



by Jean-Luc Frast

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Intercultural Dialogue Through Sport

The contribution of sport and physical activity towards intercultural understanding

► The International Sport and Culture Association



INTERNATIONAL SPORT AND CULTURE ASSOCIATION

The International Sport and Culture Organisation ISCA is the world's leading umbrella in Sport for All. ISCA is an organisation bringing together sport, culture and youth organisations from across the globe. ISCA believes that everyone should have the chance to participate in international activities such as festivals, exchanges and sports tournaments. We call this «Sport and Culture for All». Sport is not just about competition and exercise, but also involves having a good time and making friends. Moreover, sport regulates social behaviour and creates a feeling of belonging – which in turn leads to a strengthening of democracy.

Throughout the last 3 years ISCA implemented a large-scale innovative EU YOUTH project, entitled International Youth Leader Education (IYLE) focussing mainly on education through sport. During the implementation of this project we had the opportunity to try new ways of using physical activity in regard to a variety of social issues. Later in this article we will have a look at results from the IYLE training course “Intercultural dialogue and social inclusion through sport”.

ISCA is involved in various projects focussing on intercultural dialogue. One of them is the EU Study on National Approaches to Intercultural Dialogue initiated by ERICarts; European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research GmbH.

The study is addressing different fields, in particular:

- Education as a means to provide the basis for understanding and respecting diversity;
- Youth and sport activities which facilitate practical experience with intercultural dialogue;
- Culture which can connect different value systems and provides aesthetic challenges.

The information and analysis gathered will assist in the development of strategies and programmes in the context of the upcoming EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 and in future European Commission programmes. For more information have a look at <http://www.ericarts.org>.

► Debate

From a political point of view, sport and its structures and settings are often referred to as important solutions to the major challenge of creating intercultural dialogue in European societies. However, the popularity and the preferences for using sport and its structures in the processes of creating an intercultural dialogue are not always enough to secure successful interventions and results. Transversal organisational policy and activities in regard to intercultural dialogue and social inclusion are extremely important to enable isolated actions to be set and recognized in an overall organisational framework.

Main characteristics of sport as a tool for creating an intercultural dialogue in Europe:

1. The interventions and activities are mainly planned and implemented at a local level without an overall strategy or policy.
2. The interventions and outcomes are often described through “good practice” more than evidence-based research.
3. Civil society organisations (sport associations, clubs, etc.) with their voluntary based structures and commitments are often the settings where the intercultural interventions are implemented.
4. Focal points of the interventions are “challenge oriented” (social inclusion or anti-racism), and “target group” oriented.
5. The “intercultural learning dimension” is mainly based on non-formal and informal learning settings and processes.

The main characteristics indicate the complexity and some of the strengths and weaknesses that sport faces and the role sport plays in the struggle for inclusive societies.

The political and financial support is primarily based on the general assumption that sport promotes social integration. The political assumptions are supported by similar assumptions among the European citizens. [Sport and Multiculturalism. PMP in partnership with the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy Loughborough University, August 2004.]

Results from a Eurobarometer analysis shows that close to three out of four European Union citizens (73%) view sport as a means to promote the integration of immigrant populations. Although this is the view of a majority in the 25 countries surveyed, this proportion seems lower in several central European countries. *[The citizens of the European Union and Sport, Fieldwork October-November 2004, Publication November 2004]*

In promoting the integration of immigrant populations, sport is also perceived as acting as a means of fighting against discrimination according to two thirds of European citizens (64%). The general assumptions or claims made for sport in this field of intercultural dialogue and its relation to research is very precisely described in the following statement:

«The role of sport in promoting social integration, in particular of young people, is widely recognised. Sport ... is a recognised social phenomenon. Sports offer a common language and a platform for social democracy. [Sport] creates conditions for political democracy and is instrumental to the development of democratic citizenship. Sport enhances the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and it contributes to the fight against prejudices. Finally, sport plays its part to limit social exclusion of immigrant and minority groups.» *[The Council of Europe's study on Diversity and Cohesion – Niessen 2000]*

To categorise the interventions and projects at implementation level we can describe the major categories and examples of specific target groups.

The major challenges dealt with in the interventions and projects within the sport sector are:

- Social inclusion and empowerment of excluded or marginalized individuals and groups
- Combating racism and xenophobia
- Post-war reconciliation

Here the argument is, that it takes more than the sport and physical activities to facilitate a useful and valuable Intercultural dialogue.

