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## A GOOD SPORT?

Research into the Capacity of Recreational Sport to Integrate Dutch Minorities

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**Abstract** Since the rise of a right-wing populist movement in 2002, the issue of the ‘unsuccessful’ integration of ethnic minorities is at the centre of Dutch public debate. The quest for promising social spheres to bridge gaps between the autochthonous Dutch population and minority groups has brought recreational sport to the political agenda. Sport participation is widely advocated as an effective and unproblematic way for interethnic contact and socialization. In this article we report on two studies conducted in the city of Rotterdam to test these assumptions. One study, focusing on motivations to participate in sport, showed that among participants meeting different people is less valued than expected, especially among marginalized migrant-groups who primarily want to confirm their ethnic identity through homogeneous sport activities. Further research on sport encounters between different ethnic groups made it clear that, particularly in soccer, these encounters frequently result in aggression and can seldom be labelled as trouble-free contact. This can be explained as much by the aggressive elements of the game itself as by the fact that inter-ethnic tensions from other social spheres are imported and even magnified in these sports activities. In sum, although recreational sport (such as soccer) might seem ideal for meaningful cultural crossovers, in practice ethnic differences are reinforced in this sphere instead of bridged.

**Key words** • cross-cultural socialization • integration • inter-ethnic tensions • sociology • sport

### Introduction

Recently the political landscape of the Netherlands was shaken to its foundations. In the municipal elections of March 2002 a right-wing populist, Pim Fortuyn, tapped into an apparent widespread discontent and won more than 30 percent of the popular vote in some larger cities. In a bizarre turn of events, Fortuyn was murdered a few days before the national election in May 2002, yet his party, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), accrued 17 percent of the national vote, making it the second largest political force in the country. The LPF entered a right-wing

coalition government which, due to internal tensions, lasted only 81 days. Early in 2003 new elections took place in which the 'old' parties restored some of their power, mostly by taking over elements of Fortuyn's political agenda. The LPF (now with five percent of the vote) became part of the opposition.

The popular discontent mobilized by Fortuyn took everyone by surprise. Up until the late 1990s the Netherlands was amongst the few advanced capitalist democracies where the level of social and political trust was relatively high, and not declining (see Pharr and Putnam, 2000). High levels of political discontent have only become more visible in recent studies (Castenmiller and Gerritsen, 2002; SCP, 2002). While in 2000 the satisfaction level with the public administration was still close to 70 percent, the latest survey (SCP, 2003) showed that now only 35 percent of the Dutch population are satisfied with the government of the country.

Fortuyn's astonishing popular ascendancy early in 2002 can be explained by his ability to connect a dormant public dislike of the political elite to the issue of the 'unsuccessful' integration of ethnic minorities (ethnic minority is the label used in the Netherlands for everybody with one parent born in a 'non-western' country – thus including many people who are actually born in the Netherlands).<sup>1</sup> In a country seemingly so tolerant, prosperous and calm, Fortuyn advocated that the Netherlands was in crisis, or in his own words, 'in ruins' (Fortuyn, 2002). After the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001, Fortuyn's politicization of the 'multi-cultural drama' (Scheffer, 2000) gained momentum. More strongly than any politician previously, Fortuyn linked the growing presence of immigrants, and subsequent ethnic concentration in 'black schools'<sup>2</sup> and neighbourhoods, to pervasive feelings of insecurity in the public space. His rhetoric advocated stricter policies on immigration, and strong incentives for the cultural adaptation of minorities to Dutch culture. He openly labelled Islam a 'backward' religion, and a threat to 'liberal' Dutch values. Political leaders of the established parties were accused of denying these problems, or of only reacting half-heartedly. In only a few months, Fortuyn won a great deal of the public support for his mix of issues (Van der Brug, 2003), which gave him (post-mortem) an unparalleled electoral victory for a total newcomer in Dutch politics.

