

Football as an Integration Technique

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In a land where national pride, outside of respect for the constitution, is not exalted, football can be seen as a symbol of the German spirit. Unlike the Tiki-Taka quick passes and emphasis on technical skill seen in *La Liga*, or the strong defense and structured play of the Italians, German football focuses on efficiency, strong team cohesion, and movement. The administration of the *Bundesliga* reflects the strong German economy, yet their profit-structure allows for increased care of fans – football is affordable and accessible for Germans. Based on the identity German football provides, as well as natural benefits of playing sports, football can be a strong integration technique, primarily for young men. Using football as a model can introduce German values to populations in a friendly atmosphere, diverse teams foster understanding, and the pitch can serve as a classroom.

FOOTBALL AS IDENTITY

The atmosphere following Germany's 2014 World Cup win spurred conversation regarding German »nationalistic pride«. The 2014 moment was historic; Germany has had a strong team landing amongst the top three the previous four World Cups, yet won its first World Cup since reunification.¹ *Der Spiegel* magazine, following the winning match, published a headline reading: »We're back, but as what?«² This question can be answered in the style of German football, as well as the team (and fan-base) composition. German football is focused on the collective, working well in their own positions, feeding the ball and working as unit rather than building teams around a star. Their model is efficient, no-nonsense, and incredibly effective, not only in 2014, but also historically. The

1 | Anthony Faiola/Anne Hull: A score for Germany patriotism. In: Washington Post, 17 Jul. 2014, online www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-score-for-germany-patriotism/2014/07/13/0d2d2618-666a-4919-9b3b-1bbeec1d8645_story.html.

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2 | *Der Spiegel*, No. 25, 14 Jul. 2014.

fans are important, and integrated by capping ticket prices to matches and keeping *Bundesliga* matches to Saturdays. The amateur league in Germany is huge; people from all walks of life view football as a valuable pastime. The German Football Association, or DFB, is the largest sports association in the world.³ It is simple to take a major sport of a nation and draw comparisons to their national outlook, but Germany provides an incredible example of how sport can demonstrate what *German* means, while outward signs of *German-ness* are usually looked upon with uncertainty and caution.

The integration of refugees through sport can be done in a few ways; forming teams based on nationality, mixed ethnic teams of asylum seekers, or mixed teams of asylum seekers and Germans nationals. All three teams would benefit with a German coach and need to participate in German leagues.⁴ Generally, a merit based play is preferred to setting up teams rather than convenience or ethnic lines. The environment formed in this way becomes a classroom to the players, asylum seekers and German nationals alike.

THE PITCH AS A CLASSROOM

In formal football clubs, the pitch serves as a classroom, the coach as a teacher. Dedication to studies is required for success on and off the field. The lessons taught in football include teamwork, patience, understanding, technique, and German. Most of the asylum speakers do not enter Germany knowing German, and the languages spoken on the team can become an impetus to team cohesion. Therefore, German becomes the language on the pitch, and with a specific purpose and application to learn German; many of the asylum speakers can learn (and retain) more German from their coach and teammates than in a formal classroom setting.

This style of learning can be seen already across Germany in programs such as an extension of the »Refugees Welcome« initiative in Cologne. Here, German nationals play football with African Refugees. The opportunity to play forges relationships and cultural understanding across the European and African eth-

³ | Adyan Özoguz, interview by Thomas Hackbarth, Bundesregierung, 12 Sept. 2015, online www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Interview/IB/2015-09-14-dfb-initiative.html.

⁴ | A German coach is able to help integrate players into society off the field, as well as on. This benefit should not, however discount the possible benefits of having refugee and asylum-seeking persons as coaches. There appears to be a greater difficulty, however in having a head coach that may not speak German coaching Germans, rather positions of assistant coaches may be better fits for those new to German society. Having non-German nationals coach German teams may also form a hybrid of playing style, reflecting the changing demography of Germany as a whole.

nic divides. Frank Strassburger, a local of Cologne and one of the founders is described in *Deutsche Welle*:

Strassburger does much more than just play football with the young Africans. He also takes them out to familiarize them with life in a German city. »They are encouraged to go out and meet people, to go out and talk to German people. And of course they have to be integrated into German society. I think this is a good way.«⁵

Another team in Duisburg, comprised of male Afghan asylum seekers aged 14–27, and coached by a Turkish-German woman, experiences similar stories of growth. The coach, Kader Yapıcı, is also a physical education teacher and emphasizes the necessity of physical movement for the asylum seekers:

»It is important that these young people actively participate in something and sport is particularly good for that,« Yapıcı said, »For months, they have been waiting for their asylum applications to be processed. They sit in their accommodation centers and do not know what will happen to them.«⁶