It takes :

- an objective beyond the pure sport activity
- an educational perspective and process

- settings where the educational perspective is transformed into action

The educational framework for most projects dealing with intercultural dialogue is non-formal and in-formal learning. *[Pathways to recognition of non-formal learning 2004.]*



The aforementioned IYLE project is indeed all about non-formal education and intercultural learning as such. IYLE uses a learner-centred approach, which considers the cultural diversity of the individual and places it in a larger socio-economic context. We combine proven relevant strengths of non-formal education with our definition of education through sport or/and physical activity.



We develop culturally-sensitive methods that can be adapted to different social, economic and ethnic frameworks and we empower and encourage young people and youth workers to use them to promote intercultural dialogue. Through the IYLE project we find large support in the belief that non-formal education is the qualification wheel and quality wheel of the NGO-sector.



Intercultural learning and intercultural competences are key aspects in all group-related learning processes, especially if you are dealing with a diverse public. Exploring your own identity in order to understand the other and the world around you is one of the pillars of the IYLE project and essential to making social change a process to which all individuals can contribute.

▶Key competences

We identify 3 key competences in intercultural dialogue

- The ability to ask questions
- The ability to answer questions
- The ability to create an environment where questions can be asked and answered

▶T-course “Intercultural dialogue and social inclusion through sport”

The course was held from 11th to the 17th of July 2005 in Alantos, Lithuania and aimed at:

- exploring sports and physical activities as a tool for intercultural dialogue and social inclusion and adapting different ty-

pes of sports and physical activities to different target groups, in particular young people;

- developing knowledge, attitudes and skills for the positive use of sports in an intercultural context;
- developing a value for sensitivity towards individual differences;

The trainer team, composed of Dirk Adams, Kathy Schroeder and Jean-Luc Frast, tackled the topics by developing a set of activities emphasising physical activity, personal and collective experience-making, experience-based learning and intercultural reflection.

The training process built on 4 main steps that linked intercultural learning to social inclusion:

- “Teambuilding” as part of most training courses.
- “Identity and culture exercises” during which personal, cultural, educational and social differences and similarities were emphasised.
- “Intercultural dialogue” where aspects such as individual identity, group identity, stereotyping, generalization and tools for intercultural learning were investigated.
- “Social inclusion” where strategies to overcome discrimination and create inclusive environments through physical activity were worked out.

You can access the process and the activities by contacting ISCA.

▶ Regional and national examples

>> SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Democratic Development Through Grass-root Sport in South East Europe

ISCA’s involvement in South East Europe began in the post-war period in the late 1990’s. There was an interest in assisting the new countries of former Yugoslavia in finding a sports model to fulfil the wishes of citizens and contribute to the reestablishment of democratic processes. Furthermore, ISCA has been interested in the role of sport in the ongoing development process in these countries and the ongoing interest of local clubs, regional associations and national federations. The ISCA project Democratic Development Through Grass-

root Sport has included six locally-developed model projects, seven seminars and two conferences with beneficiaries coming from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia and Albania. The overall objective of the project was to assist the development of local associations and groups with a focus on popular sport in order to create regional interaction and co-operation between NGOs in popular sport and to establish a regional operational network of NGOs which has the capacity to serve as a platform for future regional and international cooperation. The project has received support from SAD and from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

>> BELGIUM

Coloured Sport Clubs funded by the King Boudewijn Foundation

The initiative was taken by the King Boudewijn Foundation to develop an active non-discrimination policy within the sports clubs and to generate an integrated sports co-operation between the Belgian and foreign population. The goals are:

- to raise the number of migrant participants,
- to stimulate the active involvement of foreigners in the club,
- to provide quality tutors and coaches and to stimulate youngsters to follow coaching programmes,
- to develop connections to local actors
- to react to long-term social challenges and developments

The first campaign started in 1996. Twenty four sports clubs were selected to receive financial support from the Foundation to implement a sports and participation policy for foreign youth. As for the coaching programmes, ten candidates were selected. Each of them received a scholarship and a tutor. In 1997, it was extended to 34 clubs and sixteen youngsters were taken on for the coaching programme.

