



PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND SPORT AMONG IMMIGRANTS: BUILDING THE DECISION

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Summary:

Introduction: The current European society is diverse by nature and must face up to the challenge of being inclusive. Some previous studies have proposed the possibility of using sport as a strategy for inclusion. Given that practising sport among immigrants is, in general, lower than that of nationals, for our first step we propose identifying the factors perceived as barriers and stimuli in practising sport among immigrants in the regions of Occitania, in France, of Piedmont, in Italy, and Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, in Spain.

Methodology: Descriptive and interpretative study using qualitative methodology by creating focus groups made up by the sports actors involved in the creation and maintenance of opportunities for practising sport in the regions involved in the project, as well as adults and children as of the age of 11 years –regardless of whether they practise sport or not– immigrants and residents of these regions.

Results: Health, associating sports with fun, the possibility of growing as people, sports as a space for building relationships and the influence of a trusted person have been identified as stimuli for immigrants to practise sports. The barriers detected include fear of not being accepted, responsibilities, the existence of social and economic problems, and a lack of political commitment towards grassroots sport. We have identified certain elements of an ambivalent nature, which can help as well as interfere, and these are football as a predominant practice, a lack of knowledge of the language, competitiveness and culture.

Conclusions: As practical implications of the results it is worth highlighting the proposal of activities of global and local cultural identification, and based on aspects that are alternative to the ethnic aspect; the availability of public areas for informally practising sports, changes in the strategy for promoting activities, establishing synergies between professionals from different areas, networking of the involved actors, comprehensive training of sports instructors, the participation of the interested parties in designing the activities and the systematic assessment of the social performance of the programmes.

Key words: *Sport, Physical exercise, Social inclusion, Barriers, Stimuli, Immigrants*

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Introduction

Europe, as a continent, is populated by men and women from many different origins. Firstly due to it being an area with vast internal mobility, and secondly due to the migration that arrives into Europe being characterised for its diversity of flows originating in all regions of the world (1). If we only take into consideration the restricted scope of the European Union (EU), the demographic and social mosaic is also exceedingly varied. In essence this is due to the fact that the EU is made up by 28 different states. But also due to the internal and external migration dynamics; which affect in so far as economic, social and humanitarian aspects. Beyond internal diversity, in January 2016, the EU-28 was made up by 20.7 million people from non-Member States, representing 4.1% of the population (2). With regard to refugees, the statistics for 2016 indicate a discreet drop in the number of asylum seekers applying for the first time, in relation to the same circumstance in the previous year, while maintaining the diversity of origins (3). According to the same source, Syrian men and women presented the highest number of applications in 13 of the 28 EU Member States and constituted the largest group of seekers followed by applicants from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria, in that order. However, the diversity doesn't stop with the origin of the immigrants and refugees. Firstly because access to a European nationality increases year on year, and this leads to the people who have gained nationality and their families disappearing from the migration statistics while the diversity with which they contribute remains, and also because the cross-linking of diversities contributed by each person based on the gender, generation, level of education, social or religious status, among other aspects, adds to the national and ethnic diversity. All this together draws a complex scenario made up by diverse groups, between them and among them, with specific needs for acknowledgement and inclusion that require specific actions to such an end.

Beyond the impact on the practise of sport has on physical health, the effects of sport are fully accepted in so far as the improvement this has on the psychological and social well-being of the people practising sports (4,5), as well as its use in promoting intercultural contact and helping to include people and collectives at risk of exclusion (6), despite this often having discreet and controversial effects (6–9). It is therefore advisable to be prudent in the face of euphoric expectations relating to sport as a strategy for inclusion, given that the results, if any, will not be immediate as an exclusive effect of the sport won't be either.(8,10)

It is known that in order to make the most of the benefits provided by physical exercise this must be performed as a leisure activity, as it has been proven that vigorous physical exercise within a work context does not have the same effects as when it is practised as a leisure activity, and that it can even be detrimental (11,12). The percentage of immigrant men and women who perform vigorous tasks exceeds that of their Spanish counterparts (13), while some studies carried out in Spain also indicate that the participation of the immigrant population in sports activities is quite low, when compared to that of the national population (14–18), and that the levels of highest participation are seen among children and teenagers (16). With regard to female immigrants, the percentage of sports activities is even lower, within



the heterogeneous group made up by immigrants, women are the ones who are least involved in activities of this nature (16,18,19). Despite the fact that the studies on which these statements are based are works of a limited scope and from several years ago, the exploitation of the microdata from the European Health Survey in Spain (EHSS) from 2014 confirms them and allows to generalise them (13). The exploitation of the data provided by the EHSS (13) allows us to state that in the case of men, sports practise among immigrants is below that of nationals in all age groups ranging from 15 to 49 years, both measured based on minutes of physical exercise per week as well as based on their self-assessment of a sedentary lifestyle. The case of young girls is almost identical, with the only difference that the prevalence of a sedentary lifestyle among Spanish girls aged 15 to 19 years is slightly above that stated by immigrant girls of the same age group (13). The disaggregation of data by ages is important, otherwise the conclusions could be mistaken, given that these are populations with such different age profiles. This is the case of the Survey on sports habits in Spain that was conducted in 2010 (15), which globally provides figures on the participation of immigrants in sports activities exceeding those of national citizens (45 % vs. 40 %), while the analysis of the data by age groups allows to state that sports practises among immigrants in all age groups below the age of 55 years is clearly below that of national citizens. The results report of the 2015 Survey on Sports Habits in Spain (20) indicates that sports practise among non-nationals remains lower than that of nationals, even without disaggregating on the basis of age groups. However, it is true that sports practise among people with dual nationality is generally slightly above that of Spanish nationals (20), a fact that may suggest acculturation as a determining factor in so far as practising sports. Unfortunately, the report does not disaggregate this data by gender and age and, therefore, does not allow to compare the particularities of sports practise according to these variables (20).

With regard to memberships of sports associations, it seems once again that the foreign population reflect sports club membership levels that are below those reported for national citizens (17). The exploitation of the 2007 National Survey on Immigrants indicates that only 5.1% of these are members of a sports entity aimed at the general population and when looking into sports institutions specifically aimed for immigrants, the percentage drops to 2 % (21). Despite this, it is worth noting that entities of a sporting nature aimed at the general public are, from among all the possibilities, the types of association that are most widely accepted among immigrants, a fact that highlights the inclusive potential of sport.

Outside of Spain, studies continue to indicate that despite the benefits attributed to practising sport, there are minority groups, such as collectives of immigrants or people with a family history of migration, that live a more sedentary lifestyle than the general population (22–27). This highlights the obvious need to promote sports among newly arrived groups and their families in order to take advantage of all the benefits that practising sport can provide, and directly to the groups towards which these actions should be aimed, and indirectly to society as a whole. However, it must be noted that the simple offer of opportunities for practising sport does not ensure the participation of the people who need it the most, and that neither does the participation, in itself, guarantee the social change or inclusion (8,28).



As diverse as the European society may be, if it is true that practising sport can help to improve health and well-being, contribute to improving mobility and social inclusion, and fostering equitable intercultural relationships; it is worth taking advantage of this fact. Despite this, the complexity of the task leads to the impossibility of improvising the use of sport for this purpose and it requires specific knowledge and planning according to the people towards which it is aimed and the objectives that are to be achieved (8). Up until now, research into facilitating factors and barriers affecting physical exercise and sport among the different populations is limited and has mainly been carried out in the United Kingdom and in Nordic countries (29). There is a need for localised studies in other European areas that take a closer look at the research carried out on determining factors of physical exercise among different populations, its effects on different territories and social groups, and the manner in which the determining factors interact among each other (29). That is why the main objective of this project focuses on identifying the factors perceived as barriers and stimuli in practising sport and leisurely physical exercise, among immigrants and people with a family history of immigration who live in the regions of Occitania, in France; Piedmont, in Italy; and the regions of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, in Spain. The specific objectives of this project are the following:

- 1.- Knowing the elements which immigrants –children and adults, who practise sports and those who don't– and the agents involved in the promotion of sport in the aforementioned regions perceive as stimuli for practising sport among the immigrant population.
- 2.- Knowing the elements which immigrants –children and adults, who practise sports and those who don't– and the agents involved in the promotion of sport in the aforementioned regions perceive as barriers for practising sport.
- 3.- Understanding the mechanisms involved in the decision made by the immigrants in the aforementioned regions in so far as practising sport or not doing so.
- 4.- Inferring and proposing actions for improvement that contribute towards increasing the participation of immigrants in sports activities.

Material and methods

Descriptive and interpretative study using qualitative methodology.

The subject of the study is the perception of stimuli and barriers for practising sport among immigrants. The units of analysis are the regions participating in the project: Occitania (France), Piedmont (Italy) and Catalonia and the Balearic Islands (Spain).

The study population are the sports actors (SA) of the regions participating in the project which are involved in creating and maintaining opportunities for practising sport such as instructors, volunteers, managers and personnel from the public institutions, entities and associations related to the world of physical exercise and sport; and the adults and children aged 11 years or more –who practise sport or not– who are immigrants or national citizens descending from families of newcomers and who live in the aforementioned regions.

The “immigrant” category is defined by the nationality. For the study, immigrants have been considered as the persons who do not hold the nationality of the country in which they live, and the persons who hold the nationality of the country where they live, but one or both of their parents or grandparents are not of that nationality. We consider that the participation in the study of this profile of informants –the nationals descending from families of newcomers– is important due to the fact that, although attaining the nationality is an undeniable channel for accessing citizenship, the fact remains that the migratory history partly determines the processes of settlement and these in turn determine the life conditions and the specific needs (30).

The concept of sport on which this project is based is that included in the European Sports Charter, prepared by the European Conference of Sports Ministers of the European Council in 1992, and revised by the same body in 2001 (31). According to this document, sport is understood to be “any kind of physical exercise which, by means of an organised or other participation, has the final purpose of expressing or improving physical or mental condition, developing social relations or achieving results in competitions at all levels”.

The data has been gathered between February and September 2017 by carrying out focus groups on the elements that are perceived as stimuli or barriers for practising sport among immigrants. The focus groups have been segmented into three different profiles:

- Sports actors.
- Boys and girls aged 11 to 17 years, who practise sport or not, who are immigrants or nationals of different non-national origins.
- Adults, who practise sport or not, who are immigrants or nationals of different non-national origins.

After having respected the segmentation category, the aim has been to ensure that the discussion group was as uniform as possible.

The recruitment of participants for the discussion groups has been carried out by the institutions promoting sport in the different areas participating in the study based on their contact networks. In France the recruitment has been carried out by the *Comité Régional de l’Union Sportive de l’Enseignement du Premier Degré Occitanie*, in Italy this tasks was carried out by the *Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti Piemonte*, in Catalonia by the *Unió de Consells Esportius de Catalunya* and in the Balearic Islands, by the *Direcció General d’Esports i Joventut* of the Government of the Balearic Islands.

The discussion group meetings were held in a familiar environment for the participants, which was previously agreed by participants and researchers. The data collection sessions were conducted by two researchers. Both of which acted as moderators during the sessions.

The communication between the researchers and the participants in the discussion groups took place in the official language of the area. The discussion groups held in Italy have made use of a liaison translation



service. The sessions have been recorded in audio format. The recordings of the sessions were transcribed and then translated into Catalan.

Just before commencing the discussion, the informants filled in a questionnaire on social and demographic data and signed an informed consent.

The immigrant focus groups' discussion started by asking the participants to explain what the concept of sport meant to them. After that they were invited to defend their position as sports participants or not and to provide arguments to convince those who thought otherwise. The focus groups with sports actors were asked to choose the elements which, in their opinion, represent the most important obstacle and motivation for practising sport among immigrants, and to defend their decision.

Analysis of the results

The content of the transcriptions of the work carried out with the focus groups has been analysed attending to the objectives of the study. The first level of the analysis has been concurrent with the data collection and has aimed to identify emerging issues with a view to adapting the sample and data collection actions to the knowledge gaps. The second level of the analysis was designed to segment the data into units of meaning and to code them into categories using open code, which at a higher level of organisation have been grouped into meta-categories. The interpretation of the data has proposed establishing relationships between the elements of the same organisation level as well as between the different levels of organisation of the content.

