

## **“Football and dancing are in our blood”: Culture promoting sports practice among immigrants in Europe**

### **Authors:**

- 1- Monserrate-Gómez, Sílvia. MSc. <sup>(1)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2962-6608>
- 2- Rubio-Rico, Lourdes\*. Rn, Ph. D. <sup>(1,2)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3862-0462>
- 3- Cuesta-Martínez, Roser. Rn, MSc, Ph. D. <sup>(2)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5527-0292>
- 4- Raventós-Torner, Rosa-Dolors, Rn, MSc, Ph. D. <sup>(2)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2340-5305>
- 5- Roca-Biosca, Alba. Rn, MSc, Ph. D. <sup>(2)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3962-1587>
- 6- de Molina-Fernández, Inmaculada. Rn, MSc, Ph. D. <sup>(2)</sup> ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1429-4455>

(1): UNESCO Chair for Intercultural Dialogue in the Mediterranean. Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona

(2): Nursing Department. Rovira i Virgili University, Tarragona

\* : Corresponding author

## **ABSTRACT**

The current state of knowledge indicates that regular sports practice helps prevent and treat non-communicable diseases. The promotion of sport is, therefore, an important community health intervention for maintaining and improving the health of individuals and populations.

Culture is identified as being associated with sports practice and sedentary behaviour of ethnic and national minorities. This study aims qualitatively to analyse the potential for culture as a basis for the promotion of sport among immigrants in four regions of Mediterranean Europe.

Ten focus groups (n=62) were conducted with immigrants –adults and young people over the age of 11– and people involved in promoting sport. Thematic content analysis was conducted.

The results enabled identifying two major issues: sport as a vehicle for cultural expression and synergies between sport and culture. Accordingly, sport serves to express global, local and non-ethno-national cultural belonging. Regarding synergies, culture and sport feed each other positively and contribute to immigrants' health and cultural well-being.

Culture as a strategy for promoting sports practice requires an interdisciplinary approach that involves collaboration between healthcare practitioners and social sciences professionals. There is also a need to use the various axes of cultural definition -global, local and non-ethno-national- of those involved, and for them to take part themselves in designing sports activities. Moreover, promoting sport through non-ethno-national axes of cultural definition may help with immigrants' social inclusion, as intercultural relations between migrants and newcomers are promoted.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Regular physical activity (PA) is a well-established protective factor to help prevent and treat non-communicable diseases (World Health Organization (WHO), 2018). It can also improve mental and social health, quality of life and well-being (WHO, 2018). The promotion of sports practice is considered a useful strategy for individuals and populations to achieve the recommended levels of PA (WHO, 2011) and is, therefore, an important community health intervention for maintaining and improving the health of individuals and populations.

Some studies have identified immigrants as groups at risk of low levels of PA (WHO 2011; Gualdi-Russo et al., 2014), in fact, according to the 2014 European Health Survey (Eurostat, 2018), the percentage of nationals aged between 18 and 64 years practising aerobic or anaerobic PA in their free time at least once a week is 37.6%, while the percentage of immigrants who report such practice is 35.8%. However, the data from this same survey carried out in three European Mediterranean basin countries –Spain, France and Italy– repeat the trend but display more pronounced differences between immigrants and nationals. The practice of PA by immigrants in these three countries is 6.4 percentage points lower in Spain and 8.4 and 8.7 points lower in France and Italy respectively. If the data are broken down by gender, the difference in levels of PA among immigrants and nationals ranges from 5.7 percentage points for women surveyed in Italy –20.7% for nationals, and 15% for immigrants– to 10.9 points for men surveyed in Italy –31% for nationals and 20.1% for immigrants.

These data highlight the need to further promote PA among populations of diverse origins in Europe, especially with regard to the countries of the Mediterranean basin (Toselli and Belcastro, 2017). The migratory profiles of the countries on the northern shore of the Western Mediterranean are very similar to each other as they are largely fed by people arriving from countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and south-eastern

Europe, while migrants established in the rest of Europe come from other regions (Eurostat, 2018). Furthermore, up until now, research into the aspects determining the practice of PA among the different populations has been limited and has mainly been carried out in the United Kingdom and in the Nordic countries, and studies on this subject are required in other European regions (Langøien et al., 2017).

