

The position of sports in times of anxiety

How sports are used to conceal the failing Dutch integration policy



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1. Introduction

Sports are from all times, but their position and function change from time to time. In former times sports were seen as leisure activity and nothing more than that. Times have changed and sports are becoming a more and more important part of the Dutch society and are nowadays used to help and stimulate the integration (inclusion) process of non-western foreigners. The Dutch policy hasn't always used sports for this function. In the seventies the policy of the Dutch government was directed on the thought that after a few years the immigrant workers would go back to their home countries (the remigration of the guest workers) (Verwey-Jonker institute, 2004, page 160). When the politicians, in the second half of the seventies, were confronted with the fact that the immigrant workers wouldn't go back, their policy changed. Nevertheless cultural integration still wasn't a part of the policy. In the eighties the most important topic of the policy was the strengthening of the position of minorities and the interaction between the different groups in the Dutch society. The social and economic difference between the natives and the foreigners had to be decreased. And secondly conditions had to be made for emancipation for the minorities in the Dutch society. The politicians were however sceptical about the roll of sport in the integration process. The pursuit of integration through sport could never be the main object of sport policy for minorities. Sport policy had to focus on furthering the sport participation of minorities and creating the conditions for that purpose. In the nineties this vision completely changed, sport stood on the political agenda for her social useful roll and politicians began using it in their campaigns. Probably because the politicians started to realise that the integration process wasn't going as smoothly as most of them hoped and thought. From that time the use of sports as instrument to further the integration of non-western immigrants started.

And therefore my research question for this paper will be:

Can sports really function as instruments to further the integration process and solve some social problems?

At first I'm going to tell some more about the current Dutch and European sport policy, then I will make clear where these policies are based on. After that I will pay attention to the disintegrating functions of sports, like the under representation ethnic minorities in competition and management. Then I take soccer as example as a multiethnic sport (inclusion) that also has a disintegration aspect (exclusion). This point I want to clarify by telling about the 'immigrant' soccer clubs and the shortage of immigrant volunteers. Finally I will come to my conclusion and give some recommendations for future (sport) policy.

During this paper I will use the terms 'immigrants', 'non-western foreigners' and 'people from an ethnic minority' indifferently. There is no specific reason for this, but when I use these terms, in the Dutch cases, I aim at the Turkish, Moroccan, Surinam and Antillian minorities.

2. The current sport policy

The policy of the Dutch government was and is that every citizen of the Netherlands in each period of ones life, to it's own preference and self chosen grounds can participate in sports of good quality (Elling, 2002, page 12). This policy, also called 'breedtesportbeleid', was made for and directed to groups (like women, non-western foreigners, oldsters and the disabled) who were (socially) behind on other groups.

*'The 'breedtesport' policy stimulates also the use of sport to solve the social problems. By offering sports in back streets or 'slums' VWS¹ hopes for example to further the integration of non-western foreigners.'*²

Not only the Dutch politicians are convinced of the idea that sports can be used for more than only the health and vitality of people, the European politicians are also convinced of this thought. To start from 1 January 2004 'the European year of raising true sport' has began. This year The European Union will give attention to the educational value of sports and stimulate the connections between the sports and the teaching world. This shall all take place under the device 'Move your body, keen your mind'.

*'Raising through sport provides, according to the minister, also chances on the area of integration. Sporting together is a beautiful beginning to get more appreciation for another. The playing of a sports game is not one-way traffic you have to interact with each other. You have to anticipate at each other, you need each other. That also applies for integration, said the minister.'*³

The use of sports as instrument is nevertheless hardly founded on scientific resources. Although the local, provincial and national governments are very ambitious, eventually there has been much to little research into the effectiveness of the sport policy (Verwey-Jonker, 2004, page 160). The little resource that has been done isn't valid or reliable and the few evaluation reports that are related to the sport stimulation of non-western foreigners aren't very clear. The connection between sport and integration is far more complex than the policymakers make us (and themselves) belief. But what's than the reason for the politicians to be so convinced of the instrumental use of sports for social problems? Their policy is based on the wide spread conviction of the 'goodness' of sports, this is a thought that is connected with the basic ideas of the Olympic movement (Elling, 2002, page 15). According to the (sport) media and the policymakers sport almost automatically provides fraternisation, social integration and cohesion. This 'populistic' idea finds expression in slogans like 'sport fraternises', 'sport is healthy' and 'sport integrates' (Elling, 2002, page 27).