The rise of Fortuyn's populist movement has pushed the issue of multiculturalism and the integration of ethnic minorities to the centre of political and public debate. The Fortuynists' agenda is to end the influx of new immigrants and to disperse the present non-Dutch population over different neighbourhoods of the cities and, if possible, to the countryside. Furthermore, the LPF and other Fortuynists want to roll back the position of Islam, which is labelled as out of tune with mainstream Dutch society (particularly on such topics as gender equality and tolerance towards homosexuality, topics that find broad support among autochthonous Dutch [Duyvendak, 2004]). In reaction, the public debate has become more heated and loaded. Death threats to several politicians and the actual assassination, in November 2004, of a (second) outspoken anti-Islam opinion-leader, the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, shocked the nation. Because this time the murderer was a Muslim fundamentalist, the fear for inter-ethnic polarization appears to be omnipresent, as is the call for more effective measures to integrate ethnic minorities into mainstream Dutch society.

Prior to the ascendancy of Fortuynism, analyses of and suggested solutions to the social, cultural and economic integration of ethnic minorities were less radical. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, stricter policies on immigration had already been put before parliament as well as plans to demand greater engagement of immigrants in Dutch society. The central idea was to increase the level of social contact and interaction between groups of different ethnic backgrounds, in the hope that this would lead to more mutual understanding as well as fuller cultural and socio-economic integration of minorities. This policy echoed Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> One realm identified by policymakers as a promising social sphere for inter-ethnic contacts was *recreational sport*. Sport activities were regarded as having a low threshold for entry and participation. Furthermore, social distinctions were considered not to play a major role in sport. Recreational sports are considered to have few distinct ethnic biases ('everybody likes sport as a way to spend leisure time') making it easy to bring together people with different backgrounds.

The idea that sport is a sphere with high potential for successful social engineering goes unchallenged in the new political arena. Similar to advocates of the 'old politics', the LPF and other critics of the former integration policy, underline the communicative and integrative function of sport. As a consequence, expectations of positive effects resulting from ethnically mixed sport activities are sky high.

In this article we test the popular assumption of uncomplicated ethnic intermingling in sport, and evaluate the assumed positive effects for the Dutch case in general, and for the city of Rotterdam in particular. Rotterdam is a crucial case as it was the birthplace of Fortuynism. By looking closely at the character of cross-cultural meetings in sport, we question the claim that tense social interactions are mostly absent in sport. Rather we suggest that inter-ethnic encounters in sport reproduce tensions rooted in other societal spheres. In order to explain this, we analyse the motives of ethnic minorities to become involved in sport. Do participants see sport activities as an opportunity to mix, or do they prefer to spend their leisure time with those from their own ethnic communities? Moreover, we look at the dynamics of the soccer game itself, at the characteristics of the game that might magnify the tensions that result from other societal spheres. In sum, we analyse the extent to which sports can bridge inter-cultural gaps and relieve ethnic tensions.

## **The Dutch Case: Looking for Realms for Ethnically Mixed Social Interaction**

Principles of corporatism, subsidiarity, and the sovereignty of social groups have long been dominant features ('pillars') of Dutch social and political life, resulting from a long history of different religious minorities within one state (Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Pombeni, 2000). However, the institutional heritage of 'pillarization' is considered to be increasingly problematic since the circumstances have changed. Separate schools for (already emancipated) Christians or (vulnerable) Muslims are no longer adequate for a country that is mostly secular-

ized and post-materialist in its values (Duyvendak, 2004). Now the dominant perception is that cultural separation (and geographical segregation) leads to social and political marginalization. Dutch authorities have subsequently embarked on policies of intermixing civil society organizations and activities.

In social life, the era of 'organic pillarization' has already faded. In the last decades old forms of social cohesion have been replaced by new ones. Social ties within the family, and certainly within neighbourhoods have been substituted by interaction mostly among friends (SCP, 2002). As a result, social relations are as homogeneous in character as in the former pillarized days, though nowadays more based on free will. They remain, however, in the words of Putnam (1995), more oriented towards '*bonding*' than towards '*bridging*'. For socially disadvantaged groups, these processes of bonding bear the risk of a (potentially negative) loss of contact with the mainstream of society. The domination of bonding-networks could also lead to an overall lack of *cognitive* cohesion in a multi-ethnic society (Duyvendak, 2004). As orientations become restricted to a mono-ethnic group, citizens will not know and understand the drives, ambitions and motivations of other members of society. Stronger cognitive ties between citizens make them aware of the similarities and differences in the behavioural norms and values of the various social groups.