Yapıcı touches on another important aspect of using sports as integration. Not only can sports provide the avenues to learning about a culture and developing language skills, but sports also builds community, provides a safe and constructive outlet for energy, and gives purpose to time. Due to laws that prohibit work for asylum seekers until they are approved to stay, many refugees and asylum seekers are stuck in small apartments with nothing to do. Many pass the time with cards and friends, but football provides a reason to get out of their homes and move around and meet new people. As fear over refugees in society increase, sport gives opportunities of socialization and familiarization for both the refugees and German people. The example of Yapıcı's team provides yet another dimension to the benefits of integration through sport – respect for one's coach. Discussion in Germany, particularly after incidents in Cologne, raise suspicion over integrating refugees into a society that emphasizes gender equality. Some areas in Germany have responded with courses, offering information on proper social actions, and the equality of women. Instances in which women are given authority, such as the coach of a football team, also provide instances in which gender equality is normalized in every day setting. In order to participate on the team, the players must accept the authority of the coach, and listen to her direction. To reject her coaching is not only detrimental to the game, but also team morale. The team is comparable to society, and the game, life. Learning

5 | Abu-Bakar Jalloh: Integrating African refugees through soccer. In: Deutsche Welle, 15 Oct. 2015, online www.dw.com/en/integrating-african-refugees-through-soccer/av-18780633.

6 | Turkish woman trains refugees for football team. In: Daily Sabah, 17 Feb. 2016, online www.dailysabah.com/europe/2016/02/17/turkish-woman-trains-refugees-for-football-team.

to work cohesively and efficiently, regardless of sex, nationality, or creed reflects important German ideals.

METHOD IN ACTION

Other countries have used sports as a means to integrate populations, with successful results, albeit with small groups. Sport as an integration technique is never going to be the only method of integration, nor should ever be the main method of integration. In the University of Sterling's report, *The Roles of Sport and Education in the Social Inclusion of Asylum Seekers and Refugees* a series of studies concerning sports as a method of integration are overall favorable of its use in promoting community, physical fitness, and a general sense of purpose to asylum seekers and refugees. The main result of sports, the study found, is a general increase in the feeling of inclusion amongst the refugee/asylum population and the national population. Additional benefits listed were deeper cultural understanding across divisions within the refugee and asylum communities, and the building of self-esteem and confidence.⁷

One of the largest programs utilizing football for integration in Germany is the program »:o für ein Willkommen.« This group aids amateur football clubs monetarily so they can provide more placement slots for the asylum seekers. The money, from the federal government as well from teams in the *Bundesliga*, goes mostly to renting pitches and covering increased insurance costs as well as equipment.⁸ Another popular program is »Champions ohne Grenzen«, or Champions without Borders. Operating in Berlin and Brandenburg, the goal of this group is to »create a sustainable culture of welcome«⁹. Champions ohne Grenzen not only invites refugees and asylum seekers to participate in sports, but the organization also fosters community, using football as a networking platform, forging friendships between newly arrived refugees and German nationals. From there, the volunteers help the refugees in day to day; they become teammates on and off the field.

Even the Minister of State, Aydan Özoguz, is convinced of the benefits of using sports in integration techniques. »Football has a particular power to bring people together despite cultural differences, thereby strengthening social cohesion« she said, »it encourages encounters between people, generates under-

⁷ | M. Green et al.: *The Roles of Sport and Education in the Social Inclusion of Asylum Seekers and Refugees: An Evaluation of Policy and Practice in the UK*. Loughborough University 2004.

⁸ | Adyan Özoguz, interview by Thomas Hackbarth.

⁹ | Online <http://championsohnegrenzen.de>.

standing and dismantles prejudices on both sides through shared experiences.¹⁰ With the backing of the German government, and the positive precedents set by other states, there is little reason to believe that football programs would not aid in the integration of refugees in Germany. However, like most issues facing the refugee problem, positive methods are easier to talk about than implement.

POSSIBLE HARDSHIPS

There are proven benefits to using sports for integration, yet their implementation is rare. The refugee crisis presents many problems, and securing housing, medicine and food are rightly on the top of challenges to overcome. Organized sports require money and locations for training, both of which are strained in the context of refugees. Gym spaces in particular are hard to come by, both for German nationals and refugees, as gymnasiums are typically assigned as transition housing for the large number of refugees coming into Germany. There is a balance to be found, however. Integration is a challenge with lasting implications that will be felt not only in the days to come, but also for generations. In this way, positive techniques like football programs are methods to turn to in order to foster community and learn German culture.

10 | 1:0 for a Welcome. Football clubs in Germany promote refugee integration. In: Deutschland.de, 17 Jun. 2015, online www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/society-integration/10-for-a-welcome.