3. The disintegration functions of sports

The (Dutch) policymakers see sport as an instrument that can have a positive social function, however on the other hand sport is a part of the prevailing values and norms and the unequal share of power in the society as a whole.

¹ VWS (Ministerie voor Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport) or Department for Public health, Welfare and Sport

² <http://www.minvws.nl/dossiers/sport/breedtesport.asp> 2004-04-12

³ http://www.minvws.nl/persberichten/ds/sport_leerzaam.asp 2004-04-03

Opposite to the (pretended) integration function of sport there are also lots of disintegration functions. Like winning always involves losing, social inclusion and integration always involves exclusion and differentiation. When particular groups are included other groups are excluded (Elling, 2002, page 49). When you're a member of a certain sports club or a fan of this sports club, at the same time there is a distance and (sportive) competition against another sports club. When you're for example included as Ajax fan you're excluded as Feyenoord fan. There's no doubt about it that you can't be a fan of both soccer clubs at the same time.

The cultural beliefs about race and ethnicity have a great influence on social relations and the organisation of social life. In these relationships not all people have the same share of power, till this day on it are most of the time the white middle aged men who have the most power. Because sports are a part of the social society this unequal share of power is also still a problem in the sports world.

'Sports not only reflect the influence of cultural beliefs about race and ethnicity on the social relationships and the organisation of social life, but also are sites where people challenge or reproduce dominant beliefs and forms of racial and ethnic relations in a society' (Coakley, 2003, page 284).

In earlier days the white men justified their power position by making use of theories that expressions of physicality and physical skills among people with dark skin where signs of intellectual inferiority and arrested development (Coakley, 2003, page 288). This theory fitted with an oversimplified Darwinian model of human evolution, which said that mental qualities were superior to physical qualities. The white men misused this theory to conclude that white skinned people were superior beings who deserved to be in positions of power and control around the world. This conviction is called *Social Darwinism* and as a result of this conviction sports in the 'western world' have long histories of racial and ethnic exclusion. All ethnic minorities have been underrepresented at all levels of competition and management in most competitive sports.

3.1 Under representation of ethnic minorities in competition

Many people believe that racial and ethnic problems do not exist in sports today. They think that nowadays all barriers in sports for ethnic minorities are removed and that there's no discrimination anymore. Unfortunately this is not the reality, even at the beginning of the 21st century most ethnic minorities are underrepresented in or absent from most sports at most levels of competition (Coakley, 2003, page 301). The problem is that most people overlook this absence because those who watch soccer, track and field, basketball and boxing see many athletes from ethnic minorities. When we take for example the Dutch national soccer team, the Dutch viewers see many players from ethnic minorities (most Surinam's). You can say the same thing about the NBA players (basketball) in the USA: most NBA players belong to an ethnic minority. Soccer and basketball are very popular sports in both societies, this results in a distorted image of the number of people from ethnic minorities who participate in (certain) sports. Sports like soccer and basketball make up only two of the many sports that are played at the international amateur level. Many people forget that there are almost no ethnic minorities (men and women) who participate in sports like auto racing, cycling, field hockey, golf, rowing, swimming, handball, tennis and so on (Coakley, 2003, page 302). And when they are outstandingly good in a sport, like Tiger Woods in golf and the sisters Williams in tennis they attract the attention.

This is not whiteout a reason; they are 'the best' in sports that were dominated by white people and still there are many more white people participating in these sports. Therefore it's striking when people of ethnic minorities stand out in these sports and people see it as striking because they are not used to it and that last point says enough. So the exceptions to this pattern stand out because they are exceptions.