Culture has been identified as one factor associated with PA and sedentary behaviour among ethnic and national minorities (Holdsworth et al., 2017; Langøien et al., 2017) and it is considered a determining factor of the success of activities promoting the practice of PA by immigrants (Barr-Anderson et al., 2017; Hardan-Khalil, 2020; LuthHanssen et al., 2020).

Hence, previous research proposes conducting studies that promote the understanding of the interactions between culture and other factors involved in the practice of PA (Holdsworth et al., 2017; Langøien et al., 2017), as well as others that help to develop cultural adaptation skills applied to the promotion of PA (Holdsworth et al., 2017).

Since health professionals work with many different people and groups, we need to find ways to ensure a more welcoming and culturally receptive health environment that respects and values the beliefs of others (Wilson et al., 2018).

The question that emerges from these suggestions is: How could we optimize the use of culture in the promotion of sport among immigrants?

## **AIM**

This study is part of a broader project whose aim was to find out about the perceived barriers and stimuli for sports practice among immigrants and how they operated, and we now propose qualitatively analysing the potential of culture as a cornerstone for promoting sports practice among immigrant boys and girls, men and women.

As a specific objective, we intend to infer culture-based strategies aimed at improving the percentage of immigrants practising sport.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design, and follows the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) guidelines (Tong et al.,2007)

The units of analysis are four regions of Mediterranean Europe: Occitania (France), Piedmont (Italy) and Catalonia and the Balearic Islands (Spain).

The study population comprises immigrants –adults (A) or boys and girls (BG) aged 11 years and over, either practising sport or not, and sports actors (SA) of the regions participating in the project who are involved in creating and maintaining opportunities for practising sports such as instructors, volunteers, or managers.

In this study we have considered culture from the constructivist perspective that internalizes culture as a dynamic relational process of shared meanings resulting from human interaction (Garneau and Pepin, 2015). Accordingly, the migratory experience stimulates the formation of an identity that exceeds transnationality, results from interaction and adaptation to new spaces of relationship and is made up of multiple belongings such as nationality, religion, language, social class, gender and generation, among others (Vila Freyer, 2017; Maalouf 2014).

The “immigrant” category is defined by nationality. For the study, immigrants were defined as being either persons who do not hold the nationality of the country in which they live, or 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. The participation of nationals descending from families of newcomers is important due to the fact that, although attaining the nationality is an undeniable access route to active citizenship, the

fact remains that the migratory history partly determines the processes of settlement and in turn determine living conditions and specific needs (Malmusi et al., 2010).

Following the Council of Europe (2001), we understand Sport as being “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”.

The data were gathered throughout 2017 by holding focus groups (FG) segmented into three different profiles: one profile of SA, and two profiles of immigrants either doing or not doing sports, one of adults and the other of young people aged over 11 years.

Adult participants were recruited by institutions promoting sports in the different areas participating in the study based on their contact networks. Potential participants were informed of the performance of the study and were invited to contact said institutions in the event they wished to take part. For young people, the sports institutions entrusted the schools with which they regularly offer extracurricular activities to select boys and girls from among their students who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the study as informants of the FG.

The FG meetings were held in an environment familiar to the participants, which was previously agreed on by participants and researchers. The data collection sessions were conducted by two of the authors of this article (LR-R and SM-G). LR-R chaired the sessions, steering the dialogue among participants, based on a pre-established script, and SM-G as a rapporteur, taking notes and assisting the chair in data collection. FG with adults and young people, whether or not they do sport, were conceived for discussing the pros and cons of sports practice, while FG with sports actors were conceived as a think tank to collect ideas on a topic based on the opinion and experience of specialists. The

details and guidelines for researchers to conduct FG are shown as supplementary information (SI1).

The FG held in Italy made use of a liaison translation service. All other FG were held in the official languages of the area, since the researchers are proficient in all of them. The sessions were recorded in audio format. The recordings of the sessions were transcribed, translated into English and back-translated by a different team of professional translators who validated the translation. Prior to translation, the transcripts of the sessions with adults were returned to participants to validate or correct the contents thereof.

Thematic content analysis was conducted (Braun and Clark, 2006). The first level of analysis was concurrent with the data collection and aimed to identify emerging themes to modify the sampling and data collection task. In the second level, the data were segmented, coded using open coding and grouped according to the study objectives. To ensure the reliability of the coding, four qualified researchers, in pairs, identified and codified the minimum units of significance that corresponded to the objectives of the study. As the analysis by pairs progressed, the four researchers met to agree on the significant segments and the coding assigned. The categories that emerged from these meetings were incorporated into a bank of categories that was kept throughout the period of analysis. The meetings also enabled the researchers to discuss and establish the relationships between the various elements of the analysis.