The systematisation of the categorisation and analysis have been carried out using the programme ATLAS-ti, version WIN 5.0.

Ethical considerations

The study protocol has been approved by the ethical research committee of reference of the Rovira i Virgili University. All the people who have participated in this study have done so voluntarily. Before participating, they were informed of the objectives and methodology of the study, have had the chance to ask questions and have signed an informed consent guaranteeing their anonymity and confidentiality in the handling of the data, and its use solely for research purposes. In the case of minors, the consent was signed by the adults responsible for them.

The publication of the results has eliminated or modified all references to persons or clubs in order to ensure they cannot be identified.

Results:

A total of 10 discussion groups have been conducted. Three in Occitania, three in Piedmont, three in Catalonia and one in the Balearic Islands. In total, 62 people have participated, of which 51.6% were women, 32.2% were sports actors, 9.7% adults and 58.1% were teenagers. Of the adults and teenagers, 55% define themselves as sports participants. In so far as the nationality, none of the adults had nationalities of their country of residence while of the teenagers, only 14% were non-nationals. The



composition of the discussion groups and the profile of the participants in each group can be seen in table 1.

The presentation of the results has been organised based on a subsequent grouping of the emerging categories. This grouping has been structured into four large areas: *Stimuli for the practise: things that help*, *The barriers*, *Of ambivalent meaning* and *The challenge of continuity*.

STIMULI FOR THE PRACTISE: THINGS THAT HELP

For health and feeling good: *mens sana in corpore sano?*

Among the stimuli of an individual nature, the reference to health is present in almost all discourses, even those regarding children. The practise of sport is assumed as being a healthy activity, acknowledging the need for improving or maintaining good health as a powerful incentive for taking up sport. The children say: “I have written health because when we move our body, sometimes our body needs it to feel better” (FG6-BG), and also the adults:

Six years ago, the City Council created a circuit called the “health track”. Behind the city there is a health track that... yes, yes, which is 1 km long, and every 200 metres there is an area for... for exercises, another one for climbing stairs, a bar for hanging... [...]. On this track they exercise and chat. At the beginning there weren’t many people. But if you go there in the evening, it is packed with people... It’s really good! Now it is used by elderly people, children, people of all ages. It is a really nice place. Our people go there, the Africans... everyone living in Borgoro goes there to play, meet-up [...]. It is also a place where immigrants can meet-up with each other and with the elderly people they care for. Evidently, those who arrive walking are sat on a bench, and among them [the carers] they have somewhere to talk in their language (FG4-A).

These statements unveil a concept of health which goes beyond the strictly physical scope and in addition embraces aspects involving health and mental, emotional and social well-being in interaction. One of the informants makes perfect reference when talking of activities organised in the heart of the Romanian community in Borgoro. A community in which many women work caring for elderly people. A task that adds an additional burden of suffering to the work problems inherent to the jobs involving caring for people:

They have one day a week free of charge and on this day we do activities for the body and mind, aimed at not thinking for a while, removing themselves from this problem. Otherwise, so many years as carers would make them ill. It’s called the illness of the carer because they take on the problems of the elderly people they care for. And at a given moment, they are talking to you, and they start talking about their problem (FG4-A).

In fact, the contribution of sports towards well-being and mental health is highly present in the statements provided by the informants. Both in adults: “It’s just than when you practise sport, you feel positive. The feeling... it stops... you sometimes feel that... it stops you from feeling depressed” (FG10-A), and in children: “I like sport because I spend time with my friends. I really like it because it relaxes me” (FG8-BG).

Without stepping away from the mental health scope, it is important to acknowledge the pretty much unanimous opinion that physical exercise is a healing balm against everyday concerns, tensions and worries which, although they don’t kill us, neither do they let us live: “To allow my mind to distract itself, relax myself, stop thinking about so many things. If I’m worried about something that’s going on, I dance



a bit –I do some aerobics or Zumba– and this make me feel good, I am fine. I feel good, both physically and mentally. It makes me forget about my problems” (FG4-A). Or a good way of letting off steam: “Playing with a ball and feeling the ball at your feet, then the feeling when you aim and kick it really hard. Or when you look at the goalkeeper and *score* a great goal, right into the corner of the net, like Messi. And you feel great, afterwards. Yes, because you feel angry” (FG9-BG). This particularity of sport gains even more meaning when we think of people who, due to specific circumstances such as immigration, have to endure additional stress. According to our informants, sport helps face up to these situations as it provides an escape and dedication to those who need it the most: “It can even be an escape valve. For everyone... but maybe even more so for immigrants, because they undergo more stress, more difficulties. Then, at that moment [when practising sport] they think about themselves, about their own body, their own image...” (FG5-SA). That is the case for adult immigrants, but it also applies for children and teenagers, who despite having different problems, feel the same need to escape from the daily demands they endure as unachievable:

As he says, it's hard to talk about stress at this age, but friends, school... studying, fighting with friends, arguing at home with their parents, keeping things inside without being able to talk about them. Not being able to study for tomorrow, because I have possibly spent too much time practising sport, or with friends [...]. I don't know, I feel anxious because I can't... I'm scared of not getting good grades (FG6-BG).

The need for relating with other people in a relaxed environment, even more so when one lives in a complicated situation, would complete this polyhedral vision of health and well-being, and once again sport would be the path. One of the instructors working with immigrant teenagers in underprivileged neighbourhoods claims: “Meeting with others is not only important, but is actually of an urgent nature. I mean, that in our territory the fact of meeting with others is essential and sport is the chance to do so...” (FG1-SA). Despite the fact that in a context of practising sport in groups there can always be relational problems among the participants, the relationships that are established have been described as spontaneous, uninhibited and free: “Yes, it was an adrenaline rush, because when you're in a group and you dance, and laugh, it's not just about the sport you practise, it's the good feeling and all that, because aside from sport, you talk to people and...” (FG10-A). It's not just about making new acquaintances, it's the possibility of establishing relationships which, amidst the restrictions involved in everyday obligations, provide a feeling of freedom and happiness:

Normally when I practise sport with my friends, I'm having a good time. We joke, I enjoy myself... how to say it... I free myself from spending the entire day at school, sitting at my desk. And then, with sports, you can express yourself, you can jump, run without having to stop, you can feel greater freedom than if you are sitting at home or in school (FG6-BG).

A type of relationships that allow you to feel closer to people from very different social, economic and cultural backgrounds:

And then, in rugby there is a really cool thing which is the third part, when the local team invites the visiting team to a soft drink: juice, Coca-Cola, a hot dog or something like that and they talk about 'what a good tackle I had to deal with' and nobody cares about your religion, your gender, if you've got lots of money or hardly any...” (FG7-SA).



However, some of the informants have noted that sport can also be a health hazard. Practising sport at a top-level, and the media treatment this involves, transmit the idea of acceptance of inverting the values traditionally associated to sport, and places more importance on the need to win at any price, even if this involves sacrificing the most noble values such as the contribution towards the health and education of people:

Taking into account the evolution of the perspective of sports and our research, our mind turns to the image of doping, selling players, etc. To be frank, teenagers are very used to seeing this type of image and the first things that come to their mind are these types of images, a fact that comes into contradiction with the meaning of sport as health, citizenship, etc. (FG1-SA).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that some of the informants, when talking about health as a motivation for practising sport, are actually referring to the image. Some statements reveal how easy it is to mistake health for the image of a body according to certain beauty canons: “As she said, it’s good for the body. Burning calories or losing the odd kilo can never go wrong” (FG6-BG), even though we all know that the external or self-imposed pressure to have a certain image, has nothing to do with health. Especially when this involves children and teenagers.

Objective: having fun

Adults and children express their need to have fun and they see sports as a good way of achieving this:

I have chosen fun, because... it may be that immigrants have the need to enjoy themselves, to entertain themselves. It's a way to integrate and have fun (FG5-SA).

I have written fun, but why fun? Because I spend a lot of time studying, and also to do something different... Spend time with friends, have fun, enjoy myself, because otherwise I feel stuck (FG6-BG).

Fun is associated with sport and it is one of the things that make it attractive. In everyone’s eyes, but even more so for the people who feel the need to burn some steam, release tensions that accumulate at other times:

-[I do Taekwondo] because I feel great! Taekwondo is a good way of defending myself, improving health, for burning some steam and for having fun.

- For burning steam. It helps to burn anger! (FG1-SA).

Although fun is a much appreciated part of sport, it should also be used to generate allegiance among those who practise it, after this same component being acknowledged as a good incentive for initiating the activity. The leisurely component of sport is good in itself, and because of the fact that through fun we reach other milestones such a team work and shared responsibility, because fun makes easier other tasks which would otherwise prove daunting:

I make them collect the material by categories. 'We're made to collect the balls and we're given them as a prize'. 'Today, the under-10 will collect the balls'. 'Yippee!' The under-16 don't say yippee! each time, but the under-10... as it involves using a cart, they jump on and have a great time (FG7-SA).

Moreover, aware of the need to maintain fun as an element that favours continuity –even more so when the team is not very competitive– coaches prioritise fun over results and make sense of the activity by making it a pleasant and friendly experience:



And now you realise they are rugby players. That what they want is to have a good time. With the parents: 'When they arrive home, don't ask them whether they won or lost', ask them if they had a good time. 'Did you enjoy yourself?' Yes? Well that's all that matters'. Sometimes they lose, but have had a good time —because my ones have lost 90-0 this year and they are all new—, but they've had a great time because they tackled and have tried to better their mark (FG7-SA).

However, beyond the efforts of sports actors for making sport a fun activity, sport outside of clubs or schools, as a spontaneous activity which combines fun and friendship, has been seen in all groups of children:

- I play basketball and cycle... when playing basketball, I have fun with my friends. And when I cycle... I feel that I empty my mind.

-Question: and where do you play basketball?

-Next to my house there is a court (FG2-BG).

And with immigrant adults:

Because we don't go out much, because to go anywhere we need a car, but I don't drive. My husband is always working. But you've got to make up things to entertain the kids, and myself, of course. Because when I go out with the girls —we have four girls—. You can do whatever you want: dance, run, lots of activities and we have a great time. But not a professional activity (FG10-A).

Sports to grow citizens and people

The possibility of using sport as a strategy for personal growth and for transferring values has been acknowledged by adult informants as a motivation for promoting sport. In this sense, it is stated that the fact of sport being an activity which entails an explicitly accepted set of rules, teaches people to deal with their frustrations: "Whoever accepts a rule, the authority of a referee, whoever accepts the fact that they may win or lose, accepts being replaced" (FG1-SA), and to integrate significant learnings which can be transferred to other aspects of their realisation as citizens:

And why sport? I mean it could have been photography, painting? But, we prefer sport. Because sport is often our body in movement in space and when this body wants to develop itself, find its limit, it moves through space. Therefore, thanks to this learning on the playing field, one will learn to develop in another field that was unknown until then. And through learning from this new field, the person will learn to develop in another field. It is the institutors who carry out the task of teaching. And in addition, they will learn a rule, and this new rule will be more complicated (FG1-SA).

And why is this? Because it is thought that despite movement being something inherent to man, the manner of living this movement and expressing it must be carried out via rules: "In the measure in which movement is inherent to man, man has the need to express himself to the full potential via this movement. And it is sport, with its rules, with its entire structure, it is the best way of channelling this need" (FG5-SA). Although there are also other arguments. Sport cannot be conceived disconnected from the rest of social life. Sport reproduces the forms of relationship in the society in which it is immersed. The power, sexism, domination or abuse which are expressed on the playing field are the same as those which can be found off the playing field:

In October, team work, because we saw that the rugby-football reality —as we are the same club— was not healthy. It was not healthy. The coaches did not like me being there, as a woman, training, or as another sport. They could only see: 'They are taking our space', 'they are taking our field' or 'they are taking our players'. They weren't amused, in the beginning. I



went up to them and introduced myself: 'Hi, how are you? We've come to play rugby'. Initially, the coexistence was quite complicated (FG7-SA).