There are two main reasons why there are almost no ethnic minorities who participate in certain sports. First, the forms of racial and ethnic exclusion that are most important today occur at the community level (Coakley, 2003, page 314). You must pay contribution to participate in sports at a sports club and you must be in the possession of personal transportation. Furthermore some neighbourhoods where certain groups of ethnic minorities live don't have all the sports facilities that the upper-class neighbourhoods have. Not only the membership of a sports club and the transportation to the sports club cost many, most sports also involve the use of equipment and/or clothing. And the lack of this money is a problem for certain ethnic and racial minority groups (some more than others). For this reason sports like basketball and soccer are popular among children from ethnic minorities. These sports are namely by tradition free and open to everybody. You can play soccer at almost every square, grass-field or street and most basketball fields are sponsored by public funds. And besides that there is almost no equipment or clothing required, for playing soccer you only need a (soccer)ball. Even though this form of exclusion is not based on racial or ethnic discrimination, its effect is nearly the same (Coakley, 2003, page 314). People from lower income groups are harmed by this kind of exclusion and many people from ethnic minorities have a low(er) income. The problem is that this kind of exclusion is difficult to attack, because it's hard to prove that civil rights are violated. The second reason why soccer and fighting sports are popular by (Dutch) ethnic minority groups is because these sports are also practised in the countries of origin (Elling, 2002, page 93). For example in Latin America and Africa soccer is very popular and fighting sports are popular in Asia and Turkey.

To make my point about the under representation of ethnic minorities in competition firmer I want to take the Netherlands as an example. As you can see in the table (1) below immigrants participate less in sports than natives, 51,5 percent against 66 percent. These differences in participation in sport between the Dutch natives and immigrants can for one part be explained through cultural and religious differences (V-J, 2004, page 162-163). Two of the largest minority groups in the Netherlands are the Turks and the Moroccans and most of them are Moslems. For the Moslems taking care of the household is the main task of the woman of the house with the consequence that these women don't have any time left to sport. Secondly the Moslems belief that the girls can lose their virginity when they sport. Finally for many Moslem women it is forbidden to sport with are nearby men. Still these cultural and religious explanations can't fully explain the difference in participation in sport between natives and immigrants. These differences must, for a great part, be explained through structural factors. When you want to be a member of a sport club you must pay contribution, for many people with a low income these costs are to high. A lot of the immigrants belong to the group of people with low incomes. This fact has his influence on the number of immigrants that participate in (organised) sport. Thereby there is also a connection between participation in sport and the educational level. People with a lower education participate less in the 'civil society' than people with a higher education. Unfortunately most immigrants belong to the group of people that are lower educated and therefore participate less in (certain) sports.

Table 1 Participate in sport, population from 6-79 year, 1979-1999 in per cents⁴

	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999
In general						
Inclusive cycling and hiking				65,9	67,2	68,9
Sex						
Man	55,5	61,4	59,8	62,9	63,1	64,6
Woman	49,5	56,3	57,3	62,2	63,9	65,1
Age						
6-11 year	79,1	85,6	85,0	87,9	88,7	91,5
12-19 year	80,8	84,7	81,6	83,8	84,5	86,0
20-34 year	65,9	72,9	72,0	76,4	73,5	74,2
35-49 year	46,2	56,6	58,0	62,2	63,6	63,2
50-64 year	20,3	28,7	31,1	39,0	44,7	47,7
65-79 year	8,2	14,6	19,1	23,4	25,6	34,5
Income level						
Quartile 1	36,9	41,9	41,9	47,6	47,6	50,8
Quartile 2	49,9	54,9	55,9	60,6	59,6	63,7
Quartile 3	56,0	64,8	62,7	68,0	70,3	69,2
Quartile 4	67,2	74,7	73,6	74,9	77,6	76,3
Educational level						
lo, lbo, mavo	34,4	41,5	41,9	45,5	44,9	46,3
mbo, havo, vwo	62,7	67,4	67,7	70,5	70,5	69,6
hbo, wo	67,7	73,6	73,4	75,2	76,5	75,0
Social position						
Studying	81,8	86,2	84,1	86,5	86,6	87,4
Working	54,7	63,0	63,9	67,6	68,1	67,5
Housekeeping	34,9	40,7	44,7	50,8	49,4	55,2
Jobless, unfit for work	26,5	43,6	45,5	42,6	46,0	44,4
Pensioner	9,8	17,8	21,5	27,4	30,0	36,2
Ethnicity						
Native					64,6	66,0
Immigrant					53,4	51,5

3.2 Under representation of ethnic minorities in management

Although there have been major changes in most sports, the men who are in power and have almost all the control are white. And that stays this way because people in power don't easily change the ideologies and social structures that support their power (Coakley, 2003, page 320).