The systematization of the categorization and analysis were carried out using the programme Weft QDA V1.01.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research ethics committee [BLINDED FOR REVIEW] evaluated and authorized the project. All participants signed a form of informed consent. In the case of minors, the consent was signed by the adults responsible for them.

## RESULTS

A total of 10 FG (n=62), lasting between sixty and ninety minutes, were conducted: three in Occitania, three in Piedmont, three in Catalonia and one in the Balearic Islands. Four FG were composed of SA, one in each region participating in the project (in total, 20 participants, 32.2% of the sample). Among the FG with immigrants, two were with adult women, one in Catalonia and the other in Piedmont (6 participants, 9.7% of the sample) and 4 with immigrant boys and girls, 2 in Occitania, one in Catalonia and one in Piedmont (36 participants, 58.1% of the sample). Of the participants in the immigrant FG, one of the 6 women (16.6% of adult immigrants) and 22 young people (61.1% of young immigrants) reported being regular practitioners of sports. None of the adults held the nationality of their country of residence, while among the teenagers, only 14% were non-nationals. The composition of the FG and the profile of the participants in each group can be seen as supplementary information (SI2).

The results are presented in two large content blocks. On the one hand, sport as a vehicle for cultural expression, and on the other, a block in which the synergies and interrelationships between sport and culture are presented.

### **Sport as a vehicle for cultural expression: “football and dancing are in our blood”**

The choice of a certain sport provides clues as to the person’s identity. Our informants identified various axes of cultural definition according to which the person tells us who s/he is, which are his/her cultural origins are and how s/he relates to them.

#### ***Global or local cultural belonging?***

According to our testimonies, choosing one sport or another is an act of personal and community definition: “I do aerobics and Zumba. In Brazil, football and dancing are in our blood. Samba, you know?” (FG4-A). As explained by this Brazilian woman, the definition using global senses of belonging, such as football, and local ones, such as



Samba, are not incompatible. In fact, this definition using diverse, apparently contradictory, parameters says a lot about the person 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 21<sup>st</sup> century, all senses of belonging are necessary.

Our research presents football as a sport that generates great interest. Many people are encouraged to practise sports because they like football, whether they are boys or girls, adults or children, and regardless of their origin.

*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. [...] Romanian, Moroccan. And all of them playing football (FG4-A).*

*Look, when I was at my son's football game [...]. 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).*

*Here the girls demand flamenco [Spanish dance] and football [...]. Here I discovered that there are girls who play football (FG9-SA)*

In our field of study, the practice of football can be considered as the expression of a global, shared cultural belonging that is manifested through various axes of identification such as origin, adoption, gender or generation.

Although global cultural senses of belonging are, a priori, familiar and shared by all kinds of people, sometimes axes of individual belonging interact with global sense of belonging, and adaptations are required that render all of the individual's axes of belonging compatible. In the case of this Muslim woman, she acknowledges that her religious belonging within a migratory context requires her to make certain adaptations 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 [...].*

*No, it's about me. Because of my culture, which is a bit different. [...] It's something that poses 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 (FG10-A).*

Despite the informant having experience as an athlete and acknowledging her liking of sport, she identifies certain limitations related to being a Muslim and she expresses them with resignation because she feels they are hard to manage in a migratory context. Despite the religious sense of belonging not forbidding her from practising sport –in fact before emigrating she played basketball– it does currently condition her possibilities of doing so. And despite not making any specific demands, it is obvious that there is a need for intercultural adaptation, otherwise she will resign herself to not doing sports. The informants mention other cases in which, without there being any clear interference between the different axes of cultural belonging, specific adaptations are implemented to satisfy the cultural profile of the target population –in this case, a community-based educational initiative based on sport aimed at improving coexistence in socially underprivileged areas: “Now, for example, in *Cultural May*, there was a nighttime football tournament. These actions arise from the demand by young people. We try to find out what they want and implement the proposal. Through a community platform in their neighbourhood” (FG7-SA).