That is why the promoters of the sport express a clear intentionality, that of educating citizens through sport: "Our work is to convince that there is a social use [for sport], that it can help individuals to mature, to put them on the right path, to create free individuals" (FG1-SA). It was about creating, on the playing field, forms of relationship that are socially healthy because once they are internalised, they can be transferred to the rest of society.

Beyond sport as a tool for educating citizens, there is also an individual effect. The participants of the discussion groups associate practising sport with a series of positive effects on the personality. An improvement in self-esteem, as a direct and purely biological effect: "When a female, alike a man –I know this because I am a woman–, practises a sport, her self-esteem changes, the shower is incredible when you are absolutely drained, you are happier; I don't know what happens in your head. *Well*, yes. We do know: it is what happens to your hormones. It is amazing" (FG7-SA), or like an effect caused by an acknowledgement that is not obtained in other environments:

She has no friends at her school, because she is black and plays rugby, and she has no friends. She only plays whatever is played in the playground. If they're playing basketball, she plays; if they're playing football... And now, during the first few days she didn't pay much attention to the others, the ones from the private schools. 'Pairs!'. She never has a pair. And now, she is the best in the group. In the end, she also has certain traits that make her better than the others who are scared, who are more delicate, as I say. And she is stronger, she's more participative. She tries to be as good as everyone else. The others already assume that: 'Boys are better and faster'. And she is there competing with all the others. There are two who have become chums, and they now follow her, they laugh, sit together, play. And they are now a group, and when they play against another team, they ask her to be the captain. And you can see they are really proud of her, and you see her face and it's amazing. And I am really surprised, as I've seen the change since September. And her mother wants to give me gifts and she can't even pay her membership (FG7-SA).

There is also mention of the contribution of sport to the development of the skill for working in a team. On how sport teaches people to collaborate with other to reach the same goal: "Especially among children when you organise a team game, the team shares the same common objective. You share an objective and sharing this common objective brings the players together" (FG4-SA) and generates cohesion and a feeling of belonging: "We have our cry. And all categories use the same cry, everyone from 9 to 40 years, they all use the same cry and we come together in a circle, and you realise that this bond, a T-shirt, certain colours, a club or a sport and 'I play rugby' with pride also creates a family" (FG7-SA). Or how it helps to cultivate discipline: "And there is also the discipline. The discipline, because you can't work as a team without discipline" (FG10-A), and, in general, all those rules regarding behaviour and citizenship which can be transmitted through sport: "We sometime play very little rugby. That is why I say: 'First, people; then, athletes'. When they turn 16, they have grown up, by then they have already learnt, at least, the basics of sport." (FG7-SA).

Sport as a relational space

Beyond recognising the contributions of sport to the social aspect of health, practising sport must be seen as a relational space par excellence. And this possibility which sport offers is, in itself, an invitation to



practise it. The possibility of making new acquaintances: “Surely to make new acquaintances, because sport has to be practised in small groups” (FG5-SA) and communicating beyond words: “That way people that may be from other cultures can express themselves. Emotions are a shared language, even more so than words, and then you can communicate your emotions through practising sport” (FG5-SA) are good arguments to begin to practise sport within a migratory context. As is the opportunity of getting to know new realities. In truth, it isn’t always about spontaneous activities. In the case of children, being in contact with the diverse reality surrounding them is often the result of the premeditation of the instructors, and sport is just an excuse:

When the children meet and are from different schools, we mix them up for the sport practice. Work is carried out inside and outside of the school. When they learn, the children carry out a sports activity. In parallel, when we organise meetings with other countries, when we create mixed teams and they meet to play together and don’t even talk the same language, they have to try to understand each other and this allows to create mixed teams (FG1-SA).

Sport is an excuse that allows to turn sports practice into an activity with the added value of facilitating relationships among different people and groups. In addition, the educational potential of sport as a strategy for the presentation of diversity free from prejudice is not limited to strictly practising sports activities and capitalising on everything that surrounds it, yet again as a premeditated activity:

When we organise meetings, not games... But when we meet with others and make changes, the children and teenagers can be players, referees, they can be secretaries and it may be that they welcome those visiting the school and they are shown where the changing rooms are, how to get there, maybe the person preparing the meals. It is through other tasks, and depending on the situation this could end up being a triumph. They can even explain the rules and how the sports day will play out (FG1-SA).

In so far as the social relationships, the children see in sport an opportunity to enjoy their friends and have fun: “I like playing [football] because my friends and I play well together and they enjoy playing” (FG8-BG). However, adult immigrants who have participated in this project have the need to make friends and, as seen, think that practising a sport will help them to make these friends. However, sport helps adults to relate even when they don’t practise it, as it facilitates the process for the parents of the children who practise sport to meet each other. And even more so, because this relational core surrounding the children, often gives rise to initiatives for the adults present to take part in some kind of sports activity: “Look, when I was at my son’s football game, I think they still do it. I don’t know when women’s day is or mother’s day, I don’t know. And the idea is for the mothers of one team to play against the mothers of the other team. Do you understand? That is really nice and good fun” (FG4-A).

Sport as an expression of trust: the significant person

It has already been seen that the consideration of sport as a space for relationships is a stimulus to practising sport. Along this same line, it is worth looking into the role of people who play a significant role in the decision to start practising a sport. The intervention of a close person, a work colleague, a family member, a friend, or a trusted professional, has been mentioned in almost all of the discussion groups, when dealing with children: “Because I saw my brother playing football, and I wanted to try it and I liked it (FG8-BG), with adults: “I began playing in 2001. Yes, a women’s team had been created and the



president knew my father, he asked him if my sisters and I –because I’ve also got two sisters– wanted to sign up and become part of this women’s team. And that is how we began and how it all started” (FG4-A). As well as when dealing with sports actors: “I don’t know... we ended up here thanks to someone I know who was playing this sport. And I maybe tried it and liked it, so I would then continue” (FG5-SA), and with participants: “I have been doing it for three years [boxing]. I started with my father. He practised it... and he encouraged me to try it (FG3-BG).

The influence of a significant person seems to be an important element in deciding to start practising a sport. This influence has a component of opportunity and a component of trust in the person making the proposal. It is the trust in a familiar person which helps to overcome the doubts or for them to not even come to light.

I also have lots of kids with ADHD. There is a psychologist I know who sends me all his patients aged 7 or 8 up until 16 years, because he says it is showing very good results and that on “Tuesdays and Thursdays, the children eat their dinner and fall asleep”. Their mothers say: “Please, could there be rugby practise every day of the week?”. They get home, have dinner and go to bed. And they have stopped their medication, because sports is working well for them (FG7-SA).

It is also possible that one takes advantage of a bond –consolidated or emerging– which, in general, presents physical exercise as an opportunity to practise a pleasant activity and create pleasurable interpersonal relationships: “I also go hiking with my family. We head somewhere and go hiking. We do it on Sundays and we all really enjoy it. Yes, even the dog comes” (FG2-BG).

The analysis of the attraction strategies through the significant person has brought to light a mixed strategy, which arises through the initiative of a professional and which, in light of the success, is warmly welcomed by other more informal promoters:

And now, by word of mouth, we have a group of kids with ADHD and we’ve had to pay more instructors, because in the end the exercises were becoming more complicated (FG7-SA).

The families are scared of trusting the teams with their children. But, we have been working in the neighbourhood for about 15 years and we know it is a task that makes slow advances, we realise we are reaping success from the actions aimed at teenagers. The main reason is because we started 15 years ago and nowadays our teams are well-known. If they weren’t well-known and had just arrived, it wouldn’t work (FG1-SA).

The significant person gains importance when confirming that the normal information channels don’t reach everybody: “The first thing is that I didn’t know, I thought there was only yoga, I thought it was a whole, you know? I couldn’t be alone, leave clothes... Information [I’m missing information]” (FG10-A) and that we need to look into more effective alternatives.

THE BARRIERS

Fears

At the top of this list of forces to be overcome there are two fears which are closely linked to immigration: the fear of feeling different and the fear of not being accepted. The informants refer to a self-imposed exclusion that arises from the awareness of being different and is followed by the fear of feeling rejected



due to this difference. And all this without there being, inside the group, an explicit accusation referring to diversity:

Because mainly among the kids that are here, the ones I mainly work with, I see that the other kids don't isolate the Chinese boy, or the South American kids, that it isn't a natural tendency... But through the conditioning exerted via the television, newspapers or adults themselves, the kids from other nationalities tend to feel different and they don't want to join in when there are group sports, as a team, because they are scared (FG5-SA).

The fact is that the conjunction between passive and uncritical citizenship and an irresponsible handling of diversity in the media, ends up promoting a state of opinion that perpetuates the prejudice and stereotype regarding immigrant people:

If we do not have the desire to gain proper information, the media is able to direct our thinking in one direction or another. For me, Italy should implement more actions to fight its institutionalised racism, because in the end, TV is a state tool. I see shameful television programmes which perpetuate these stereotypes (FG5-SA).

In fact, some of the informants have spoken openly about racism: "Racism. Racism is one of the first reasons that make an immigrant not want to practise sport, given that we are in a society that is still racist" (FG5-SA). A problem, racism, which in the case of adults –with a way of thinking made up from things and life– is hard to eradicate: "The problem among adults with racism is even more complicated [than with children], because unfortunately we can't change people's thoughts. There are people who aren't interested in integration, and it is impossible to change them" (FG5-SA). In addition, however, there is the strength of the group that, in a favourable and permissive context, can further insist on this idea, without taking into account the offences that it can cause. That is explained in a group when referring to racism: "Because, in effect, the strength of the ideas often comes from the group. When in a group, we all tend to be very brave" (FG5-SA).

Not only the promoters talk of the fears, one of the groups of children also spoke of the fear of not being accepted as being one of the elements that lead to them not daring to practise sport despite actually wanting to do so. These are the statements by a young girl expressing what she would need to dare to practise a sport: "I don't know... I would want to be sure that I would be accepted. That I wouldn't be left aside if... if I don't do things well enough. And knowing that they would be by my side even if I have difficulties" (FG6-BG).

The responsibilities

Responsibilities often move physical exercise down on the list of priorities for adult immigrants. Although this circumstance seems quite logical from an adult point of view, in the case of newcomer men and women it becomes even more evident, especially in so far as the family-related responsibilities of immigrant women. When the distribution of the family roles is so clearly defined that it is the woman who look after the family, while the man is responsible for working and bringing money into the home: "Mainly because of that, if we have children and we can't work, the husband also has to work and due to the different hours we can't leave them" (FG10-A), performing physical exercise becomes very complicated because within a migratory context it is hard to find external support that could relay the women from looking after their children: "There in the town it's pretty much all families, and those who were young

and had children could leave them with their mothers, with their mother or with their mother-in-law, they always had somebody they could leave their children with. I don't have anyone. [...] But for us foreigners this situation is quite complicated" (FG10-A).

Despite acknowledging the need to carry out physical exercise and acknowledging the associated benefits:

[Lively] Physically and mentally also. For example, I really like Zumba. I have been to some Zumba classes in the town, but I had to stop going because of the children, because the classes were in the afternoon and I didn't have anyone I could leave them with, so I couldn't go (FG10-A).

Women with children have to make an additional effort in order to carry out physical exercise, even though this effort isn't always completely understood:

When I went there, it was with my eldest, the boy, and I went with the girl who was younger and I would sometimes have her sitting on me while we did abs, and the women would say that I couldn't go with kids at those hours, because the class was from 20:00 to 21:00 hours. "Because at those times children are tired and they need to sleep". But, who can I leave them with? My husband works in the afternoon and evening, he leaves at 3 pm and doesn't get home until 4 am. Who can I leave them with? In the end I stopped going to Zumba because of that. Because I couldn't work it. Even though they were really quiet, the boy would play on my mobile and just sat there and the girl would sit next to me on the mat, and she would copy whatever I did (FG10-A).

However, there is a solution proposal that arises from the same affected women and prevents passivity or the easy resource from the help provided by the administration:

I, for example, can say one thing, I live in Castellnou. I could go once or twice a week to a Zumba class or yoga, or whatever was on, if there were somewhere I could leave the kids close to where the class is. For example, a mother working weekly shifts, someone we could leave the kids with. For example, they could be there in a corner, but we know they are there. Mainly because of that, if we have children and we can't work, our husbands have to work and if the times don't fit in, then we can't leave them. It would be a great help for one or two hours a week, otherwise you just can't do it (FG10-A).