Inspired by the “Coloured Sports Clubs” campaigns, some local community sports services organised valuable sports and integration initiatives during holidays. They expanded their range of holiday sports camps for youth and offered some weeks with new contents aimed specially to attract migrant youngsters. Furthermore, during the whole process of organisation the dialogue with migrant organisations was intensified.



>> IRELAND

SARI (Sport Against Racism Ireland)

This organisation is involved in projects designed to use sport as an integrating force. It is a voluntary organisation and does not receive government funding. To mark World Refugee Day (June 20, 2004) the African Refugee Network in partnership with Dublin City Council, NCCRI, UNHCR, SPIRASI Integrating Ireland organize National Awards. The awards highlight the positive contribution that asylum seekers and refugees have made to the local communities in which they live and to individuals from those local communities who are extending the hand of friendship and solidarity to refugees and asylum seekers. There are five categories under which awards are made which include sport and leisure.

>> ITALY

Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti (UISP)

The organisation has developed a series of programmes, which concentrate on communication and dialogue between migrants and Italians while promoting initiatives to build contacts. The aim of these programmes is to provide immigrants communities with assistance to organise sports activities. UISP works also with provinces in organising sporting projects that aim at intercultural dialogue and mutual acceptance.

The initiatives are developed at five levels:

1. recreational, cultural and sport activities that aim at maintaining specific cultures and identities of immigrant communities in Italy
2. promoting intercultural dialogue: project of Centro Olympic Maghreb in Genoa aiming at immigrants from North Africa, South America, Eastern Europe
3. promotes events such as an anti-racist world cup which involves mixed teams (men and women) from different ethnic minorities (Mondiali Antirazzisti)
4. initiatives to combat ethnic and social prejudices such as the "Ultra Project" targeting football fans at national and international level.
5. At international level: Peace Games (<http://www.peacegamesuisp.org>) which aims at promoting peace through sport and other recreational activities in areas of crisis in Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. For instance the campaign "Una speranza per il futuro", ("a hope for the future") collects funds for the reconstruction and administration of a sport camp in Mostar.

>> SPAIN : Cricket for All

Another example from the province of Barcelona comes from the area of Sant Adrià de Besos, where the Hispano-Pakistani Cultural Association organises cricket courses in collaboration with the town hall. The courses are open to everyone and include a tournament.

These examples highlight the existence of collaborations between the voluntary (particularly associations representing immigrant populations) and public sectors in the provision of sports activities for immigrants.

► The overall estimation of the current situation in Europe

Approximately 70 millions Europeans are members of/or directly related to a sport association, club, etc. Many sport organisations are involved in the question of intercultural dialogue and integration through sport, and this number seems to be increasing. In other words, it is on the agendas of European sport organisations. However, few organisations are today beyond the "critical mass", when it comes to involvement in work with integration through sport. In other words, this is not very high on the agendas.

Consequently, very few organisations seem to have Corporate Social Responsibility or Organisational Social Responsibility included in their general policy. This failure illustrates that the topic of Organisational Social Responsibility is not an integrated part of organisational objectives. Organisations need to be realistic in the definition of their aims and should assess the distinction between education for, by and through sport. What exactly is it that they offer and what exactly it is that sport can offer? Education for sport develops technical competences. This is normally linked to well-defined disciplines of competitive sport. Education by sport uses physical activity instrumentally to attain certain social goals such as ethnic reconciliation, public health, citizenship or social integration. Education through sport is physical exercise that creates existential learning between human beings. Here, education is a way of empowering people.

Therefore, we believe that one innovative approach is to create partnerships between sports clubs and human rights and cultural associations. In the framework of the International Youth Leader Education project we strongly promoted the benefits to bring the sport world closer to the rest of the NGO world and vice-versa. We know that sport has a great potential to promote social change. We believe that this potential is not fully used by the Sport world and by the rest of the NGO world. Throughout the IYLE project, we took first steps to give the Sport world tools inspiring them to look beyond the positive aspects of physical activity and to use sport as a method to enhance social change. Further we try to encourage the NGO world to use physical activity as a tool to engage people in reflective processes that they might not reach by using their traditional ways to promote social change.

We hope that many new partners will join us in this effort.

To conclude with the words of the European Youth and Sport Forum 2007: "Welcome diversity – Let's move Europe" [*Declaration of the EYSF2007* <http://isca-web.org/english/news/eysf20070>]

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