrants in sports

However, the relationship between integration and migration is recent.

Examining this relationship, we first define integration as a process through which an individual integrates into the host community, which does not involve the loss of the original identity but rather a transformation of the same as a result of contact with the community that welcomes him .

Integration can indicate, at the same time, a "regulatory program" and a "social process" (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010; Gasparini, 2013). The integration imposed by the state as a "regulatory program" is the result of a public policy and the host society requires to adapt to it. Integration seen as a "social process" is, on the other hand, an interaction between the migrant community and the host society, between

the “minority” and the “majority”, which produce developments that only empirical research allows us to analyze.

To this end, integration cannot focus only on heteroethnic minorities but requires the active participation of the host society (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010). For both migrant and indigenous communities, the development of specific skills is essential for effective interaction with diversity to materialize.

Since there are semantic nuances that make the concept of integration difficult to define, it is possible to analyze its dimension at a given moment, for example as a practice that generates social bonds and educational effects, and sport, as part of society, it is one of the resources or strategies through which to carry out this dimension (Gasparini, 2012).

Integration through sport entails, simultaneously, the implementation of the dominant sporting rules for immigrants and children of immigrants and the capacity for inclusion of these communities by the sports associations of the host country (Gasparini, 2013).

In fact, according to what is confirmed by sociological surveys, the more a migrant belongs to the disadvantaged social classes, the more marked is the integration deficit, linked to the cultural distance in the area considered (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010; Martelli, 2015). However, educational institutions and associations have always represented integration tools for the children of migrants, and in particular sport in a club context capable of promoting voluntary actions, which encourage daily political participation in local networks (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010, p. 17).

The analysis of European estimates, albeit scarce and contradictory, on the effects of real inclusion through sport reveals a disparity in the way sports and community movements use sporting practices to include migrants and their children in society.

The experience of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom shows the adoption of policies that favor dialogue between migrants and the population in general. In France, on the other hand, lacking such forms of official policies, sports programs appear to be oriented towards the “fight against exclusion” (Ibidem, p. 18).

In Italy, being a country of recent immigration, sport represents an important tool for social redemption. By virtue of the social conditions experienced by their parents, the second generations have growing expectations that make the path of integration less acceptable.

In addition, another very incisive cultural variable that concerns the impact of the religious element on sport should be considered. Just think of the case of Muslim women who are denied the opportunity to practice in freedom and safety. Surely this possibility is denied to Muslim women. The exclusion of girls from the sport practiced is mainly due to customs and traditions concerning their culture (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010; Russo, 2018).

This represents a visible starting point to reflect on because there are still many experiences of exclusion that especially the second generations live.

In Europe, Italy's role is mainly that of a "transit country" for migratory flows, from the nineties onwards (Russo, 2019). The migratory phenomenon, not to be underestimated for its numerical importance and economic aspects, cannot neglect the socio-cultural aspects; it is of fundamental interest for the social integration of immigrants, being a strategic resource and a challenge for the host country (Martelli, 2015).

More precisely, discussing sport and immigration highlights the multidimensional aspect of the phenomenon, its being a “total social fact”, which represents an important (albeit controversial) opportunity for inclusion and, on the contrary, for discrimination and “ordinary racism” (Russo, 2019, 2016).

Yet in the face of the ideology of the universality of sport, which mainly concerns those popular practices and practiced on a voluntary basis, it must be noted that sports cannot always be considered a place free from phenomena of intolerance, discrimination, exclusion (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010, p. 5) and even less represents a factor of heterogeneity and social integration. Often the low participation of migrants is due to the barriers that do not exist for the natives. These include economic ones, obstacles deriving

from bureaucracy and sports legislation and finally socio-cultural barriers.

As already mentioned, the European institutions have paid great attention to the sport phenomenon as an instrument of intercultural dialogue (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010) and social inclusion, enhancing the contribution that sport makes to job creation and economic growth, in particular of disadvantaged areas.

A substantial prerequisite of intercultural dialogue is the sharing of values, the interaction between cultures and the acceptance of diversity (Gasparini & Cometti, 2018) and, in this sense, the European Union has supported initiatives and financed projects aimed at promoting sport for the purpose of social integration.

Among these, the Spin - Sport inclusion network project, co-financed by the Erasmus Plus program, is composed of seven partners, coming from different Member States, who which dealt with the inclusion of newly arrived migrant women, often refugee women and girls representing the category of the most disadvantaged migrants and, very often, they have to face lengthy bureaucratic procedures to obtain a residence permit.

Each country involved in the project created a focus, which saw the participation of various experts in the sector, and the results of these focuses were analyzed and compared by Victoria Schwenzer, researcher of the German Camino Institute, who produced the report “Equal access and participation of migrant women and girls in sports” (Schwenzer, 2020).

From what is reported it emerges that even today, the sports sector is largely modeled and geared towards men, despite the fact that there have been some positive changes in recent decades, so experts still feel some resistance when it comes to accepting the active role of women, not just as athletes and players but also as instructors, coaches or managers in sports organizations, especially in professional sports.

Regarding grassroots sports, sports teams report that decision-making structures are often dominated by male figures and, therefore, unattractive to women or girls. With regard to popular sports, such as football, this trend is even more evident, society perceives football as a typically male activity and neither the sports clubs nor the social environment provide sufficient support and encouragement for women and girls to try to play soccer.

However, although girls' participation in football has increased in recent years, refugee women are still more underrepresented in football clubs than migrant women in general (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

The female body in sport thus becomes a terrain of struggle, contestation and the affirmation of a continuously renegotiated identity, between paths of social inclusion and discrimination (Russo, 2016).

Often, exclusion, social marginalization and discrimination suffered by migrant women and girls hinder their access to sports and in particular to standard activities relating to the organizational sphere of sports.

Associations and teams should take specific measures to ensure a safe and discrimination-free environment. In conclusion, it is possible to state that all women and girls have the right to equal participation in sport, regardless of their origin and that often a series of barriers prevent migrant women and girls from exercising this right.

Conclusion

Analyzing the relationship between sporting practice and the migratory phenomenon means evaluating the relevance and multidimensionality that sport represents for contemporary culture and society.

Sport is an important (albeit controversial) opportunity for the social integration of young immigrants and a good deterrent for civil engagement activities carried out into adulthood.

From another perspective, it was observed how sport can be a strategic tool for intercultural dialogue or, on the contrary, as an opportunity for social dis/integration.

In recent years, the evolution of migratory phenomena, the growing presence of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, has led to reflect on new possibilities for integration policies. Therefore, evaluating the contribution of sports practices can provide innovative tools to the complex phenomenon.

It will be up to the institutions, therefore, to promote a new concept of sport as a useful tool aimed not only towards competition, but also at promoting new forms of openness and reciprocity towards the immigrant.

Given the promises, it is possible to believe that integration represents a challenge for the whole community and that sport and sports practice can act both as intervention practices for specific policies, and as a driving force to contribute to the search for a better distribution of life chances for natives and immigrants.

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Beyond Diversity. A Look at the Social Integration Paths in Sport Practices

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