With regards to the children, the responsibilities that affect them and which interfere with practising a sport are mainly academic: "I tried [to practise a single sport] but even that was complicated because I had lots of homework and I spend... I have to spend lots of my time on school work because I'm not doing very well" (FG6-BG). However, some sport actors have brought attention to the interference of another type of responsibilities, domestic chores and looking after the family:

As I mentioned, the problem lies with the parents' reluctance. For example, in the times we have proposed to the kids I often find that the eldest child of a large family is responsible for helping the mother and is not available to practise the activity (FG1-SA).

In fact, in one of the groups of children, one of the participants insisted on the need for obtaining approval from the parents in order to practise a sport, given that –in his own words– he thought it would be complicated to get their approval if this meant not helping out with the domestic chores: "Before anything else, I would need my parents to accept it, well... they would let me, but... I also help them with the house chores and... they sometimes ask me to do things and... that takes up a lot of my time" (FG6-BG).

Social and economic problems

Economic difficulties have been identified as one of the barriers for beginning and continuing with a sport for immigrants and those of an immigrant origin.



To begin a sport, because the people in these circumstances feel they have restrictions regarding their options for practising a sport to the extent that, they are sometimes not allowed to access said activity. The offer of free or economically accessible sport is not always sufficient:

In our case, for example, the kids join the activity and only pay 7.5 Euros a year and this is just a symbolic amount, and this has the purpose of generating loyalty and providing value to the activity. And this is the case, because in relation to the general policy [for promoting sport] there are lots of associations that work in the neighbourhood, but there is such a high demand that despite them being economically accessible, they often can't provide access to everyone (FG1-SA).

Aside from signing him up to football, between the boots which are fifty odd or sixty Euros... More or less, about 500 Euros just to start. And with a salary of 1,300, 500 Euros is a lot of money, even more so now that the school year has just started (FG10-A)

Or to maintain it, because a lack of money threatens the continuity of the activity due to not being able to pay the membership fees, despite the payment facilities that are often available, there comes a day when they have to be paid: “€5 a month [they pay]. One says to me: ‘When I get a job, I’ll pay you’” (FG7-SA). Also, this expense, despite being acknowledged as an investment in education: “And what you mention about education, if they start practising sport when they are young, I believe it will be much easier for them to integrate when they are older, in all aspects, for relating to other children, for everything” (FG10-A), in the context of a precarious economy, it can be considered as non-essential: “My husband works and he has his salary, but of course, we have to pay rent, pay other things, three children... And now, the books and all that, it’s something that is... If there were facilities...” (FG10-A).

The availability of a free or low-cost offer, depends on the sport policy of the area. Our informants have identified the political priority towards federated sport as a fact that ends up generating an imbalance between the recipients of the funding, in so far as this preference pours a great deal of the resources into top-level sport at the expense of the funds destined to creating sports opportunities for everyone:

We are lacking a great deal of support in so far as political representation, from those who should help our conception aimed at social life, at physical and moral health, we are lacking a lot of equipment. When we want to organise activities we are missing a team members, there is insufficient political will and we always come across this dichotomy between professional sport and the sport with less coverage in so far as receiving funding (FG1-SA).

The first model –the federated sport– is justified in obtaining results, while the promotion of sport for everyone is supported in acknowledging the right people have to accessing sport. Both models are very different and, in the opinion of the informants, they compete for the same resources: “The Italian state grants 400 million Euros to sport, but all of them are high performance. Only 3% is destined to the dissemination of sport” (FG5-SA).

However, money problems don’t come on their own. The perceptions of some instructors go along the line of accepting that an underprivileged social environment does not only entail difficulties in the payment of fees –regardless of how low these are– or in the purchase of equipment, but often also entail a certain level of social determinism:

There are some things that come to mind and make me worry a lot. In our neighbourhoods there are parents who feel somewhat pressured and who cannot leave the neighbourhood via the educational channel. The parents are the ones who always choose the activities they want their children to join. And sometimes they can't. And we need to think about this,



we must take into account desire for freedom regarding the activity to be performed, it is the citizens' will and this must be taken into consideration. Do you agree with me?

Yes, totally. We must pay attention and be respectful.

And this is something that worries us and we must really think about it. And not only in the window of internal activities that can be developed in the different cities. We must step outside our own city and get to know other places (FG1-SA).

A lack of involvement of the parents in their children's activities:

The project itself involves the neighbourhood association. The neighbourhood association calls meetings with the parents. It is very strict about the fact that if the child does not bring the registration form along with the parent, then the child is not allowed to join. It is useless. Yes. And hardly any parents would come. One or two, at most, of about 20 or 30 children. When about 150 children pass through there each week (FG9-SA)

Or a problem of the models to follow. All together, to make the educational task of the instructors even more complicated and, after all the possibility of using sport for educating and promoting the values which are inherent to it:

All the problems that children have are the parents' problems. You see the parent is worse than the child. The child creates a problem in the activity, but when you try to talk to the parents, they are worse than the child. And when you see a kid smoking, you approach the parent and it's worse. I don't know how to handle this. The problem they have there, in the underprivileged neighbourhoods, is the parents, there is no family involvement (FG9-SA).

Despite this, the institutors in the underprivileged neighbourhoods end up resolving the situation, despite admitting that the relationships with the parents are complicated and that there are always some that disassociated themselves from the activity. And they resolve with an attitude of proximity and availability, without judgements or hierarchies: "Any mother or father knows they can contact me whenever they want" (FG7-SA), providing them with a voice in the development of the activity: "That every month we have a value, that the first three months I chose the values in agreement with others. January, February, March, were chosen by the parents. And the following three months were chosen by the children" (FG7-SA), and with an approach in which without pressure value was placed on personal freedom and allowing the facts to talk for themselves: "He wants to join rugby, but I'm not sure". 'Let him come, he doesn't have to pay and he wants to play I'll tell you how much you'd have to pay for the membership, insurance and the uniform' [...]. Then, you realise that when they realise their children are enjoying themselves, that's it" (FG7-SA).

Lack of political commitment

The preference for a certain model for promoting sport is nothing more than the expression of a political commitment or lack of commitment with the use of sport as a tool for educating. In general, the sports actors who have taken part in the discussion groups within this study complain that the predominant sports policy model only seems to think about federated sport, the results of the competitions and the attractiveness of the podiums, without taking into consideration that the effects of the investment in the alternative model are of a general, profound and long-lasting scope, because they reach more people: "Those who worry about sports activities, such as us, must attempt to communicate the use of what we do, that it can be a useful tool, not only an expense, it can be something that... can directly, even though



not immediately, be of use for society” (FG5-SA). And they help in so far as coexistence: “We are lacking a great deal of support in so far as political representation, from those who should help our conception [of sport] aimed at social life, at physical and moral health” (FG1-SA). They also report a certain degree of institutional hypocrisy. The incoherence between the discourse that praises the virtues of sport for everyone and certain facts that lead us to doubt whether sufficient money is actually being invested: “I ask myself whether the message that the institutions give as their desire to commit people to sport... if alongside these words there are actions, if there is investment... or if what actually occurs is that the message does not tally with the actions?” (FG1-SA).

The promotion of sports activities aimed at all people and designed as a comprehensive and integrating activity mainly depend on public funds which are granted to projects of a mixed profile, sports and social, started up by the administration or by other non-profit organisations. The dependence on public funds and the fact that the actions are often aimed at a socially underprivileged audience, determine a certain level of precariousness and force the professionals into an additional personal commitment on their part:

I find that at the schools I have to hear: ‘No, we don’t do activities in this class because there are lots of foreign kids and the parents won’t pay and we can’t make money. Or you have to do it for free’. OK, but we always have to do it for free so the school has money. 10 Euros, 20, 30... I mean, it’s the attitude that it always has to be us who work for free (FG5-SA).

In the end, this way of doing things ends up becoming a part of us and it is assumed that the promotion of sport as a strategy for inclusion and social education has to depend on the commitment of the volunteers that believe in it, because at the moment it seems as though the State doesn’t want to see the benefits: “In my opinion it is also a cultural problem, because people think that associations like ours should work for free and that is because people don’t consider sport to be a good primary good and a solution” (FG5-SA).

OF AMBIVALENT MEANING

Sport as a vehicle for cultural expression: *It’s in our blood*

It is evident that choosing one sport or another is an act of personal and community definition: “I do aerobics and Zumba. In Brazil we carry football and dancing in our blood: Samba” (FG4-A). As explained by this Brazilian woman, the definition using global senses of belonging, such as football, and now local ones, such as Samba, are not incompatible. In fact, this definition using diverse parameters –apparently contradictory– speaks a lot of who is using it. It is said that belonging to a global world is possible without having to do away with the more personal essence, and it is said that, in the 21st century, all senses of belonging are necessary.

Football is the global sport *par excellence*. In fact, some of the discussion groups have developed completely around the practise of this sport (FG8 and FG9) and in others, football has always been present. With regard to specific cultural senses of belonging, dance has been acknowledged as a gender-based sense of belonging that is widely accepted among women. Likewise, some young boys have also

expressed their preference for dancing, although they have set a distance with traditionally female dances and some that can be considered more masculine. This is explained by one of the participants of the focus groups: “Yes, I do hip-hop. The girls dance” (FG6-BG). In another scope of definition, that of belonging to a political or ethnic community, sports that are connected to the origin and a local sense of belonging, have also been mentioned and they should be taken into account in order to add new senses of belonging and bonds with the people and the place of their establishment:

The tambourain. It is a tradition from Languedoc-Roussillon... I don't know how to explain it. It's like tennis. There are five people on the court, five in one team and five in the other team. It is played with a hard ball and they have to pass it to each other using a kind of tambourine. When I arrived here, I discovered this sport and I thought it was nice, I asked a coach if I could practise it and he said I could (FG2-BG).

To maintain the bonds with the senses of belonging that the immigrant men and women took with them when they left their home countries behind:

Firstly, in our community there is a dance group, which attracted the younger people. We were bored and we were embarrassed to dance in front of others, but in the end we even ordered traditional costumes. In 2010 we put on a show here in Borgaro with traditional music. A show in Italian language. At the Republic Square, it brought together about 5,000 people. It was really emotional (FG4-A).

And, after overcoming the first reef to approach the “other”, daring to get to know and relate: “And after these dances, then a new friendship was born between the Italians and the foreigners for playing football. And others started to play tennis in the afternoons, or play the piano... An excuse to meet up” (FG4-A).

Global cultural senses of belonging, although they are widely known and adopted, may require adaptations caused by other senses of belonging. In the case of Muslim women, they acknowledge their religious belonging within a migratory context requires them to make certain adaptation when it comes to practising a sport:

Yes, I was in the teams in school, in high school, playing basketball, I loved it. It is something that... it is my favourite... But well, I can't play basketball in a group now, you know? It's a cultural thing. Do you understand or not?

No, it's about me. Because of my culture, which is a bit different. If I want to play basketball, for example, in Morocco I can play tomorrow in a female team and they would lend me clothes as I am free, do you understand me? Now [here] you can't do this with a lot of clothes, you know? It's a bit complicated. It's something that represents a problem for me. I need somewhere where... The relationship, in our culture the relationships between men and women are a bit different. If I want to practise a sport I need lots of things. I need to be with women to be... I can't wear lots of clothes and run, for example, because it is hot and... For me, it's better to be alone with women. It's a problem that is part of my culture, it's not that I need a place... For example, I can walk, but it's a weather problem, because you know... (FG10-A).

Despite the informant having experience as an athlete and acknowledges her liking of sport, she identifies certain limitations related to the fact of being a Muslim and she expresses these with resignation because she feels they are hard to manage in a migration context. Without the religious sense of belonging forbidding her from practising sport –in fact before emigrating she played basketball– it does currently condition the possibilities. And despite not making any specific demands, it is obvious that there is a need for intercultural adaptation.