Just as the Brazilian woman mentioned when talking about Samba, the choice and exercise of a particular sport can also be a way of expressing belonging to a specific ethnic or national community. This is the case of activities of local scope that are linked to the community of origin or to the host community and that, when dealing with studying the potential of culture as a basis for promoting sports practice among immigrant men and

women, are doubly attractive. First, they help attract practitioners because they present themselves as something “exotic” to those seeing them for the first time, whether they are from the host community or newcomers. And then because they provide loyalty incentives to the practice such as adding new feelings of belonging and facilitating the bond with the host community:

[I play] *tambourin*. *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: "Of course, you can"* (FG2-BG).

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

Or to stimulate the practice of interculturality, not as an abstract concept, but as something tangible since locals and newcomers, after overcoming the initial barriers to approach the “other”, take an interest in finding out about and relating to it: “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). A mutual rapprochement that, due to the playful component of sport, it is hardly surprising that, in turn, it leads to the practice of a new sport.

### ***Expression of cultural belonging not associated with ethnic or national identifications***

Regarding sports practice as an expression of belonging not related to nationality, the clearest example is the practice associated with gender belonging. Some groups have

identified certain practices as being associated with a particular gender. This is the case of dance, which has been identified in various groups, both of adults and of young people, as belonging to the female gender:

*We adapt all types of sports to our public. For example, we offer girls gymnastics, dance, choreography or some other type of activity that we think they may like more. (FG1-SA)*

*It's just that, for example, there are some sports, like ballet, that are more for girls, right? There are some sports for men and others for women (FG6-BG).*

While this gender identification associated with certain sports practices cannot be denied, it is also true that an SA group has expressed its desire to combat this conception: “We also have to do a bit of work to break stereotypes, that there are no girls’ sports or boys’ sports!” (FG7-SA). And they do so because they are convinced that the conception of gender-specific sports practice reduces options for girls:

*If the promotions are by boys or men in schools, only the boys sign up. But if there is a girl and a boy, the girls say: “Ah! Do girls play rugby too?” And a lot of teachers: “Ah! Is this also for girls? [...] I think that the basic pillar of our involvement is to start from children’s right to play sports, whatever it is (FG7-SA).*

And because they are convinced that diversity –of origin, class and gender– is a value in itself and a necessary contribution to improving coexistence. Note how all this is reflected in one of the conversations with sports promoters in economically deprived neighbourhoods with a high presence of immigrants:

*-I also like to work on breaking stereotypes, on the subject of players, coaches, technicians. In the end, I am the screaming feminist of Mallorca. “Watch out, she’s coming!” There’s a big difference when you start putting women somewhere that has always been occupied by men.*

*-We are neither better nor worse. The meetings are different. What they [men] can contribute and what I or we [women] can contribute is very different”*

*-I have been a coach for nine years, and I see that the more diverse a group, the more it’s enriched. I took private schools, chartered schools and XXX [the subject mentions the name of a local school*

that we do not publish to respect its anonymity], *which is a public school in the neighbourhood, and we have brought together children from many different backgrounds*". (FG7-SA).

Another axis of cultural definition not linked to origin through sport is the generational one. Although the informants' identification of a sporting profile associated with a generation is not as well defined as in the case of dance and gender, it should be noted that competitiveness has been mentioned as a cross-cutting feature associated with the sport carried out by young people. The youth say so: "Fun is not a sport... For me sport is not about having fun with friends. Sport is competition". (FG3-BG) and the SAs also say so: "As a coach, you expect results. There is a competition at the end and results are needed. It's not just pleasure, you have to win". (FG1-SA). In fact, the stimulus to compete is considered by promoters as a resource to retain young people in the practice of PA: "[I motivate them] getting them to compete with others, perhaps even exceeding one's own limit and others'. To have a little bit of competition, maybe get to a slightly higher level, so... keep improving, you know" (FG5-SA), although it could also pose a threat because, if the instructors do not succeed, the young people may well stop sport at a time in their lives that has been described as vulnerable:

*-The junior players have taken this step that they like football, they feel passionate, but they have also taken this step of going out with girls. Drugs, maybe. We had the group of juniors, the first days, we tried to keep it going as best we could but there was no competition, they didn't compete, and they all stopped coming, and we lost them all, almost, at that such a difficult age* (FG9-SA).

### **Synergies between sport and culture**

The results suggest that sport nurtures certain cultural aspects of particular relevance to immigrants or people with a migrant background, to the extent that sport is perceived to have a positive impact on meeting human needs related to cultural belonging and, also, satisfying these needs acts to reinforce and strengthen the person in the practice of sport.