Despite different analyses of social integration and cohesion by various observers, there seems to be widespread consensus about the need for more ethnically mixed social interaction. The question then becomes, how do we organize such interaction, and in which social settings? Due to legal or moral constraints, as well as a lack of instruments, cross-cultural interaction cannot be immediately implemented and practised in many sectors of public life. In housing and education, for example, the politics of dispersion can be in direct conflict with principles such as non-discrimination and freedom of education (Duyvendak and Veldboer, 2001). In other domains, where authorities face fewer restrictions, the odds may be more in favour of integration policies. State-subsidized cultural organizations for ethnic minorities, for example, are being encouraged, or even forced, to no longer orient themselves towards their own cultural origin and heritage, but instead to 'Dutch culture'.

## The Promise of Sport

Since most social spheres are out of reach or (legally) out of bounds for direct state intervention, politicians and policymakers have (re)discovered sport activities as a promising social sphere for inter-ethnic socialization. An annex to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)<sup>4</sup> states, 'the social significance of sport, in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together'; and the Nice Declaration of the European Council asserted that:

sport is a human activity resting on fundamental social, educational and cultural values. It is a factor making for integration, involvement in social life, tolerance, acceptance of differences and playing by the rules (. . .) In a sports hall or on a sports field everyone is equal. (EU Sports Forum, 2003: 2–3)

Thus, among politicians at the national and European level sport is not merely seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means for social engineering (Buisman, 2002; Duyvendak et al., 1998). Sport activities, particularly when they are organized by clubs or other civic organizations, are assumed to reduce social and cultural barriers since they enable meetings among people with different backgrounds.

It is undeniable that sport activities are a promising social sphere, in part because of the large number of participants. Recent figures show that more and more people in the Netherlands are active in sports. Despite trends towards more individual, ad hoc and modular types of sport, no other types of civil society organization are as numerous as sport clubs. Next to family, school and the work place, sport organizations and activities have become a milieu for education and the transfer of norms and values (socialization) (Bottenburg and Schuyt, 1996; Vanreusel and Bulcean, 1992). Since the selection mechanisms and criteria for success are different from other social spheres (based on physical qualities rather than on cognitive abilities), sport activities can increase and transform the usual patterns of social interaction (Bottenburg and Schuyt, 1996; Elling, 2001). A recent study (SCP, 2003) showed that practitioners of sport are indeed more likely to *meet* members of other ethnic and cultural groups than those who do not participate in sport activities. Based on these characteristics, sport undoubtedly has cross-cultural potential.

The advocates of sport as a medicine for social ills see various positive effects. In addition to integration, discipline, self-esteem and fair play are often mentioned. Less optimistic observers, however, point out that sport activities are full of paradoxes (Eitzen, 1999). On the one hand, sport can lead to new encounters between people with equal physical abilities, but different backgrounds; on the other hand, sport can lead to new forms of segregation (on the basis of gender, age, abilities, fitness and physical disabilities). Clearly, sport can potentially bridge gaps between different persons and groups, but fierce sport rivalry can also confirm hierarchies and antagonisms among individuals and groups. The claim of sport is that this rivalry is a sound outlet for feelings of anger and discontent accrued in other social interactions ('better a fight in the ring, than on the streets'). Sport activities may indeed bring some individual stress relief for a period (Smith, 1983), but it remains to be seen whether sport can also reduce stress and social antagonism on the collective level. In order to assess the social contribution of sport, it is necessary to separate reality from mere rhetoric. This article examines the *motivation* and *character* of social *interaction* in sports. The following draws on two studies conducted (in 1998 and 2003) in the city of Rotterdam, which focused on the possibilities in sport for social interaction of (members of) different ethnic groups, and on the nature and quality of inter-ethnic encounters in sport.

### **What Kind of Interactions Do People Expect from Sport?**

Sport has the potential to realize interpersonal encounters regardless of social background, yet this does not mean that social background is irrelevant. On the