In summary, despite sport in a migration context requiring certain cultural adjustments, it offers a friendly way of getting to know people, helping towards cultural redefinition, to establish new links and maintain old ones, and generates curiosities and compromise which are useful for stimulating the uptake of sport.

The dominion of football...good or bad?

Certainly, football must be acknowledged the value of attracting many people. Football is a sport of masses and the football offer is, in itself, attractive and an incentive for practising sport. In addition, it is worth taking into account that its global dissemination helps for it to be acknowledged as belonging and it would be complicated for it to represent any cultural aggression. The reference to football has been present in one way or another in all discussion groups. However, football as a strategy for inclusion, has pluses and minuses.

The pluses. Many people are encouraged to practise sport because they like football. Of all ages and of all origins: “Yes, in Messina. We have young boys [who play football] as of the moment they start walking and up until they become adults. And we have lots of foreign kids. Yes, yes, yes. There were friends of my son. Almost all foreigners, Romanian, Moroccan. And all of them playing football” (FG4-A). And it reaches everywhere. It is played in schools and on the streets, in teams and out of them: “I play in extracurricular activities and I play next to my home, on the street” (FG8-BG). And it favours spontaneous relationships: “No, I didn’t know them. I said: ‘Hi, can I play football?’ And they said ‘Hi, what’s your name?’ That’s it” (FG8-BG).

And the minuses. It is known that the relationship between the institutors and the parents is always a delicate matter. Well, according to the informants, when talking about football there is yet another added element, which is the interference of the parents in the institutor’s job. The parents’ interference –which has only been mentioned when talking about football– discredits the coaches and ends up affecting the child. In the short term because it affects the child’s relationship with the coach. And in the long term because it creates a conflict between the two figures of authority: “The child pays more attention to his father than to my orders. Then, this child hardly gets playing time. And I told him: ‘If you listen to your father, then you won’t play’. The father no longer comes to the games. He comes, drops the boys off and leaves” (FG9-SA).

According to the sports actors, the correlation between professional football and football as a sport of the masses is so closely linked to the competition that, in this context, winning or losing is too important, and playing clean ends up so far down the list of priorities, that it is often forgotten. Let’s hear the thoughts of one of the groups of promoters that were interviewed:

- There are fathers who are more competitive than the boys. That’s where the problem is. If the father teaches the boy...that the priority is to have fun. I’m not here to win. Winning is just that, having a good time, ensuring that the child is fine, that he is truly having fun with the sport. But there are fathers who just don’t get it. There are fathers who insist that... I think that selfishness comes from it being a factor imposed by the parents. There are parents who teach their children that they have to win.

At all cost. Yes, yes, yes! If necessary, by rolling on the ground or not taking any notice of the coach (FG9-SA).



This reality requires a counterbalance that can face up to it. The institutors know this and seek alternatives in minority sports that are free from the influence of money, and protected from media exposure. Rugby, multi-sports and even dance have been presented as useful strategies for facing up to the misery caused by football. Some of the interviewed promoters, aware of the task that lies in the promotion of values they have taken on, feel the need to make the most of the potential of sport for breaking away from prejudice. One of the challenges they consider is that of fighting against the gender-based stereotypes linked to sport. In fact, pretty much all boys and girls who have taken part in this study –not so for adults– explicitly accepted the existence of activities for boys and activities for girls, even though, it must be said, we have come across girls who were proud and happy to say they practised boxing or football. One case of a successful fight against the gender-based model linked to sport has been that of rugby. The fact that this is a minority sport which has difficulties in making up teams, forces some places to form mixed teams and, therefore, they are forced to set an example. And then, the fact that the activity is conducted by a woman removes the distrust that may be present at the very beginning:

Their mothers worry because: 'Oh! My daughter!' Unless they have practised sport since they were young...Otherwise: 'Rugby is very dangerous' 'Rugby is dangerous', 'it's violent', but never mind. For the boys, it is also the first year. But, then, when I tell them I have played, and they see other examples. Afterwards, they are the most loyal, the ones which make the most effort and the ones who provide the best publicity (FG7-SA).

In contrast with the way things work in football, the promoters have brought attention to the added value of rugby in relation to the strict adherence to the rules of the game:

The referee is very important in rugby. We always tell them he is the judge, and that without the referee we can't play, and that nobody can answer back to the referee. They find this hard to understand. In the end, when they understand that the referees only talk to the captains... The figure of the captain also gains importance. Another very important element is the respect for the rival team, because I tell them exactly the same: 'Without them, we can't play'. And they realise, they respect the coach (FG7-SA).

And with regard to the aim of remembering that beyond the battle on the playing field, there comes the camaraderie outside the field, we have the contribution of the third half. Other promoters have also insisted on the need for detaching themselves from the model of mass sport which is often expressed using a dual language. That of the values present in the written rules and that of the media handling of the sport: "Many television shows shoot off –forgive the term– stupidities without verifying whether they are of any use to anyone. They are harmful, racist and nobody condemns them" (FG5-SA). That is why the sports actors see the need to distance themselves from mass sports: "We focus on a different sport than the one seen on the TV, a sport that is not as widely known throughout the world" (FG1-SA), because – according to them– the message that is transmitted is contradictory: "We see in our minds the image of doping, of players being sold, etc. [...]. Paradoxes like these affect us athletes. We have to defend ourselves to not be influenced. We have to be alert. We must find a balance. We say that we must all play football, basketball, etc.; but taking into account our health, to do so in a correct manner" (FG1-SA)

The language. Learning to play... or playing to learn?



The lack of knowledge of the language is, for adults of an immigrant origin, an element of ambivalent value, which could serve to stimulate practising sport or could be detrimental to this aim. Some adults participating in this project have placed the lack of knowledge of the language as one of the main conditioning factors which oppose sports practise among immigrant people: “For us there is another problem. That is the language problem. You know, when the language problem disappears, many other doors will open. And to resolve the language problem, people need time, because it must be learnt” (FG10-A). This vision comes into contrast with that of the people who consider the language of sport as a universal language: “We say that sport could be a universal language. A tool for exploiting, for reaching a shared language that could help make new acquaintances, because sport must be practised in a small group and that makes dialogue much easier” (FG5-SA). A communication that is expressed, mainly, in a non-verbal manner: Even though with sport, the language is mostly non-verbal, hence it is very body oriented” (FG5-SA), but that, by virtue of the relationships that are established around sport, it can help to overcome the barrier and move on to spoken language: “Of course [sport] helped me to learn the language, but also... I don’t know, it helped me and my sisters, and even my parents to make friends with other parents and talk to them. [...] It’s just that my mother is a housewife and therefore she didn’t know [Italian]” (FG4-A).

In fact, some testimonials confirm that sport can help to learn a language. And it helps, mainly, through the significant relationships that are established: “Through sport I realised that by being part of a team it is much easier to learn the language, because I couldn’t speak a word of Italian. And even though I studied at school, I was very lucky because I found friends that helped me a lot!” (FG4-A). This is the thought of an adult on facts that took place as a child. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, it seems that language difficulties do not determine, in the case of children, the decision to practise a sport or not. The consideration of a deficient command of a language as being a barrier for practising sport mainly affects adults. In the case of children, this fact has not emerged from the talks because schooling seems to be the unifying element surrounding a common language and, therefore, does not place the possible learner in the dilemma of learning the language before deciding to practise a team sport, or to use the sport to learn the language. It seems obvious that for children in school age, team sports can be understood as a natural strategy of linguistic consolidation, as is explained by the previous statement and, for adults, as a strategy for establishing significant relationships that, beyond the emotional benefit associated to this fact, could entail the natural learning of the language.

The importance of participating... sure? Or on the effects of competitiveness as stimuli

The appeal to competitiveness as an element for attracting and maintaining teenagers engaged in a sport has gained importance, especially when the discussion revolves around football. One of the discussion groups made up by promoters, which bases its activities on football, has identified it as powerful stimuli which leads teenagers to become and remain interested in practising sport: “Competitiveness. Improvement. The younger they are, the more competitive. As people grow older if they can’t compete, they just stop trying. As a *hobby*, they give it up” (FG9-SA). The coaches think that there is a need to

maintain the stimuli of competitiveness, because if they lose, it is quite probable that the sport will seem less attractive. However, that is not an easy task in socially underprivileged environments, because remaining in the competition and being competitive has its price: “The coordinator said there could not be competitions, leagues, weekend games. That there could only be training. There are only training sessions. They can’t be done because of the economic factor” (FG9-SA). In addition, there comes a time in the life of a teenager when new possibilities arise which, in the absence of the competitive incentive, could be more seductive than sports:

The cadets have taken the step of liking football, they feel passion, but they have also taken the step of going out with girls. Maybe drugs. We had the group of cadets, the first few days we tried to keep them interested but there was no competition, they couldn’t compete. They hadn’t advanced to compete and they all stopped coming, and we have lost nearly all of them, at that complicated age (FG9-SA).

Some coaches use the competition and the stimuli of competitiveness to control a group that they feel is escaping their control: “In the first few games, for example, there were lots of fights, shouting, and by the end of the year there weren’t as many. They were calmer, and we managed to control many of the groups. Imposing limits, threats. When you compete, it is easier to impose threats” (FG9-SA). However, if you lose the resource of competitiveness, the coach feels he loses authority or ends up losing the entire group, by being left without resources to manage it. Moreover, the coaches themselves realise that without the stimuli of competitiveness, they don’t know how to go about it: “This year we haven’t competed, that’s why lots of kids have dropped out. We have lost them because there is no competition. You can’t threaten them with not playing the game” (FG9-SA).

Other interviewees, far from preaching the positive aspects of the stimuli of competitiveness, are more critical and highlight that despite that it can be used to stimulate personal improvement: “Having a bit of competition, might not make us slaves to competition and it could be taken as a stimuli and maybe even help one reach a higher level, to continue improving, basically” (FG5-SA), it can’t be thought of as the sole motivation, because it could exclude or frustrate. This is the explanation by the mother of a boy who decided to leave the football team at the age of 15 years: “No, unfortunately he no longer plays. He was really good. Very good. But he was let down by the coach who didn’t know him and left him without playing, because he had lost two toe nails. He spent two months without playing, and when he returned the coach never let him play again” (FG4-A). Competitiveness can make sense in top-level sport, but it can’t be the only pillar sustaining the sport when the aim is to include and educate:

And you realise these are different realities. And I really like it, because I sometimes train with the women’s team, yes all of us compete, and I am always competitive. I’m not the same when I’m with the kids, that’s when I’m the teacher, when I’m with them, that’s when I set a competitive objective. They must have a good time [...]. It’s not the same with a guy, or a girl, or a child. In the end you change your tone depending on who you’re talking to. The same as we’ve organised activities for people with functional difficulties and have changed the exercises. I have done it in two different ways (FG7-SA).

The instructors: profile and influence



Without belittling the efforts of those who, with great precariousness, use sport as a tool for inclusion, it is worth remembering that the training of the instructors has been considered key for making the most of the educational potential of the sport. The sports promoter must be a versatile professional capable of responding to the technical and social challenges of his/her task: “It must be said that the workers are professionals. In fact, these people have been trained to have a dual skill-function: technical workers with knowledge of the territory and the public” (FG1-SA). The model is inspired by the figure of the institutor –the former name given to French teachers–, understood as “that which allows to become a free citizen because it helps to enter into the institution of free, public and secular school” (FG1-SA). The educational potential of the institutor goes beyond the school and can be seen in the exercise of citizenship of those who have been instituted:

When this concept of institutor was created by Jules Ferry, in 1993, this man who created the concept, addressed the institutors and said: “The outcome of your work will be more noticeable outside of the classroom, rather than inside”. That was already an intuition. It focuses on the capability of creating a free citizen, who behaves in a free manner (FG1-SA).

Moreover, the function of the instructor doesn’t end with his sports actor role and some of those interviewed reclaim their role of companionship, protection and model for the youths throughout their development:

Yes, they come to us to talk about things that have nothing to do with sport. They feel close to us, at ease. There is a word in French that I’m not sure how it’s said in Catalan, it is “être un repère”, which means to be a protector. We’re talking of a safe place. To correct, as a reference. And that is why in French “être un repère” would mean being a protector. It is made up by father and by “re”. The word would mean that you are not the kids’ father, but you’re an example, a reference (FG1-SA).

