

# Understanding Social Inequality (Ethnicity And Sexuality) In Sports Policy And Research And Contributing To Social Justice

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## **Aim of the research**

In this research paper I critically reflect on developments in Dutch governmental sport policy and research directed at social inclusion of specific social status groups, with the aim to enhance research, policy and practice directed at increasing social justice.

## **Theoretical background**

A critical, constructivist perspective is used to discuss how mechanisms of marginalization and social exclusion may not only operate within the practice of sport, but also in sport policy and research. In my analyses on 'policy-as-discourse' I draw on theoretical notions like Fraser's (2001) 'participatory parity' and 'redistribution and recognition' in relation to social justice regarding gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Like the practice of sport, policy and research on sport in society are also influenced by the social and political context, organizational and institutional powers and ideology.

## **Methodology**

The focus is on developments in governmental sport policy and research in the Netherlands regarding ethnic and sexual minority groups in the last two decades. The adoption of, shifts within and (potential) disappearance of ethnicity and sexuality as relevant sport policy issues with respect to measuring sport participation and stimulating social inclusion are qualitatively explored using critical discourse analysis of relevant texts, actors/network structures, social interactions and the sociopolitical context. Main data are policy and research documents on/including sport & ethnicity and sport & sexuality and the lived experiences as research actor within this context (e.g. research assignments, expert meetings, email contacts).

## **Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions**

The results show how knowledge on sport participation and social in/exclusionary mechanisms may not only influence (social justice) policy and practice, but also how the (development of) body of knowledge on 'sport-for-all' is influenced by political policy and power regimes. For example, due to changes in political powers, ethnicity was kind of erased from the agenda of sport policy and research in the Netherlands, whereas LGBT issues became re-programmed, before having been marginalized again in recent years. Overall quantitative figures became more important in the accountability of sport policy issues, but the availability, relevance and interpretation of data relating to sport participation (distribution) and exclusionary mechanisms (recognition) are influenced by hegemonic political discourses (e.g., regarding the adoption and integration of migrants) and organizational and institutional powers and ideologies (e.g., regarding specific research institutes and data).

Although the availability of comparative data on sport participation with respect to ethnicity and sexuality has increased, as well as the body of knowledge on specific mechanisms of social in/exclusion, these do not always seem to match well. For example, the inclusion of 'sexual preference' as social demographic characteristic in large data bases does not automatically enhance deeper understanding of mechanisms of social in/exclusion in sport, especially when gender is not regarded as an important intersectional status position. I therefore plea for a more constructivist approach among — often more positivistic oriented — sport participation researchers and for more openness for quantitative data among social-critical sport researchers, to contribute to social change and enhance social justice.

## **References**

Fraser, N. (2001). Recognition without ethics. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(2/3), 21–42.