**Table 1 Different Patterns of Intrinsic Motivations to Do Sport among Four Social Groups**

Component Matrices	Sporters of Dutch origin					Sporters of Surinam and Antillian origin					Sporters of Turkish origin					Sporters of Moroccan origin				
	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5
Like to do sport for sociability	.560			.595				-.415			.544				-.457					.749
Like to do sport with others	.719			.649						.412			.667		.483					-.747
Like sport to belong to a group	.712			.806									.795		.680					.454
Like sport to meet other people	.792			.794				.611					.491		.794					
Like sport with people like myself	.454		.505	.490		.620		.540		.628					.511		.437			.659
Like individual sports	.662				.417	.625		.554							-.530		.794			
Like to do sport to distinguish myself from others	.496				.456	.409	-.556					.800			.484					-.642
Like to do sport to meet new people	.690			.671	.435			.768							.809					
Like to do sport to be busy with myself	.741				.544										.626					.527
Like to do sport with people from my own social group			.761	.500	-.435	.541		.494		.597										.864
Like to do sport with different kinds of people				-.613	.632					.661										
Like sport exclusively for myself	.511			-.408		.507	.638								-.527		.511			-.511

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

contrary, some participants see social crossovers and inter-cultural exchanges via sport activities as a positive experience, while others may evaluate it more negatively. Our analysis showed diverging evaluations of ethnically mixed sport among the various social groups (Duyvendak et al., 1998). To comprehend these different evaluations, we used an adapted version of the Attitude Towards Physical Activity (ATPA) Scale<sup>5</sup> to establish and measure the intrinsic motivations of individuals who participate in sport. This scale, developed by Kenyon (1968a, 1968b) differentiated several distinct intrinsic motivations for sport activities: *health, sensation, aesthetic experiences, catharsis, ascetic experiences* and *social experiences*. Since our study focused on the possibilities of different types of social interaction within the context of sport activities, we limited ourselves to motivations related to social experiences.

In order to measure the level of meaningful exchange, we distinguished six sub-dimensions within social experience motivations, each of which was measured with a unique set of questions (see Singer, 1980) addressed to a representative sample<sup>6</sup> of the population of the city of Rotterdam in 1998 (see Krouwel and Boonstra, 2001):

- Do sport participants want to meet people from ‘their own group’ or new people outside ‘their own group’?
- Do they prefer to be in a social setting with a more homogeneous composition or desire a more diverse and heterogeneous social context?
- Do people wish to achieve individual results, or practise sports in a team or collective?
- Do sport participants seek solitude during sports activities or more sociability and extravert social exchanges?
- Do they want to meet people and establish meaningful social contacts or do they simply want to practise sport to better their individual (physical) development and condition?
- Do respondents prefer sports activities in which they can reconfirm their present identity, or do they seek activities in which they can differentiate themselves from others?

Using factor-analysis over the entire sample, we extracted three underlying factors that motivate people to participate in sports activities. The first is the ‘*sociability-dimension*’ on which scores converge that relate to ‘heterogeneous social settings’ and ‘meeting people and extravert social exchanges’. At the same time ‘reconfirming existing identities’ is part of this dimension. A second factor loads heavily on items related to competitive, individual sports activities in which one can differentiate oneself from others. We have termed this the ‘*individuality-dimension*’. The third factor we extracted combines items involving motivations related to ‘meeting people from my own group’, ‘individual development’ and negative correlation’s with items such as ‘meeting people from outside their own group’, indicating an ‘*own-group dimension*’ (Table 1).

Our findings showed that sport participants in Rotterdam who are motivated to *meet* people from different ethnic backgrounds and who look for heterogeneous social contexts are scarce. In addition, we found wide-ranging differences in patterns of intrinsic motivations *between* various ethnic groups (see also Elling



and De Knop, 1998). Dutch autochthonous participants are primarily motivated by items related to the 'sociability dimension', they want to meet people, also outside their 'own group', yet they also want to be able to distinguish themselves from others during sports activities. Participants with a background in former Dutch colonies such as Surinam, Aruba and the Dutch Antilles, have relatively similar motivational patterns to Dutch autochthonous participants in terms of 'external group orientation', although they prefer more individual sports than team-sports and do not seek very heterogeneous contexts. Participants of Turkish origin are more motivated to participate in sport activities with members of their own group. A 'sense of belonging' and 'reinforcement of identity' seem to be strong motivations for social interaction in the context of sport for members of the Turkish minority group. Finally, participants with a Moroccan background are even more oriented towards their own group. Furthermore, they seek more individual sports activities and they are less motivated for social interaction through sport. For this group, sport is more an activity in which one can be solitary and away from societal structures, to work on your individual (physical) development, rather than seeking meaningful social interaction.