A reference they have for generating spontaneous and unquestionable adhesions:

I know that when I say something to a boy or a girl, they believe me ten times more than their teachers or their parents. And this leaves you with a double-edged sword, for good and for bad. If I say to the kid: “Throw yourself on the ground and fake a fault”. And if I say: “Don’t tell lies”, or “don’t fight”, or “work hard”, or “make an effort”, he will also do it. And I’m not only talking about sport, this also applies outside (FG7-SA).

Without reaching the level of philosophical formulation which the French sports actors have reached, the rest of groups also see the promoters as playing this role of affective closeness, supporting the youths and a reference of values which, with the aim of helping youths become citizens and people, must be added to the role of the sports technicians:

The instructors’ training is definitely the most important aspect. Yes, because their knowledge of sport is quite important, being able to recognise talent, good players... and to teach properly, but also to teach them... to also be a teacher and to know how to communicate with the kids and with the parents and the teachers (FG5-SA).

With all this, and despite the unanimous claim regarding the teacher training of the sports promoter, the materialisation of their function as an educator of people takes on a range of different formulations and styles on the field. At one end we see the authoritarian style, which manages the group by imposing very strict rules: “Yes, like when a person does his own thing, when a player is doing his own things, he says ‘I’m the best’ and you tell him to leave. And in the same week you say: ‘No, come, I want you in my team’.



The following week he does the same thing” (FG9-SA), and the other uses a more peace-making style in which the authority of the instructor is not an authority imposed from a position of power, but it is more of an authority that is gained through affective closeness and by acknowledging the difficulties kids go through:

Having plenty of patience when wanting to know. You must realise that in a neighbourhood club there are lots of external factors that you can't control. That is why you must be really patient, talk a lot with the child to find out what is causing the problem, why he is so nervous, try to control this with the parents to improve the situation (FG9-SA).

The comments made by the sports actors have allowed to establish a correspondence between the instructor's style in managing the group and the prioritisation of objectives, in a manner in which the authoritarian and rigid style is associated to the prioritisation of competition results: “If they are bad like my ones, you have to be hard on them. Be tough. How many games have I won this year with the juvenile team? None. Only one draw. But I can say that the kids compete fiercely” (FG9-SA). And the peace-making style, of a leadership that is more granted than imposed, prioritises the educational function of sport. Sport as an excuse to teach people. Sport as the saviour of certain youths who have no other alternative than the streets:

You shouldn't ask him to leave, that's the first point. Because you'll lose him, and he'll end up on the streets. You must control your emotions, not get angry, and seek different strategies with the family or with the friends or by talking with him alone. There are different ways of approaching the situation without having to remove him and stopping him from joining in on the activity (FG9-SA).

It is obvious that, despite the instructors tending to manage the group with one style or another, it is also true that quite often the same instructor alternates styles, depending on the situation in hand, using different styles of authority. The authority that is imposed and the authority that is inviting. Therefore, the instructor with a peace-making style becomes strict when dealing with the educational aspects he considers to be critical such as respect: “The main thing is to correct the comments made by the colleagues themselves. Those are the most destructive. You've got to be strict in that sense” (FG9-SA), and the instructor who is stricter sees the need to give some leeway in some trivial matters to counteract the strictness imposed at other times: “We start the training session at 5:30 pm. The kid would arrive at 5 and: ‘Look! I will do so-and-so for you’, ‘I'll do... I don't know’. I say: ‘I'll let you play at the end if you fight for all the balls in the game, you do this...” (FG9-SA).

THE CHALLENGE OF CONTINUITY

Truthfully, the first step for stimulating the practise of physical exercise requires finding a motivation that encourages the people to start. However, this is just the first step and it is convenient that the people persist with this approach.

The participation of the sports actors in this study has enabled to identify a wide range of strategies that reaffirm the relationship between the instructors and the players, and improve the experience of practising the activity. The aim is to ensure that the people, after having joined the sports activity, find it easy to continue and enjoy themselves.



Here is the inventory of strategies identified to help make sport a more enjoyable experience:

Creating a close and respectful relationship that becomes some sort of implicit commitment in which instructors and players acknowledge their mutual duty:

And that's what it's about, being a friend to the kids. You don't have to be a grown-up with them. You should always try to be an equal to them. You must treat them well and be their friend, that way they will do things right. Then, they will see the results and will say: "I have to do this much better, so the coach can be proud of me" (FG9-SA).

Working on the group cohesion. The shared belonging to the team, the club, to the sport. The pleasure of being, all together, the same thing and being proud to show-off the colours of the team and to belong to it:

We have our cry. And all categories use the same cry, everyone from 9 to 40 years, they all use the same cry and we come together in a circle, and you realise that this bond, a T-shirt, certain colours, a club or a sport and "I play rugby" with pride also creates a family (FG7-SA).

Inclusion leads to commitment, to being convinced of it being good and nice to work towards a common goal, beyond the sport, if necessary: "That we have painted a wall to make it look nicer, because we don't want to play on Saturday mornings with dog litter. And I always collect the any bottles" (FG7-SA). It is about being convinced that coexistence, responsibility or respect for our surroundings are intangible assets of the group that are well worth building on.

Trust as a starting point. A trust that doesn't need to be earned, because it's there for the start. A trust that isn't lost, not even in times of doubt. An unconditional trust that arrives from outside and because, as it's unconditional, operates the transformation and helps to believe in one's self:

I give them the material and say: "Come on. We give you each a ball and you have to bring it back net Tuesday". [...] Then, some of them didn't return the ball on the Tuesday, but I never said "where's the ball?". I said: "Leave all the balls in the trolley", and I watched to see who had returned it and who hadn't, and others told on them: "Juani and the other one didn't bring the ball". "That's OK. They must have forgotten. They'll bring it another day". Thursday, the same story: "Juani and the other one didn't bring the ball". They tell on each other a lot because they know the balls belong to everyone, that they all lose out. And they didn't return it until a month later and said to me: "I'm sorry. It had been taken away from me. But I recovered it and here it is". "Well that's fine. No problem, no problem at all" (FG7-SA).

Collaboration with the family, schools and other entities within civil society has been acknowledge as being necessary, because neither the sport nor the kids and adults who practise it can be considered as airtight elements. And that is why they are asked to share the philosophy. It's not a literal allegiance, but one of principles:

The schools have an educational project and our actions are integrated into this project. Our actions are a continuation of the school's work. As if it were a guiding thread. Our actions are linked. There is a very close relationship between the school team (headmasters, etc.) and use, the structure we all put in place. I am the means between the educational projects and everything that surrounds us (FG1-SA).

Some groups have identified the parents as the external element that is the most complicated to manage. It seems that it is complicated to find a balance in the parents' involvement, either because there is no involvement: "No, no, in this neighbourhood, I know it, we know it well, and these don't get involved" (FG9-SA), or because the involvement interferes with the educational task carried out by the instructors:



“I was in this school doing an extracurricular activity and I came across the case of a father that had to go into the school to talk to the headmaster: ‘And why did he throw the penalty shot and not your son?’” (FG9-SA). The instructors try different strategies to control the level of participation of the parents in the activity, such as conditioning the child’s effective membership with the fact that one of the parents is physically present to register the child, asking them to accompany their kids to the games, call meetings at the start of the year, or other less orthodox methods, such as exerting direct pressure on the parents: “And the father drives the bus, this yellow one. One day I got fed up, I sat down and bought myself... I had never got on a bus, I sat behind the driver, who was the father. He was driving and I said: ‘Hey, your driving is terrible!, ‘you drive too fast’, ‘you drive too slow’, just to annoy him. And we reached an agreement: if he says anything else to his son, I will place a complaint and whatever else is necessary” (FG9-SA). But it seems very hard: “You try it but the parents don’t... try to find... I have held meetings in the neighbourhood and only three parents have attended. I had 17 kids” (FG9-SA). The adult informants justify the lack of involvement of the parents of children from underprivileged neighbourhoods in the existence of other concerns which are considered priorities such as economic problems, not having a job or work conditions that don’t allow them to accompany their children. With all this, some initiatives, proposed on a one-to-one basis, based on the joint forces of the adults –parents and coaches– and mutual support, have provided their fruits:

I’ve spent the last year working on this project. With the previous management board, the families were very reluctant, very cold towards the club. I have tried, only this season, to do some group choreographies and when you go to the field there is somebody available to pick up a coffee. It has been quite valid, the intervention at a family level (FG7-SA).

The collaboration of the schools has also been looked upon as being essential. The educational continuity of the family-school-community environment is essential for transmitting coherence when promoting values: “Within the educational programme in so far as the school environment, these [actions] have an educational projection and our actions are integrated into this project. What we do is a continuation of the school’s work. As if it were a guiding thread (FG1-SA).

In the community, the role of the administration and civil society is essential for bringing money, material support and personal effort wherever the children and their parents can’t reach. The city councils provide money, support projects and provide structures: “There is an annual budget from the City Council, with two or three instructors and the minimum amount of material. I think they charge €5 per child more or less –if they even get paid– per year and this covers the material. And *closings*” (FG9-SA). The neighbourhood associations, sports clubs or companies provide support to those working with sport as a tool for social education: “I contacted an association, it’s called *Bassa*, because one day on their radio station I spoke about it, and hey... about 20 or 30 kg of sports clothing for boys and girls” (FG7-SA). And even, people arrive on their own accord where the parents are –for whichever reason– they can’t get there: “Another thing we also have is the economic level of the parents. I was talking about it yesterday with the president, that one team has no cars, they borrow the van off the president to go to the matches. No, no. It’s no joke. It’s a true case” (FG9-SA).



Despite the involvement of the different social agents, right now, it can't be said that all the work is being in a network. Despite some programmes being the outcome of coordinated actions carried out between different actors: "When we're in a territory that doesn't just appear, there is work behind that... there is a lot of work to reach that point. It is the link with the associations. And for two years we have visited the associations, politicians, youths, families, and we have asked them for what we need to carry out the sports activity" (FG1-SA). Other times, the collaboration established between the social agents seems improvised, it is at the mercy of personal actions arising from ad-hoc needs and they do not anticipate coordinated responses to shared problems:

The problem is that the parents are not involved. If there is a match away, far away, nobody takes them. They come alone and hope that somebody will take them. The neighbourhood association takes them, but not this year. This year there is no competition. And they are also tired of taking them. [...] About five parents need to come together and use one car each weekend to take all the kids. This is better than nothing (FG9-SA).

The customisation, understanding this to be the adaptation to the real needs of the collective or the person towards which the activity is directed, is a widely used strategy for attracting new players and for ensuring the continuity of the activity. The customisation has both individual and community facets. The individual customisation is carried out by the instructor when adapting the demands at the start of the activity: "The economic problem is not our problem. No. Because if they can't pay, they still play" (FG9-SA), or the style in handling the needs and characteristics of each person, so everyone can feel comfortable and acknowledged in what they do:

When they aren't good... in fact we all have something we're good at which... for example, could be that a short kid isn't suited to basketball, but may be good at running. If you do relays, the boy might be better at that. To improve each person's skills, so all the kids can be good at something (FG5-SA).

The community aspect of the customisation is not as evident, because it often entails going beyond the simple practise of a sport, but it has been acknowledged as being yet another strategy for generating loyalty among those practising a sport. In this case, the needs which must be identified are those affecting the entire collective. These can be needs identified by the institutors, as well as the need for leaving the neighbourhood for boys and girls who live in underprivileged areas: "We organise other activities beyond of the sports activity so they can discover other things, allowing them to see beyond where they live" (FG1-SA), or such as specific demands of the collective in question channelled through the instructor: "In the neighbourhood, [boxing] is something that is also welcomed. I proposed it and a volunteer came to teach a personal defence workshop. About 40 people came and they really liked it" (FG7-SA). Regardless of how, the aim is to find strategies in order for the people who have a link with sport see the use and carry on practising it.