'We can expect that patterns will continue to shift toward equity, but some people resist real transformation and will impede the deep ideological changes that would open the door to full equity (Coakley, 2003, page 349).'

When people finally are in power they're so afraid to lose it again that they do everything they can to prevent that. Next to that it's hard to change relationships on the personal level, because the (negative) beliefs about ethnic minorities have to change. But it's even harder to change the social structures where the sport organisations are built on. Some people even call this the 'old boy network' and according to them this network is still alive (and kicking) (Coakley, 2003, page 352). These networks can be dangerous in the way that they can be the source for racial discrimination.

⁴ <http://www.rapportage-sport.nl>

Research in sociology has shown that people in positions of power, and this are most of the time white men, look for people who think as they do. The reason for this is that they want to work closely together with the people they hire. People with the same background are easier to understand and personal connections are easier made. Thus, when a white man is doing an interview with someone from an ethnic minority he can raise questions about the background of the candidate. In all likelihood the white man isn't fully familiar with the cultural background of the candidate and he probably questions himself if this person can be trusted and if this person really is in the possession of all the capacities that are requested. People from a different cultural background raise more questions like these than people that you are in a certain way familiar with. When there are any doubts about the candidate, these doubts can be conscious or unconscious, the man doing the hiring will most likely select the candidate about whom he has the fewest doubts. Thus, the person who will be hired is the white man who has (almost) the same background and 'looks' the most like the man who is doing the hiring. This process is going on for many years and when this process continues people from ethnic minorities will stay underrepresented in management positions in sport.

4. Inclusion and exclusion at a soccer club

The paradoxical relations between integration/differentiation and inclusion/exclusion becomes clear in a national sport like soccer. Next to the multiethnic soccer clubs, which can be seen as integration, there are also examples of differentiation: the 'immigrant' (mainly Turkish, Moroccan and Surinam) soccer clubs and a shortage of immigrant volunteers at the multiethnic soccer clubs.

4.1 The immigrant soccer clubs

Several resources show that sport policy is focused on ethnic mixed sports whereas people with different cultural backgrounds also like to sport with 'their own people' (Elling, 2002, pag.19). Some people chose to become a member of an 'immigrant' soccer club because of negative experiences at a 'non-immigrant' soccer club. They feel discriminated or not at home at the 'non-immigrant' soccer club. They say that the whole sphere of the 'non-immigrant' soccer club is Dutch from the canteen, the music, food etc to the expectations of the trainers and coaches (V-J, 2004, page 165) They don't take into account that there are soccer players with a different cultural and religious background. The difficult question is where's the line between creating a nice (Dutch) sphere and discrimination? This line is thin and because of that some 'immigrants' feel discriminated by 'non-immigrant' club members and sometimes even the referee and the opponents. This can be the consequence of their experiences of discrimination in the labour market, organisations and in the media (Knoppers ea, 2000, page 97). Another often used theory on this field is the 'token-theory' from Kanter (Glastra, 1999, page 185-186). Kanter supposes that the quantitative ratio in a group is determining for the behaviour and position for a loner (token) in a group. A token is not only a loner in a group, he or she is for the other members of the group a symbol for a group that is seen as a 'special category'. As long as a certain social type is represented by less than 15%, they have the 'token position' towards the other group members. When the percentage of the certain social type gets between 15%-35% the members of the minority are more and more seen as individuals. When the minority reaches the 30% they get some influence as social group. This theory from Kanter can explain why the 'immigrants' sometimes feel discriminated by the minority (the non-immigrants).