The different patterns of motivation found among sport participants from different ethnic groups in Rotterdam, and particularly the orientation of Turkish and Moroccan participants towards more individual development and collective identity-bolstering, clearly contradict the assumption that most sport activities are suited to meaningful social interaction between members of divergent ethnic groups. Other studies also point to the strong preference of ethnic minorities to spend their leisure time in a mono-ethnic environment (Elling and De Knop, 1998; Janssens and Bottenburg, 1999). This ethnic separation in spare time seems to be a conscious choice to escape the marginalization in other social spheres. The preference to be among one's ethnic fellows *originates* not from negative experiences during sport activities but from negative experiences in other social spheres. During leisure time there is a clear wish to be among those with whom social interaction is uncomplicated, symmetrical and meaningful. The choice to spend leisure time in a 'conserving' environment is also visible when we consider sport involvement over the life span of participants. At a very young age, children with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds mix easily and often in the sport clubs of Rotterdam. Yet, after puberty, when identity formation is more stable, we see a large number of ethnic-minority participants leaving ethnically mixed sport organizations to join mono-ethnic sport clubs (or leaving organized sport altogether).

On the basis of our findings on intrinsic motivation patterns and sport careers we conclude that it is doubtful that leisure activities such as sport are the optimal social sphere to increase the level of ethnically mixed social interaction and meaningful inter-ethnic exchanges at the cognitive level (Duyvendak and Krouwel, 1999). For many members of ethnic minorities, sport as a heterogeneous social sphere has little appeal beyond puberty. As a consequence, the use of sport activities for inter-ethnic socializing is problematic. Forced intermingling in sport is no solution either, for exactly the same reasons. It can easily have an opposite effect: an even larger exodus of ethnic minority-participants from sport organizations, and thus less inter-ethnic social interaction.

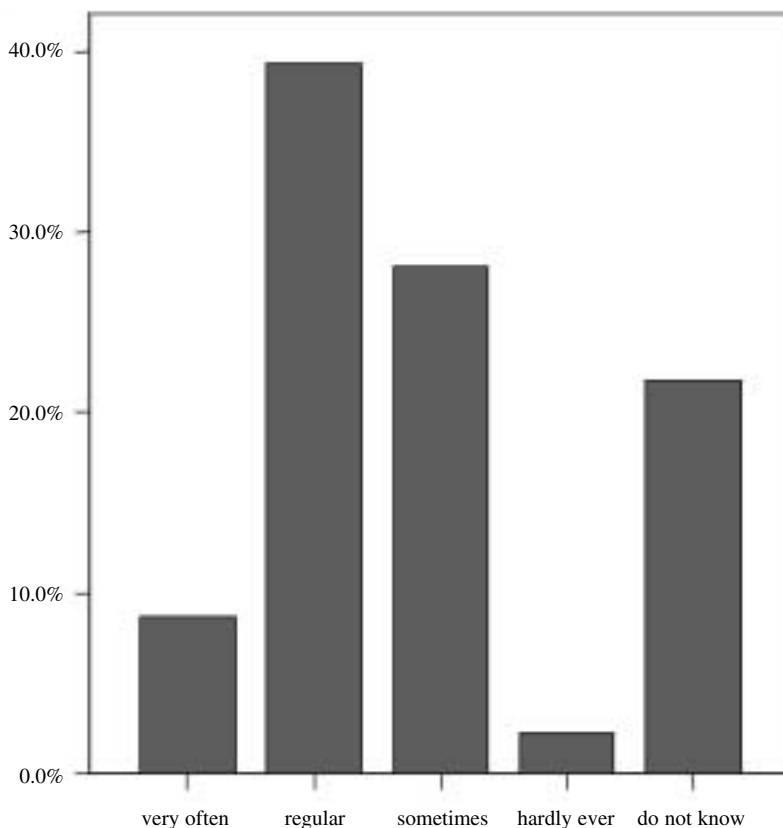
Does the practice of (voluntary) ethnic bonding in sport activities mean that the consequence of ethnic separation is widely accepted among participants? No. Almost all of the people we interviewed emphasized the need for more inter-ethnic activities and interaction (Duyvendak et al., 1998). However, we found that opinions in favour of intermingling were used selectively. Most respondents expressed an aversion to mono-ethnic sport activities by Turks and Moroccans, and also expressed resistance to separate sport activities by Jews or homosexuals. Other forms of segregation were less disputed. Students were mostly allowed to have their own (elitist) clubs and, segregated sport activities for men and women, for the old and the young, are accepted as a fact of life.