Without moving away from the concept of community-based customisation, it is worth remembering that the institutors should value the need for remaining connected to the real world, to transfer the concerns of the street to the playing field. According to the institutors, dealing with the conflictive and difficult aspects which are part of the kids' lives brings greater sense to sports, improves the experience of practising sport, and helps to establish bonds between the members of the team. That is why during



training sessions time is spent, either systematically or in a more opportunistic manner, in a kind of *soft* catharsis, dealing with everything that boys and girls possibly can't talk about in other spheres of their life, such as death, bullying, family separations, sex...

- We deal with it to a great extent in restorative circles. I don't know if you know that in a circle, for example, when you ask a question and... what food is your... for example. From more banal to more... And if I say I like their pizza, and you say you like their pizza, here, there is now a union... A bond, yes. And in the beginning: "What team do you support?" Trivia. Then: "And what makes you feel bad?" And if the other person feels bad about the same thing, a bond will be created.

[...]

- But I don't spend six and a half hours playing rugby. I have now implemented a protocol, within the first ten minutes, I ask: 'How was your weekend?' or 'how was your day?', because otherwise... they have a bad day and they boycott all the exercises and I realised that by having a chat works really well and they open up (FG7-SA).

Including diversity in the game in a premeditated manner, and practising it, in the sense of forcing the perception of feeling diverse, helps to reduce their fear. Especially when you are forced to face up to it because diversity is one of the characteristics of our societies. However, given that the institutors do not limit themselves to talking about ethnic and cultural diversity, but they also include diversity relating to gender, skills and social and economic conditions. This premeditated practise of diversity is addressed from an empathetic stance: "We must teach empathy. We must ask them to put themselves in other people's shoes" (FG5-SA). Forcing the encounter between different people within a sports context in which collaboration is the key to success: "When we organise meetings with other countries, when we create mixed teams and they meet to play together and don't even talk the same language, they have to try to understand each other" (FG1-SA). Making the most of diversity to get the very best out of each person: "She had to take lead of a group of about 20 really different kids and I placed her in *positions* of responsibility, of leadership. Bit by bit" (FG7-SA). Or by forcing prejudice away by means of accomplished facts:

Afterwards, they [the girls in the team] are the most loyal, the ones which make the most effort and the ones who provide the best publicity. So, you have convinced them, and it's great. And then, you talk to the girls and some of them say: 'I don't talk about it, I don't say I play rugby, because they say I'm a tomboy' or 'because they're scared of me'. And, then, you say: 'Well. Say it with pride or ask them if they want to join' (FG7-SA).

Discussion

This study has allowed to identify factors perceived by immigrants as incentives and barriers for practising sport. In addition, it has also allowed to identify certain elements that are perceived to have an ambivalent effect. The participation of sports actors has enabled the preparation of an inventory of strategies that are being used for turning sport into a pleasing practise and, thus, managing to retain the participant.

As in our case, as mentioned by Langøien et al. in their revision work, certain studies carried out relating to ethnic minorities have identified health –in its entire complexity– as an important motivation for practising sports (29). However, it seems that invoking health as the motivation behind practising sport is not exclusive to immigrant people or to those who are from an immigrant background, as stated in other studies carried out on the general population (29,32–34). Based on ages, Allender et al., place health



improvement among the main motivating factors for practising sport among elderly people and middle-aged people, while younger people talk about not gaining weight and the need to keep fit (34). The young people participating in our work coincide with Allender et al. (34) in the expectations placed on sport as a strategy for maintaining a body image in line with prevailing aesthetic canons.

Despite some of our informants noting that practising sport could be a health threat, there have been no cases in which health was identified as a barrier, as concluded by the study carried out on elderly immigrant people which confirms that certain pre-existing health problems may represent an obstacle for beginning to practise physical exercise (35), a discrepancy that we attribute to the fact that this study only involved elderly people, while our informants are much younger.

The idea of sport being a fun activity has been expressed in all the groups. This idea is not new and other studies have echoed (29,30). In addition, Johnson (36) in the work involving Asian communities in the United Kingdom, concludes that the promotion of physical exercise –aimed at both immigrants and nationals– can only succeed if it is considered fun and is part of the social and community life. In fact, it has already been seen that for both –athletes and sports actors– it is very important to maintain this component alive. The first –athletes– because they feel they need it, and the second –the sports actors– because they are aware of its importance. Despite the fact that sports actors, in their awareness of the importance of fun, seek the way to introduce fun and maintain it in the normative spaces of sports practise, the truth is that fun is often identified with the spontaneous and leisurely practise of a sport outside clubs and specifically dedicated spaces. That is why it is advisable to guarantee the availability of physical, temporary and symbolic spaces that encourage practising sport in a leisurely and safe manner, for those who practise sport and for those who don't. There are previous studies which support the conclusions resulting from this work and they confirm the use of public spaces for sports purposes (18,23). Despite our informants not having made specific demands to this regard, and with a view to creating and making use of this sort of spaces, it is worth remembering that the bibliography proposes the promotion of an active model for making good use of leisure time (36), promoting a culture of physical exercise (37,38), improving the social consideration of sport among certain collectives (39) –especially when practising sport outside people's homes (40)–, and taking advantage of the communities' resources for generating rules that, from inside the group, favour an increase in people practising physical exercise (38). From a more urban stance, access to green areas and leisure areas (38,41) and the provision of public areas with commodities such as pavements, safe parking for bicycles or a pleasant environment with little passing traffic favour practising physical exercise in public spaces (42–45). Safety has also been deemed as being very important, specifically highlighting the availability of safe spaces free from violence for women (36,46) and young children (41,43,47). Despite sport as a free and spontaneous practise not fitting in with the objectives of sport as a strategy for social education, it has other virtues and, therefore, is desirable in itself. In addition, it has been proven that, in the case of immigrant children, leisure sport compensates for their significantly lower participation in sports clubs (18) and contributes towards maintaining their physical exercise at the same level as that of local children (48)



The possibility of making friends and strengthening the links provided through practising sport has been highly valued in all discussion groups. The consideration of sport as a relational space must be linked to the concept of sport as an expression of trust and taking advantage of this link to promote its practise. The decision to take up sport is highly determined by the trust placed in a significant person, which is the one proposing the activity. According to that, creating the figure of the *significant person* could be useful as a strategy for attracting newcomers. The suggestion is that this figure which up until now had acted spontaneously, could be used in a premeditated manner in campaigns aimed at promoting physical exercise, given that behind each person practising sport there is a significant person who has encouraged the person to take up the activity. The aim would be for the people who can have this power to become aware of it and to use it. As seen, the significant person can be from the inner circle or the social circle, or can be trust-worthy professionals, and they could accomplish their objective as a result of a spontaneous proposal or within the framework of a formal campaign aimed at exploiting the potential of a pre-existing relationship. In fact, some authors have highlighted the fact that the traditional strategies for promotion, such as adverts, posters or signboards placed in residential areas or work paces of immigrants are useless, because they fail to break away from the prejudice and they don't clarify any doubts regarding the proposed activity (8) and that, in this case, strategies such as an invitation or accompaniment by a significant person are much more effective (8,49).

The reference made to family responsibilities as an obstacle for practising sport among women has been widespread. It seems that establishing a migratory context further emphasises the gender roles. Caring for family members has no time schedule, even more so when these are young women with small children who don't go to school. In addition, it seems that the times scheduled for sports activities have not taken full-time mothers into account, as is the case of some of the women participating in this study. Despite being convinced that sport is not a frivolity or a whim, rather it being very positive for health and well-being, the decision of these women leads them to stop practising sport. This is unanimously seen in the literature that deals with barriers in sport among immigrant women. This is due to the strict assignment of gender-based roles which these women often have to live with (10,36,39,49–52). And it is also due to the lack of family support within the migratory context (51,52). So, taking into account that the segment of immigrant women is, by far, the segment of population that practises the least amount of sport (16,18,19,27), it would be convenient to think up solutions which, on the one hand, facilitate access to sport for these women and, on the other, were manageable for society, given that it wouldn't be the first time that actions involving positive discrimination aimed at a group in need have involved opposition by large sectors of society (53) which has generated the opposite effect to that desired. In fact, one of the informants explains that one of the reasons which led her to deciding to stop practising sport, was the lack of understanding of other people attending the activity which, instead of acknowledging her efforts to attend the classes, they criticised her attitude as a mother. Facts such as this one don't help in so far as relationships among people, or for inclusion through sports or any other means. The women participating in this study, with the knowledge that it won't be easy for them to be understood by other women like them, but with a very different life, propose intermediate solutions which, without involving any form of



positive discrimination, which is often hard to understand, help them to organise their own resources. In this case, the demand is specific and is to have spaces can receive the young children of immigrant mothers –or local ones, as this service would not be solely for immigrants– so they can join in the activity of their choice, while another mother looks after the children. The organisation for looking after the children would be carried out by the group of women interested in the activity and would allow them to continue enjoying the activity in exchange for forgoing some classes on a one-off basis. However, for this solution to work, there must be a certain number of women wanting to take part. It is also necessary to avoid all wariness –if any– and for bonds of trust to have been established previously among all the women in the group. For all this, and before anything else, knowledge spaces must be sought among the women which facilitate the relationship between them, then they must be offered opportunities for practising sport that are attractive to them, and lastly, the person handling the resources should assess the possibility of helping with the internal organisation of this effort, optimising the use of spaces and other structures for purposes which were not initially foreseen. Despite all this, caring for the family as a gender-based role, is not exclusive to immigrant women and there are works that confirm that this is a frequent problem that affects families from all origins, including Anglo-Saxons (49).

The possibility of using sport as a vehicle for cultural expression has been recognised as a motivation for practising sport. The question to be posed now is to which extent this use contributes to the inclusion of immigrant people or, even, what is the risk of “re-ethnification” when proposing activities with a marked cultural specificity. The opinions to this regard are controversial. On the one hand, it is accepted that in the case of immigrant people, physical exercise with a marked cultural specificity helps to maintain the ties with their origin, offers a channel for expressing their identity, a meeting point for the community and newcomers, and can represent a relational core with other communities (8,16). However, it is not free from risks. The main risks: the “re-ethnification” and isolation from the rest of society (16), even though some authors state that creating ethnically uniform groups within a socially diverse context ends up widening the relational circle of the members of the group with the rest of groups and contributes towards cultural hybridisation (8,16) without the appearance of forms of exclusion (18). Ideally, intercultural societies are fed from contributions made from and towards the multiple channels for the cultural definition of the people, far from patronising stances that propose solutions without gaining information of the needs. The participatory dimension of the initiatives for includes is a milestone that is not always achieved, despite being considered an essential component of an intercultural approach (54,55). With regards to organising sports activities, the demand –currently, the challenge– is for immigrants to advance from being passive recipients of external initiatives to become actors who create their own projects. Projects in which all the aspirations, including aggregation –understood as the opposite of segregation–, are legitimate.

On the other hand, it is worth taking into account that ethnicity is yet another sense of belonging based on which identity is built, but there are others, such as gender or social class. With this in mind, it seems logical to think that choosing a culturally specific activity does not necessarily need to be done from a stance of ethnic identification. Additionally, the consideration of other channels for cultural definition in



planning the sports offers, such as gender or generation, could foster contact between different groups beyond the segmentation characteristic of the activity. So, it is worth considering the value of dancing among women, especially among immigrant women, because they are the ones who need it the most (16,18,19,27) and because they have expressed this preference (44,56). As, in general, the discussion groups have established a clear difference between male and female activities, it still makes sense to think of activities aimed at breaking away from prejudice and gender-based segregation in sport. However, if the main objective is to stimulate the practise of sport among immigrant men and women and to use this to favour social inclusion, one cannot underestimate the opportunity of organising activities which, despite insisting on the gender stereotype, such as dancing or football, will surely be widely accepted and, when organised on a basis other than the ethnic one, may encourage contact between people from different origins. All this, of course, without compromising on the proposal of parallel activities aimed at other segments of the population which propose changes in the gender patterns. A change which, on the other hand, can not just be approached from a sports stance. A change which requires the involvement of other social sectors, given that the relationships and gender-based roles that are expressed through sport are, in fact, a reflection of the relationships and roles which everyone adopts in society.

