

# "Everyone can play football no matter where they come from"

## Discourses in open sport activities for newly arrived children and teenagers

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**Karin Kittelmann Flensner<sup>1</sup>, Peter Korp<sup>2</sup>, Eva-Carin Lindgren<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>University West, Sweden; <sup>2</sup>University of Gothenburg, Sweden

The recent international crises has brought about the largest movements of refugees since World War II. There is a need for constructive strategies to manage the challenges the comprehensive migration imposes on society's ability to integrate new residents. Research highlights the central role of civil society organizations to create trust, social networks and civic engagement, i.e. basic conditions for a democratic society (Putnam, 2013; Wijkström, 2012). International research also shows that civil society organizations and the voluntary sector can have a compensating function for economically and socially disadvantaged groups (Field, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Many of these organizations have an ambition to welcome newcomers and offer a social milieu and a meaningful leisure time. Sports are often considered as contributing to the inclusion in society of marginalized groups (Misener & Mason, 2006; Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012). There is a well-established notion that participation in sports promotes positive identity construction, social inclusion and education for democratic citizenship (cf. Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). However, there is little scientific evidence that sport has the potential to fulfill this role.

In Sweden a strong emphasis has been put on the role of sports clubs to actively strengthen democratic values and equality. Different governments have provided extensive funding for this purpose, but also for the purpose of including children and youth independent of who they are and where they come from. However, there is little scientific evidence that sport clubs and their activities has the potential to fulfill this role in the community and there is very little systematically developed knowledge of how sporting activities and programs should be designed to achieve positive social outcomes (Rich, Misener & Dubeau, 2015). It is the leaders in the clubs that have the challenging task of ensuring that the objective of developing democratic values, equality, inclusion and well-being come true. Therefore it is important to examine how they understand and translate such normative goals into action.

The overall aim of the study is to explore the ways in which a sport club, in the context of open sport activities, are working with and potentially promoting values such as intercultural understanding, inclusion and equality among young people, of which a significant part are new arrivals in Sweden. Research questions focused in this presentation are:

- How are the open sports activities organized, and what are their stated purposes?
- What kind of discourses and practices dominate among the leaders of the open sport activities?

The sport club studied has since 2010 worked actively with various social projects aiming to promote intercultural understanding, inclusion, gender equality, counteract effects of social and economic segregation and increase young people's agency. The club is a football club which conducts organized football training for children and young people but have also "open sports activities" which is free of charge and requires no registration. Every other Friday arrange the sport club Sporty Friday" where they offer young people the opportunity to try basketball, football, table tennis, boxing, martial arts, wrestling and fencing. They also offer open football for both boys and girls and every week they

engage 100-300 children and teenagers. These activities are financially supported by the municipality and are the focus of this research project.

### Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

The study is a case study with an ethnographic approach. The approach aims at understanding of social phenomena and practices, human action and thinking and the importance and meaning different people ascribe to social phenomena. For that understanding to come about actions and conceptions must be understood and related to the context in which they occur. We as researchers participate in the social practices we study, talks with leaders and young people, see what they do, hear how they articulate their thoughts in different contexts, participate in their activities and so on, we get to see the world from the perspectives of the participants (Atkinson, Coffey, Dalamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2007).

The study was carried out during 2016 and 2017. The empirical data consists of observations of participating leadership meetings, leadership courses, trainings and open sports activities, informal discussions and focus group interviews with leaders as well as various documents from sports association, such as guidelines and other policy documents. Through the use of various sources (triangulation) emerges more perspective on the association's activities which generate a more nuanced understanding. Through participant observation we expected to get an insight into the everyday sports activities and how leaders are talking about and acting in these activities. Closeness to the studied environment is a prerequisite for understanding it. On the other hand, there is the risk that "go native" i.e. we become part of what we study and thus be difficult to discern key aspects and relationships (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, it is vital that we as researchers switch between attention levels and between closeness and distance to the groups and individuals who are the subject of observations (Johansson & Lalander, 2012).

During the observations field notes were continuously conducted. The focus groups interviews with leaders were recorded on audio file and transcribed. The empirical material was analyzed with a discourse theoretical approach (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Simply put, a discourse can be described as a specific way to talk about and understand different phenomena which allows certain acts and positions and limit others. Foucault (1972/2011) argues that discourses both creates and reflects what is perceived as truth, and discourses sets the limits of what is possible to say. The analyses aimed at identifying discourses at play in everyday practice of the leaders and participants.

### Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The preliminary results suggest that the club's social commitment and policy for inclusion is embraced by the leaders of the open sport activities, at least on a conceptual level. However, there are dilemmas and contradictions in the discourses and practices of the leaders. There is a strong discourse of hardness among dominant leaders, you should be "hard and fair" and not led the kids fool around and trick you. To frame and set principles for the activities is very important according to this discourse. On the other hand, several leaders are very caring and even loving in relation to the kids. The leaders are struggling with the ambition to frame and be firm on the one hand, and to be caring and listening on the other. Generally speaking, the participants are responsive and respectful, both against each other and against the leaders. But in terms of promoting inclusion and supporting the agency of the participating children and adolescents the harsh discourse seems somewhat contradictory.

There are also contradictory discourses concerning language use and the cultural integration, which is expected as a result of the activities. The rule is that only Swedish should be used, but some participants hardly speak any Swedish, which often makes this rule difficult to fully apply. Integration to "Swedishness" seems generally to be the norm, but this norm creates contradictory and sometimes confusing results.

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