## Negative Social Encounters

Another aspect that is often overlooked by advocates of inter-ethnic social intermingling through sports is that when (inter-ethnic) sporting encounters occur, they are not always friendly and positive. Here as well, negative social relations from outside the world of sport influence what happens in sport activities. Harsh ethnic confrontations seem to reflect other societal tensions – tense relations in daily life that occasionally ‘override’ the potentially fraternizing effect of sport. In 2002, we tested these and other assumptions over violence in amateur sport activities in a survey of 819 respondents in Rotterdam (Veldboer et al., 2003).<sup>7</sup> From our survey, and other studies, it is evident that violence and aggression occur quite frequently in amateur sport (see also Grosze, 1997; Guilbert, 2004). One-third of our respondents claimed to have witnessed a negative incident in the amateur sport realm (expressions of discrimination, threats, intimidation, fighting or molestation of referees) (Figure 1). It needs to be emphasized that negative experiences are largely related to team sports and ball games, such as hockey, water polo, and especially to the largest sport activity in the Netherlands: soccer among males. Moreover, the respondents noted a trend of increasing violent and negative incidents over time in amateur sport.

From this general picture of negative forms of social interaction, we can move to a more specific analysis of problematic encounters between (members of) different ethnic groups in recreational soccer games in Rotterdam. Similar to other large cities in the Netherlands, the city of Rotterdam is increasingly ethnically heterogeneous. In the younger cohorts of this city a small majority belongs now to an ethnic minority (showing the inappropriateness of these terms). Not surprisingly, this spills over into the sports clubs, whose (juvenile) membership composition transformed substantially since the 1970s, resulting in changes and tensions within the traditionally ‘Dutch’ sports organizations, and especially visible in soccer. Traditional patterns of behaviour (such as parent volunteers coaching and transporting teams) are under duress as parents from ethnic minority backgrounds do not automatically adopt similar codes of behaviour. Sometimes even a common language is lacking (Veldboer et al., 2003).

After puberty, the composition of soccer clubs becomes more ethnically homogeneous. With homogeneous teams of different ethnic origins now facing each other, this leads sometimes to tensions as well, mostly following the same



**Figure 1** Reported Frequency of Verbal and Physical Violence in Amateur Sport in Rotterdam

pattern: autochthonous teams tend to score high on verbal violence and ethnic minority teams on physical violence (Janssens and Bottenburg, 1999). The relevant question is whether these problematic inter-ethnic encounters in soccer are related to the sport activities, or to tensions from outside the field of play. And, if the latter is the case, are these confrontations 'discharging' social tensions and frustrations (Kenyon's dimension of catharsis), or do aggressive games between different ethnic teams also 'recharge' societal antagonism?

By asking research participants to describe aggressive situations on the soccer field in detail, we found that soccer players who perceive a strong presence of physical and verbal violence make most attribution to the game itself (see also Guilbert, 2004). A certain degree of physical contact is unavoidable and, regardless of social backgrounds, this leads easily to confrontations. Harassing a nearby opponent, 'if necessary' by foul play or verbal insults, is furthermore often accepted and used as a game tactic. Another overall feature is that soccer seems to reinforce a sense of antagonism and one-sidedness. The causes of conflict are hardly ever sought within one's own ranks; it is always the other person

or team that crossed the line of still acceptable 'masculine' behaviour. Even well-trained soccer referees find it difficult in these circumstances to see all (hidden) fouls and to regulate the game. In the Rotterdam case, the numerous recreational games at clubs every weekend are usually refereed by (often low-skilled) volunteers. For these referees it is certainly difficult to control an aggressive game.

The survey results made clear that, next to all these 'inside' causes, the background of opponents is seen as an extra risk for a heated atmosphere. As in many other countries, soccer attracts mostly lower social strata individuals, from both autochthonous Dutch and ethnic minority groups, partly living in difficult and competitive circumstances. Almost all respondents stated that ethnic antagonism in cities considerably strengthened sporting rivalry. Games between clubs of different ethnic composition are perceived as potentially the most violent, and these thoughts frequently become self-fulfilling prophecies. So, violence in soccer games can be seen as both externally and internally driven.