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

The lack of knowledge of the language is, for adults of immigrant origin, an element of ambivalent value, which could serve to stimulate practising sport or be detrimental to this aim. Some adults participating in this project have placed the lack of knowledge of a language as one of the main conditioning factors that hinder sports practice 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” (FG10-A). This vision contrasts with that of the people who consider sport as an opportunity to communicate beyond the spoken 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). Communication is a human need that, in a migratory context, may be affected by knowledge of a language, and this is when sport practice attains a special value, that of facilitating the expression of feelings: “doing sports, at any age, helps to express our..., our emotions. So, people who come from other cultures can express their emotions in a language that is more shared than words” (FG5-SA), and the value of helping to overcome the barrier and move on to spoken language: “Through sport I realized 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 met friends that helped me a lot!” (FG4-A). This is the thought of an adult on events that took place as a child. The consideration of a deficient command of a language as being a barrier for practising sport has not arisen in the youth groups 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 of school age, team sports can be understood as a natural strategy of linguistic

consolidation, as explained by the previous statement and, for adults, as a strategy for establishing significant relationships that, beyond the associated emotional benefit, could entail the natural learning of the language.

### ***Need to relate and feel included***

The practice of sport as a way to facilitate relationships has been mentioned by almost all groups. In addition, there seems to be some agreement on the need of immigrants or people with a migrant background to establish links with other people with whom they share living space or life experiences. This is explained by one of the instructors working with immigrant teenagers in underprivileged neighbourhoods: “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). One instructor from another discussion group goes further into the mechanisms whereby this takes place:

*Certainly [the attraction of] making new acquaintances, because in sport you have to deal with a small group, so dialogue is easier and... especially if it is a group sport there isn't the competition there may be at work, or in other spheres. Therefore, in my opinion, it favours calmer and more relaxed dialogue, more than anything else“ (FG5-SA).*

Establishing relationships is only the first step. Establishing stable gatherings that allow building a sense of belonging and inclusion in a given group is the next, and is equally necessary, especially in the case of newcomers and even more important when it comes to women caregivers –mostly immigrants without family– who often have no sources of satisfaction or opportunities for relationships outside of work. In this case, sport organized for this purpose has a secondary value but, if the initial goal is achieved, it ends up being a stimulus to keep up the activity:

*They have one day off a week and on that day we do activities for the body and the mind, precisely, to forget a little bit, to shrug off that problem, because if not, there is a disease that has existed*

*among caregivers for a long time, called caregivers' disease because they are burdened with the problems of the elderly. [...] They live within the family where they take care of the elderly, 24 hours a day, yes, but imagine... they are invited to participate in community life, in the social activities that are organized” (FG4-A).*

### ***Beyond diversity: sharing, knowing, recognizing and appreciating the other***

The practice of sports often involves the recognition of shared goals and interests among diverse groups, which requires collaboration and a recognition of the capabilities and values of the “other”:

*The Sardinians [...] had to prepare a dance for the Bolgaro festival and they had no dancers, so they invited us and they did ours. We learned the Sardinian dance and invited them to dance with us. Ah, bravo... And at the party together it was quite beautiful (FG4-A).*

The goals and interests shared during sports practice encourage those involved to (re)discover themselves, beyond the playing field, bringing them closer to others from very different social, economic and cultural backgrounds:

*And then, in rugby there is a really cool thing which is the third half, 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).*

The practice of sport in the study setting can also be used to promote values with aspirations of being shared and recognized beyond the diversity of the group. It concerns creating bonds that allow creating and/or recognizing a common substrate among very different people and groups. A common substrate that is conducive to coexistence:

*Everything is centred around citizenship, sport as a medium. Results are not expected... sport is the excuse to lead the child to what is considered right (FG1-SA).*

*I was asked to set up a rugby school for young children, and we started with kids from 8 to 16, and I called it a school of values, because we don’t just play rugby, we try to educate people.*

*[...] I thought: “Right, I’ll have meetings with their parents every term”, “every month we will work on a value”. In September, it was teamwork, because in the end they play fifteen against*



*fifteen, or eleven against eleven. It is a team sport par excellence. [...] Then, in October, an incident occurred in the neighbourhood, a girl was bullied, she was beaten, all over a ball. They beat her because all the boys wanted the ball. It's not the fault of the schools or the children... "October: respect" (FG7-SA).*

The supplemental information (SI3) contains a graphic representation of the themes, categories and category dimensions identified in the results analysis, and the corresponding legend

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This paper illustrates how the different axes of cultural definition of immigrants influence their decision to practise sports or not. The possibility of using sport as a vehicle for cultural expression has been recognized as a motivation for practising sport. In addition, the existing synergies between sports practice and the satisfaction of human needs related to cultural belonging have been unveiled.