Most of the time there are not enough immigrants (30%) who are a member of a 'non-immigrant' soccer club to have real influence on the culture of the club. On the other hand there are 'immigrants' who deliberately chose for an 'immigrant' soccer club. For example because the Turkish and Moroccans main motive to sport is to be with their own people in a safe environment, they also want to meet new people but the most important thing is to belong to a specific group (V-J, 2004, page 165). For them it's important to strengthen their own identity, therefore they go to clubs where they have friends or like to have friends.

4.2 The shortage of 'immigrant' volunteers

The ratio between the number of 'immigrants' playing soccer at a soccer club and the number of 'immigrant' volunteers is out of proportion. There are far more 'immigrants' playing soccer at a soccer club than there are volunteers. This is a shame because volunteer work across ethnic boundaries can be positive for the soccer club as well as for the 'immigrant' volunteers: they get more influence at the soccer club. The problem of the lack of volunteer 'immigrants' comes from two sites. At first the soccer clubs policy towards 'immigrant' volunteers is not very invitational⁵. A great part of the problem is that the soccer club doesn't ask 'immigrants' to do any volunteer work.⁶ They see no potential coach when they look at a father of an 'immigrant' soccer player cheering at a soccer match. At the other hand the 'immigrants' aren't (fully) familiar with the Dutch phenomenon of volunteer work. Van Daal en Broenink confirm in their book *'Intercultural volunteer work'* (1998), the vision of Verweel. According to them there are three main reasons why there are far too few 'immigrant' volunteer workers. The first is what they call conservatism (Van Daal ea, 1998, page 16) and this comes to the same problem as Verweel mentioned. Research shows that immigrants simply aren't asked to do any volunteer work at the soccer club. Conservatism, resistance to change, is an important cause for this fact. People are afraid of change, they want to keep things the way they're, because you don't know if things change for the best or the worse. For this reason it's safer to keep things as they are, so that continuation develops. Immigrants bring change into the organisation and this can bring the continuation in danger. This is one of the main reasons why organisations don't ask immigrants to do any volunteer work, whereas when immigrants are asked to do volunteer work they are prepared to do it. The second reason is the educational arrears of the immigrants as compared with the mean native (Van Daal ea, 1998, page 18). Why higher educated people do more volunteer work can have several reasons; they are better informed and more often a member of an organisation, they have more confidence and therefore look more active for volunteer work and finally they have more capacities and expertise and that's why they are asked more often to do volunteer work. Thirdly there is the problem of a cultural distance, immigrants are most of the time 'forced' to give up a certain part of their own cultural 'achievements' and in some cases this is just too much to ask for them (Van Daal ea, 1998, page 18-23). For Turkish and Moroccan women it's for example a hindrance that they're not supposed to go out in public. The first cultural obstacle is the lack of insight that immigrants have about the possibilities and benefits of volunteer work. Like I said before most immigrants come from societies where they aren't familiar with the concept of volunteer work. In these societies volunteer work is most of the time not as formal organised as in the Netherlands. A lot of services in the Netherlands, like nurse-homes and homes for the aged, don't exist in countries like Turkey and Morocco. Most immigrants learn after a while that these kinds of facilities exist, what they often don't know is that there are also volunteers active in these facilities.

⁵ <http://www.verwey-jonker.nl> 2004-04-12

⁶ Conversation with Paul Verweel, 2004-04-16

These immigrants also aren't familiar with organisations that serve the community and they're even a little afraid for organisations like that. Because they don't trust organisations that have anything to do with politics or have a political background. Other motives of immigrants for not working as a volunteer is that they already take care of their own family like they were used to do at home and when you work for free you are held in low esteem. Immigrating to the Netherlands is equal to earning a lot of money, so why would you work for free? What most immigrants don't know is that volunteer work can enlarge the change for paid work.

5. Conclusion

My question was:

Can sports really function as instruments to further the integration process and solve some social problems?