To curb increasing inter-ethnic tensions and aggression, clubs have sometimes taken drastic measures: some have requested to play in different competitions outside the city, thus avoiding teams of different ethnic backgrounds. Other sports clubs in amateur football have already decided to limit the number of members with non-autochthonous Dutch ethnic backgrounds out of fear of inter-ethnic tensions within their ranks, and also to maintain 'a strong identity and a certain club atmosphere' (Veldboer et al., 2003). Respondents pointed out that increased violence led many referees to resign, and that players 'who are sick of it' abandon the game and seek more individual or modular opportunities for sports activities. The result is, clearly, increasing avoidance of soccer players from different ethnic backgrounds, less positive inter-ethnic interaction and more stigmatization. Several respondents suggested that these negative experiences of (inter-ethnic) foul play in sport are spilling over into everyday life, in the same manner as frustrations from other social spheres are taken on to the playing field.

## **Conclusion: 'A Society in Ruins', Reconditioned by Sport?**

In the Netherlands, there is concern about the lack of social cohesion, social and economic segregation and inter-ethnic tension. After the rise of Fortuyn and his followers the issue of social integration has become a central political priority at the local and national level of policymaking. Policymakers seek a solution for these social ills in policies of inter-ethnic blending. One area seen as promising for 'trouble-free' blending among members of different ethnic groups is amateur sport and particularly sports clubs.

In two studies conducted in the city of Rotterdam, we found that – although there are more opportunities in sport to meet other people than in most other social spheres – inter-ethnic interaction is not occurring 'spontaneously' in sport activities and these encounters are not trouble-free. First we found diverging patterns of motivations for sport participation between participants from different ethnic origins, and strong preferences for mono-ethnic environments among the majority of participants with a non-autochthonous Dutch ethnic background.

Sport activities seem to perform a strong function in the reinforcement of existing (ethnic) identities, rather than in new identity formation. However, this longing to be among one's fellows in leisure time activities should be understood in a broader, structural perspective. For ethnic minority groups, sport activities are particularly useful to temporarily get away from social spheres with tense relations (the neighbourhood, the school, the workplace) and to seek 'shelter' among members with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, we found that if ethnic groups meet each other within the context of a mixed competition, these shelters easily transform into an arena. In soccer the result of inter-ethnic encounters is not always a peaceful and meaningful exchange. This can be explained both by competitive and physical elements of the game itself, and by the fact that uncomfortable inter-ethnic encounters in public spaces and other social spheres are imported into these sports activities. In some ways, recreational soccer even seems to magnify inter-ethnic differences and tensions: unequal grasps of language, verbal abuse and discrimination easily lead to violent behaviour in a context of direct (sporting) confrontation.

Obviously, the assumption that mere contact in the sphere of recreational sport between members of different ethnic groups will automatically lead to more mutual understanding and to further meaningful exchanges at the cognitive level has to be rejected. The *contact-hypothesis*, seemingly so adequate for sport, is in fact naive with regard to leisure time activities. The idea that recreational sport can counter tense social interaction in other social spheres is repudiated by our two studies. In fact, it is the other way around: the potential bridging capacity of sport is – in two ways – almost nullified by the influence tensions brought from outside sport. First, tensions and discrimination in other societal spheres appear to cause the most marginalized ethnic minorities, those with a Turkish or Moroccan background, to prefer to be part of ethnically homogeneous teams. Second, as far as these teams encounter teams with another ethnic background in mixed competitions, the societal tensions manifest themselves once again in the play itself and are sometimes even magnified. For sport encounters between different groups, the *hypothesis of competition*, suggesting that group boundaries are reinforced, seems more appropriate.

These observed processes should lead to some reflection among policy-makers about their focus on inter-ethnic blending. Mono-ethnic sports organizations should not automatically be viewed as negative and working against social cohesion. If members of ethnic minorities are forced, against their own will, to associate in sport with autochthonous Dutch men and women, it might have negative consequences. The result may well be less participation together (the exit option) or negative encounters, all leading to even fewer possibilities and efforts to understand the drives, norms and values of others. The social capital approach suggests that participation, even in mono-ethnic civic organizations, is better than no participation at all. Government policies should therefore concentrate on providing the basic infrastructure for social participation and avoid a politics of blending coercion. Finally, staff members in sport should – instead of merely ignoring aggression to keep up the good name of sport – recognize more precisely patterns of conflict and violence in order to give instructions to referees and players for effective ways to handle and respond to (inter-ethnic) aggression.