Football could be conceived as a different case. Football has always been considered a male sport. This has been implied by the participants, despite the anecdotal incursions of women, and the sports actors who are exclusively dedicated to this sport. Football must also endure the consequences of being a mass sport which is highly contaminated by attitudes that could be considered as not very sport-like, a fact that complicates its use in transmitting values. That is why it would be advisable to compensate this negative burden with additional efforts aimed at countering the dark side, because at present it must be included. It must be included because, despite everything, it is a widely accepted sport among youths and adults, and because this acceptance makes it ideal for being used as a strategy for inclusion. Football, is so far as being a global sport, generates shared feelings of belonging beyond any origin and despite being capable of stimulating nationalist feelings, it has proven of use in processes involving social inclusion and constructing the identity of immigrants (18). That is why it could be a good line for articulating sports proposals which, necessarily, incorporate the diversity of the other cultural dimensions of those who are interested. Beware, however, because using football as a strategy for inclusion via the neutralisation of the negative message it generates, can only be done from grassroots sport. It also requires in-depth involvement –not just on the surface– of other actors such as politicians, elite athletes, mass media, clubs, federations and other sports organisations. While the tension between the facts –reality– and a part of the message –the values– is resolved by disowning the values, efforts of the grassroots sports for reconciling reality with ideality will be useless, because sooner or later the idyllic version of football will end up colliding with its roughest version.

The factors with ambivalent value in the promotion of sport as a strategy for inclusion offer possibilities for action that are worth assessing and should be cared for. While the case of football has already been contemplated in this discussion, it is worth returning to it as it an example of how to approach other aspects with ambivalent value. The way to do it is by ensuring one does not further stimulate counter-



productive elements which could lead to failure in the use of sport as a strategy for inclusion and, if necessary and possible, counteract these risk elements with active interventions aimed to this purpose. So, with regard to the language, it would be good to propose initiatives for practising sport with bilingual support, as already seen in other experiences (57) or, on a bolder level, propose experience which through sport offer an environment for learning the language focused on practical aspects of communication, which is experienced in a friendly and stimulating manner. Even more so when the criticism of immigrant men and women regarding the opportunities for learning the language reveal these shortcomings (53) and when it seems obvious that sport, as a vehicle for non-verbal communication (8) can open the path towards other types of communication. It goes without saying that this intervention should be supported by the collaboration and good work of the professionals and other actors involved in the promotion of sport and teaching of languages. Neither is it necessary to say that as proposed with the language, it would be worth exploiting the collaboration between professionals and other actors who while sharing the channel of sports, propose a range of different objectives, such as social education, health, or culture and heritage, among others.

The case of competitiveness as a stimulus for practising sport also involves advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it seems that an important segment of the population feels comfortable and needs it to continue practising sport. On the other hand, it seems logical that a context of increasing competitiveness ends up being so exclusive that it can drive the participants away, as well as affecting their self-esteem and cause certain feelings of frustration. In this case, the lesson which could be extracted would be that of using competition in the groups which are evidently sensitive, and abstain from stimulating it or, if nothing else, not do so excessively, when there is a risk of excessive demands or the limit of their own skills may lead to abandoning the activity or feeling frustrated, and affecting the self-concept or the transfer of the values of the sport. In any case, it is obvious that this is not an easy task and that managing competitiveness generates an array of difficulties among sports actors, to the point that in the absence of competitiveness there are those who express themselves without arguments to maintain the stimuli for participation. Some studies on motivations and barriers in the practise of sport among immigrants highlight the fact that focusing on practising competitive sport discourages it (41), that this kind of sport among immigrant women, especially those of an Islamic origin, is a minority (9,10,56), that in the case of men, sporting competition among minority collectives and other major groups often derives in ethnic conflicts (58) and that, in general, the leisure sports offer for everyone opens up the scope of action and freedom of decision in relation to their own possibilities, values and attitudes (8). All this serves to confirm the need for finding alternative and complementary stimuli to competitiveness in order to encourage immigrants to practise sport and for this to become inclusive. The discrepancy between our results and those found in other literature could be explained by the fact that the informants who have referred to competitiveness as a stimulus for practising sport did so in reference, either as participants or as sports actors, to football. On the other hand, there are also those of believe that institutional support towards cultural diversity in sport and its logical translation into greater visibility of cultural diversity in the



competitive scope, could facilitate the emergence of references of success originating in minority groups and contributing to mitigate institutional racism (49).

Despite having accessed informants from different countries, we have insufficient data to establish stable profiles for each of the regions; although they do share certain common traits. Firstly, the confirmation that the use of sport as a strategy for inclusion is not a simple task. The multiplicity of the actors involved, the need for creating and taking advantage of synergies, and a changing and diverse reality require stable relational structures aimed at optimising the efforts, anticipating the challenges and reacting to the problems while making the most of the diversity of knowledge of the actors and the ties established among them. It is about networking.

Then, the emergence of variables of a social or economic nature which are added to other complex elements, the demands for balanced management of the ambivalent elements, the need for finding motivation beyond the call for competitiveness, and the intrusion of external elements which interfere in the mission of transferring values further complicate the task of using sport as a tool for inclusion. It seems that this is a task that cannot be improvised or underestimated. It requires professionals who know how to use sport to create the necessary conditions for people to contribute to making this world a fairer and more caring place (8), and this cannot be done from a single approach –technical, educational or social–. To successfully create opportunities for practising sport which adapt to the individual and collective needs of the participants, which generate and maintain interest and adhesions, and which help to train citizens and people it seems logical to assume the need for training good sports technicians, who know the society and the people they will be working with, who are familiar with education and psychology, and who also have a high ethical sense (59,60). While it is also important to ensure the incorporation and visibility of people from different origins leading the initiatives (59)

The lack of political commitment –which means a lack of budget– with a sport that does not provide podiums, can only be countered by proving the benefit, which means proving its social impact. There is a need for comprehensive research cycles that put into practise sports programmes and assess their results. Despite acknowledging the difficulty of this task, the 2009 Comprehensive Plan for Physical Exercise and Sport (61) gathers the indicators which should be used for measuring the impact of these interventions and, after all, prove the profitability of a paradigm shift in sports policies.

This work has certain limitations. Attracting immigrant participants or those of an immigrant origin tends to be complicated due to language barriers, availability or, even, due to fear, in the case of illegal immigrants. Even more so when the technique for gathering data is the focus group, due to the difficulty in agreeing a time that works for all participants. In our case, the decentralised recruitment of participants has facilitated the localisation, even though the success of the invitation has been unequal, and some groups have had low internal diversity and very few participants. Notwithstanding this and considering that the team which conducted the focus groups was always the same and had to move around, we decided to make the most of all the opportunities for data gathering that we came across, despite the deficiencies which we have come across. In so far as the internal diversity of the groups, it has been



impossible to get any man to participate in a focus group of adult immigrants. So, we cannot rule out that male participation in these focus groups could have contributed new points of view to the immigrants' opinion.

This work, which has been approached from the point of view of being convinced that sport can contribute towards social inclusion, has posed the question –as a first step– of what can be done to promote sport among immigrant men and women, and boys and girls. It is also worth keeping in mind that the mere opportunity of practising sport does not ensure it will be taken up. That it will not necessarily be done, and there is no assurance that it will be inclusive. And that both sport and inclusion as multidimensional contextualised processes. So, beyond managing to get people to practise sport –which can be a good start–, the true challenge lies in turning our society into an inclusive society. The sport carried out will be as inclusive as the society it is practised in.

Conclusions

The graphic summary of the conclusions can be seen in figure 1.

The analysis of the results has allowed to infer several recommendations for helping towards the inclusion of immigrants through sport. These are the following:

- Taking advantage of the attractiveness of the proposals for global identification such as dance or football.
- Ensuring the availability of physical spaces, either temporary or symbolic, that encourage practising free and safe sport.
- Using the figure of the “significant person” as a strategy for creating awareness of activities and attracting participants.
- Promoting the organisation of activities based on cultural core areas other than ethnic-based ones.
- Incorporating the participation of immigrants in the organisation of sports activities.
- Seeking synergies among the sports actors and other professionals who share sport as a tool for intervention.
- Networking.
- Standardising the training of the professionals dedicated to promoting sport as a tool for social inclusion, including skills relating to sport, psychology, pedagogics, social and ethical education.
- Researching with a focus on assessing the social profitability of promoting grassroots sport as a tool for educating people and citizens, in the universal enjoyment of sport.

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Table 1: Sample description

Focus group		M / W	Age	Participant	Nacional / Migrant	Country of nationality	Country of origin
FG1-SA Occitania	N = 6	M	62	SA	N	France	France
		M	21	SA	NMB	France	Morocco
		M	54	SA	N	France	France
		M	28	SA	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	50	SA	N	France	France
		M	68	SA	NMB	France	Spain
FG2-BG Occitania	N = 13	M	13	BGP	NMB	France	Turkey
		M	13	BGP	NMB	France	Morocco
		M	12	BGP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	12	BGP	NMB	France	Spain
		W	12	BGP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	13	BGNP	I	Morocco	Morocco
		M	13	BGNP	NMB	France	Romania
		M	14	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
		M	13	BGNP	NMB	France	Russia
		W	13	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	12	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	12	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
W	13	BGNP	NMB	France	Turkey		
FG3-BG Occitania	N = 12	W	13	BGP	NMB	France	Turkey
		W	14	BGP	NMB	France	Turkey
		M	14	BGP	NMB	France	Romania
		W	13	BGP	I	Morocco	Morocco
		M	14	BGP	NMB	France	Italy
		M	14	BGP	I	Romania	Romania
		M	14	BGP	NMB	France	Algeria
		W	14	BGP	NMB	France	Turkey
		M	13	BGP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	13	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	14	BGNP	NMB	France	Morocco
		W	14	BGNP	NMB	France	Algeria
FG4-A Piedmon	N = 3	W	54	AP	I	Brazil	Brazil
		W	48	ANP	I	Argentina	Argentina
		W	58	ANP	I	Romania	Romania
FG5-SA Piedmon	N = 7	W	28	SA	NMB	Italy	Argentina
		M	25	SA	N	Italy	Italy
		W	24	SA	N	Italy	Italy
		W	29	SA	N	Italy	Italy
		W	22	SA	N	Italy	Italy
		W	31	SA	N	Italy	Italy
		M	26	SA	N	Italy	Italy

**Table 1: Sample description (continued)**

Focus group		M / W	Age	Participant	Nacional / Migrant	Country of nationality	Country of origin
FG6-BG Piedmon	N = 6	M	11	BGP	NMB	Italy	Romania
		M	13	BGP	NMB	Italy	Romania
		M	11	BGP	NMB	Italy	Ukraine
		M	13	BGNP	NMB	Italy	Romania
		W	13	BGP	I	Brazil	Brazil
		W	15	BGNP	I	Perú	Perú
FG7-SA Balearic Islands	N = 2	W	32	SA	N	Spain	Spain
		W	30	SA	N	Spain	Spain
FG8-BG Catalonia	N = 5	M	11	BGP	NMB	Spain	Argentina
		M	11	BGP	NMB	Spain	Morocco
		W	12	BGP	NMB	Spain	Russia
		M	11	BGP	NMB	Spain	Romania
		M	11	BGNP	NMB	Spain	Romania
FG9-SA Catalonia	N = 5	M	26	SA	I	Morocco	Morocco
		W	35	SA	I	Russia	Russia
		M	26	SA	I	Morocco	Morocco
		M	29	SA	I	Bulgaria	Bulgaria
		M	23	SA	N	Spain	Spain
FG10-A Catalonia	N = 3	W	30	ANP	I	Morocco	Morocco
		W	30	ANP	I	Romania	Romania
		W	34	ANP	I	Romania	Romania
Total	N	62	62	62	62	62	62

M: Man, W: Woman, SA: Sport Actor, A: Adult, BG: Boy or girl, BGP: Boy or girl sports practitioner, BGNP: Boy or girl not practicing sports, N: National, NMB: National with a migration background, I: Immigrant.



Figura 1: Resum de conclusions i propostes