The theoretical framework of this work in the model of multiple belongings integrated in a single person (Vila Freyer, 2017; Maalouf 2014) fits well with the experience of our informants and enables explaining the coexistence of axes of non-ethnic-national cultural identification that interact with each other. In addition, it poses an inclusive identification that, unlike exclusive identifications, does not arouse a sense of loss and nor does it force renouncing a part of one's identity.

The individual's internal integration of the different sources of identification allows us to understand that the design of physical-sports activities based on a sense of local belonging, in addition to helping to maintain the emotional and cultural ties of origin and the acculturation of newcomers, would also contribute to the real practice of interculturality so as to foster the relationship between cultures and the intrinsic recognition of the value of all of them. However, this approach is not without its risks, the main ones being re-ethnicization and social isolation (Janssens and Verweel, 2014;

Kennett, 2006). To avoid such risks, it is very important, in order to take advantage of the full potential for sport to create well-being –and this includes the increase in social capital–, that such proposals should ensure their two-way nature and attractiveness to both sets of stakeholders (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013) –that of the host community and that of the newcomers–, as our informants also explain.

The potential of the axes of global or non-ethno-national definition is that of discovering shared identifications between *a priori* rather different people or groups. Identifications that can be used to promote sport without being experienced as a cultural aggression. However, one cannot naively think that this kind of identification will work without the need for adaptation, just for being global or unrelated to nationalities. The task of integrating the various axes of identity definition coexisting in an individual also requires individual prioritization. This is the case of the Muslim girl who would like to play basketball but feels that her being a Muslim demands certain adaptations that the environment does not offer her and that she dare not request. Or also the case of the young people who give up football when the practice does not stimulate their competitiveness, because their generational identification leads them to opt for other experiences. Both examples highlight the need to incorporate the intersectional perspective in promoting sport among immigrants (Jørgensdotter et al., 2018) and fit with the theoretical formulation of Stevens et al. (2017) which states that the groups to which people belong are often incorporated into their sense of self and, through this mechanism, become powerful determinants of PA-related behaviour.

With regards to the incorporation and organization of sports activities, the challenge is for immigrants to advance from being passive recipients of external initiatives to becoming actors who create their own projects. This way of doing things could increase the chances of success of the proposals, as immigrants are often expected to fit into

proposals that do not meet their needs (El Masri et al., 2019; Luth-Hanssen et al., 2020; Perez and Fleury, 2018; Smith et al., 2018). Attention to the needs and suggestions of the parties in question yields highly original ideas, connected to real life and their interests. The night football tournament suggested by the youth of one of the neighbourhoods in which the informants acted, and the inclusion of respect as a value to work on during rugby training sessions, are examples of the potential of this strategy. Ideally, intercultural societies are fed by contributions made from and towards the multiple channels for the cultural definition of people, far from patronizing stances that propose solutions without gaining information about the needs. A health-friendly environment must be built with a bottom-up approach, with participatory health promotion programmes and internally driven community health projects (Looman and Lindeke, 2005).

Some studies have recognized the usefulness of dance in promoting PA among immigrant women in various contexts. Such usefulness is based on the dual identification of gender and origin (Jörgensdotter et al., 2018; Luth-Hanssen et al., 2020; Perez and Fleury, 2018). This dual identification has also been mentioned by our informants, which suggests its value as a proposal for sports practice specifically aimed at immigrant women. In addition, as our participants report, the fact that gender is a transversal axis of identification makes dance an ideal activity to promote intercultural contact between women through sport. However, other informants consider a completely opposite strategy, arguing that breaking gender stereotypes associated with sport expands the range of possibilities for girls –immigrants or not– to start practising it. Gender identification should not be limiting. It is about taking advantage of an inclination, a desire, without renouncing the promotion of gender permeability and freedom of choice in practices traditionally considered feminine. In fact, in the case of football and rugby, this is already happening. However, if it is a question of getting as many people as possible to sign up

for sport, it is not possible to stop offering activities traditionally considered feminine, just as efforts to empower girls and their families must also be maintained, so that they pluck up the courage to enter terrain traditionally considered masculine. No effort is in vain, and each of the strategies can be useful for a given circumstance, as stated by Jørgensdotter et al. (2018). The dual strategy of adapting to a particular gender conception without renouncing women's empowerment can be useful in promoting sport among immigrant women.