It is not our intent to over-emphasize the negative aspects of sports participation. We acknowledge the positive effects the practice of physical training and competition can have on people. We do intend, however, to warn against the rosy picture that is sometimes sketched about sports activities, and their ability to integrate new groups and overcome inter-ethnic tensions in other social spheres. Sports can recondition individual persons, but perhaps not society as a whole.

## Notes

1. The use of concepts like ethnic minority is sensitive, both in terms of being understandable for people not acquainted with the Dutch situation and in a more normative way, since concepts used by the 'autochthonous' majority are sometimes quite discriminating against minorities (for example, use of the term 'ethnic groups' to label Dutch people with a Moroccan and Turkish background seems to suggest that the autochthonous Dutch do not have an ethnicity themselves). In this article we use terms that are commonly used in the Netherlands (such as autochthonous) but we try to show their discriminating implications as well.
2. Dutch authorities designate a school as a 'black school' if 70 percent or more of its pupils have at least one non-Dutch parent. According to this definition there are about 322 black schools with an annual increase of three percent (NRC, 1 June 2002). The definition of 'non-Dutch' pupils is complex. They are children of which at least one parent is from a non-English speaking country outside of Europe (with the exception of Indonesia, a heritage of Dutch colonialism) or from Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Surinam, the Dutch Antilles or Aruba. In addition, also children who have at least one parent who is recognized as a refugee or belongs to the Moluccan population are also considered as non-Dutch. Black schools received extra government funding and teaching staff. Of the 1.5 million pupils in basic schools, slightly over 200,000 pupils can be considered 'non-Dutch'. Of these 200,000, almost 60 percent attend a 'black school'.
3. This concept from social psychology refers to the phenomenon that contact with another person leads to a more differentiated judgement or evaluation and a higher level of mutual understanding. The idea is that cognitive exchange decreases the chances of stereotyping. Ideally both individuals have equal status in the contact situation, they share an activity or have a common purpose for their interaction, and relevant authorities provide recognition or status to the contact situation.
4. As one of the major European treaties, the Treaty of Amsterdam was approved by the European Council held in Amsterdam in June 1997 and signed on 2 October 1997 by the Foreign Ministers of the 15 member countries of the European Union. On 1 May 1999, it came into force having been ratified by all the member states. The Treaty regulates the relationship of EU-citizens towards the European institutions, provides the groundwork for a common foreign policy and a reform of the EU institutions.
5. Our attitudinal measurement, using a Likert scale, was developed to tap the respondents' negative or positive evaluations towards the type and quality of sport participation. This type of attitudinal measurement has often been used when direct observation is difficult or impossible and has proven productive in many studies (Silverman and Subramaniam, 1999). One of the most authoritative and frequently used attitudinal scales with regard to physical activity is Kenyon's Attitude Towards Physical Activity (ATPA) Scale (see Brown and Kenyon, 1968; Kenyon 1968a, 1968b). This scale contains six dimensions that are concerned with how each person evaluates physical activity: 1) as a social experience, 2) as a health and fitness activity, 3) as the pursuit of 'danger' and excitement, 4) as an aesthetic experience, 5) as catharsis, or 6) as an ascetic experience. The inclusion of a sociability dimension versus more ascetic and personal development dimensions makes this scale relevant for our study. Other scales such as the Children's ATPA-scale (Simon and Smoll, 1974), the Sports Motivation Scale (SMS-scale, see Pelletier et al., 1995) or scales that measure motivations and orientations towards sport are either too specific and/or lacking the crucial sociability dimension (see for example, Alderman

- and Wood, 1976; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Gill et al., 1983; Gould et al., 1985; Sapp and Haubenstricker, 1978).
6. The survey on Rotterdam, sports, participation and integration was, in 1997, part of a broader omnibus-research on leisure time. The total responding group (*N*) consisted of 1338 persons. For our survey we co-operated with the centre for research and statistics for Rotterdam (COS). See also Centrum voor onderzoek en statistiek (1998).
  7. The survey on aggression in sport was sent out in the autumn of 2002 to 1800 people living in Rotterdam; 46 percent responded to the questionnaire (*N*= 819).

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