I don't think they can in such a simple and direct way, nevertheless the use of sports as instrument for integration is nowadays becoming more and more common although this is hardly founded on scientific resource. Besides that sports don't only have an integration function but definitely also a disintegration function. This side of sport doesn't get as much attention as the integration function, even though this side should get the same attention to really solve social problems in the Dutch society. On the other hand I really don't deny that sport can take care of some cultural-ethnic friendships and other aspects of integration, but my point is that there's just no guaranty for it. 'Likes draws to likes', people with the same (cultural) background are drawn to each other. That's why it isn't a certainty that for example a Turkish boy at a multiethnic soccer club will get a Dutch friend. These quotations from Coakley confirm and clarify my opinion:

'Too many people think in fairy tale terms when it comes to racial and ethnic relations; they believe that, once everyone comes together on the same team, in the same classroom, or the same organisation, they will live happily ever after (Coakley, 2003, page 312).'

And

'Sports may bring people together, but they do not automatically lead them to question how they think about race or ethnicity or how they define and interact with people from other racial or ethnic groups (Coakley, 2003, page 320).'

6. Recommendations for policy

The two main problems that should be solved are the under representation of ethnic minorities in competition and in management. You can split up the causes of under representation of ethnic minorities in competition in cultural and religious factors and structural factors. It's hard to do something about the cultural and religious factors and it's even the question if you want to change their culture and religion, because we have to do with ethnic question. I think this process will and must go slowly and that this aren't the factors were policy should be made for. So the policy should be made for the structural problems, all people should be in the position to participate in sport at a sport club. Unfortunately the policy of the Dutch government is shifting in the wrong direction (Verweel ea, 2004, page 2).

For sport clubs applies the same policy as for other sectors, this means reducing expenses, less subsidy and privatisation. The sports clubs are more and more forced to manage on their own. Therefore they raise the contributions and the change that people because of the high costs stop sporting is huge. Who these people will be leaves to no guesses, the people with lower incomes thus a large group of people from ethnic minorities. This process should be stopped because the contributions and other costs concerning participation in organised sports must be lower. Therefore there must come a co-operative effort of organisations in the neighbourhood, with schools and the sport club. So that the organisations can give the sport club advice and money and in return the organisation can make use of the accommodation of the sport club. The schools have potential new members for the sport club and the sport club can take care of the after school facilities. When all these organisations help each other the sport club will get enough money from the (business) organisations and from the new members. Then the contribution can be reduced so that people from ethnic minorities are also in the position to become a member of a sport club.

The other main problem is the under representation of ethnic minorities in management functions at sport clubs and as volunteers at sport clubs. The solution for this problem sounds simple but is actually very difficult: there must come more understanding and insight in each other's cultures. People from ethnic minorities have to become aware of the existence of volunteer work and of the possibilities and advantages that this work offers them. They also should apply (more) for management functions in sport, especially the higher educated among them. Because when once there is someone with another cultural background working in the organisation, in the future it will be easier for others (with the same background), to follow his example and it's also easier to reach them. On the other hand organisations must hire people with another cultural background, therefore the fear for the unknown has to be taken away. Sport clubs have to ask people from ethnic minorities personal if they want to do volunteer work. The sport club has to make clear what these people are supposed to do and that the sport club provides (a certain level of) education to their children. It maybe even works better when people 'of their own' ask them to do volunteer work, because then they're probably more inclined to say 'yes' (Verweel ea, 2004, page 6).

The job for the government is to promote volunteer work, for example in Turkish coffee-houses. And secondly the major job to make policy to bring all the cultures in the Netherlands closer together. People from different cultural backgrounds have to meet and communicate with each other, to get misunderstandings out of their way. With as a result that more people from other ethnic backgrounds will be hired for management jobs and more people will be asked to do volunteer work.

Finally I want to note that the opinions about 'immigrant' soccer clubs differ enormously. Some people say that it is a clear example of segregation others, like Jan Janssens⁷, say that 'selveorganisations' can play an important role in the development of identities and that they create self-respect. In this way these immigrant soccer clubs are helping the integration of their members in the Dutch society in an indirect way.

⁷ <http://www.verwey-jonker.nl> 2004-04-12

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