Three recent reviews have identified immigrants' poor language proficiency as being a barrier to PA and sport (El Masri et al., 2019; Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013; Langøien et al., 2017), and two of them also mention the possibility that the practice of PA in a multiethnic context improves immigrants' ability to speak the language of the host community (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2018). Our study participants have also expressed this ambivalence. In the light of the experiences of promoting PA, this dual role of language is duly taken into account. Hence many proposed PA for immigrants have been linguistically adapted. Most of the time these PA promotions are presented with translated matter offered in various languages or have the help of interpreters who cooperate in the activity (El Masri et al., 2019; Sauter et al., 2021). Despite these efforts towards adaptation, no works have been found that report on the programming of sports activities designed with the help of professionals from various fields specifically designed with the dual aim, on the one hand, of promoting sport among immigrants. And, on the other, of improving their language skills through immersion. As language is such an important element of acculturation, both from the objective and from the subjective points of view, there is a need to design, implement and evaluate language-learning activities through immersion in sports that require intercultural contact. We are not talking about spontaneous activities –which can be useful, of course. We are talking about activities

specifically aimed at achieving the aforementioned goals, programmed and designed jointly by professionals from the various fields of knowledge involved, such as education, psychology, health, social inclusion, language and sport, among others. In fact, without focusing on language, several authors (Jørgensdotter et al., 2018; Stevens et al., 2017) claim that the decision to practice PA and keep constant is complex and is determined by a great many variables –not only health-related, but also social and cultural– interacting with each other, hence they state that when it comes to promoting PA among immigrants, there is a need to incorporate the interdisciplinary perspective and collaborate closely with social science professionals.

### **Limitations**

This study has not managed to involve any men in the FG with non-SA adults. In addition, it provides global results from groups of diverse origins. It cannot be ruled out that the participation by men in the FG or concentrating specifically on a particular community might have brought new ideas to this debate.

Outsourcing the selection of immigrant participants led to a loss of control over the recruitment process and prevented knowing how many people eligible for inclusion were invited to participate and how many refused to do so. In addition, and as far as the young people were concerned, the sports institutions received the groups pre-selected by the educational centers. We also believe that this influenced the very different size of the FG. However, these limitations may be partly compensated by the fact that our study is multilocal and by the triangulation of sources.

Although acculturation is a determining factor of immigrants' attitudes and practices, the diversity of the sample for a relatively small sample prevented us from considering this aspect.

Finally, the special characteristics of the area where the research was carried out with regard to the origin of migrants (Eurostat, 2018) and the diversity of immigrant reception and integration policies (Mouritsen et al., 2019) hinders extrapolating the conclusions of this study to other contexts.

### **Practical and research implications**

Health professionals are required to represent the needs of communities in the context of health promotion (Edelstein et al., 2021; Looman and Lindeke, 2005). The results have identified synergies between sport and culture. This reinforces the idea that promoting sport among immigrants based on cultural belonging can provide health and well-being beyond the physical benefits attributable to it. The use of cultural belonging to promote sports practice makes sense because it fosters intercultural relations and mutual recognition and, therefore, could contribute to improving the social and cultural capital of all involved. In turn, this improvement would influence the desire and purpose of continuing with PA, as some studies indeed confirm (Rubio-Rico et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2017). However, it is also true that sports practice, in itself, does not guarantee the creation of these synergies (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013). The end result depends on how this activity is devised and implemented. Health promotion programmes are effective if they direct their efforts towards activities that recognize and promote collectively negotiated identities and social norms (Looman and Lindeke, 2005). Thus, the design of activities to promote sport among immigrants should include their wishes and needs as they themselves report. At the same time, there would be a need to design strategies to measure the effects on adherence to and satisfaction with sports practice, all of this to generate evidence on the benefit of immigrants co-creating the activities to promote sports targeting them.

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