

Title: Social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities through informal sport settings and sport and cultural festivals in Switzerland and across Europe

Abstract

Global migration (forced and unforced) is one of the world's most complex phenomena as it simultaneously presents significant challenges and opportunities. It has intensified political and public debates regarding the economic, social, cultural, and political involvement of migrants in their host society (e.g. Bijak et al., 2007; Lutz & Belanger, 2017). At the same time, sport has gained a reputation as a medium of social integration. Unfortunately, empirical studies on the social integration of migrants through sports are limited to mainstream sport club settings and are insensitive to the differences in experiences of various migrant groups (e.g., Agergaard, 2018; Elling et al., 2001). As such, it is imperative that the engagement of migrants in alternative sports settings within specific migrant communities are explored in the context of Swiss and broader European society. In this spirit, this cumulative doctoral project consists of two empirical studies. The first is a case study exploring the significance, function, and impact of informal sport settings in the social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women living in Switzerland, and the barriers hindering subjects' sustainable sport participation and social integration. Ager & Stranger's (2004) indicator of integration framework and Tsai & Coleman's (1999) six-factor model of constraints are used as a theoretical basis to examine the phenomena of informal sports settings. The semi-structured interviews and focus groups ($n=12$, 18-51 years old) showed informal sport helped migrants to unify, establish social networks and support within their communities, and maintain cultural identity. Gender, cultural expectations, racism/xenophobia, and the high cost of participation are the most common factors hindering sustainable participation and intensifying existing social boundaries. The second study is an ethnographic study of the importance of transnational sport and cultural festivals in the social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants across Europe. The study closely follows the sport and cultural festivals fieldwork leading up to the European-level Ethiopian and Eritrean Sport and Cultural Festival (EESCF) hosted in Zurich, Switzerland in 2019 that drew over 10,000 participants from 22 European countries. The four dimensions of social integration and socio-cultural and socio-affective integration (Esser, 2009 & Elling et al., 2001) were used as a theoretical basis to examine participants' ($n=33$) sense of belonging, identification, and social integration. The findings indicated that EESCFs had become a key space for social interaction and the reestablishment of much-needed support systems. EESCFs enable the Habesha community to celebrate and maintain their cultural heritage, creating a strong sense of belonging, and social integration among not only the European Habesha community, but with the local community as well. The findings of the two studies showed that researchers should not overlook the importance of self-initiated migrant informal sport settings and sport and cultural sport festivals in social integration into broader migrant and local communities. Migrant-formed sport settings can serve as stepping stones towards integration into the existing organized sport setting. Therefore, these informal settings and sport and cultural festivals should be seen as complementary, rather than competitive, to traditional sports clubs. The studies' findings also challenge the existing perceptions of migrant communities as dependent parties that need 'saving' in their integration into the new society. Migrant communities are more than capable of recognizing their needs in the integration process and utilizing existing resources to build a foundation for integration.

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