

## Matching Perspectives of Refugees and Voluntary Sports Clubs in Germany

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# *Matching Perspectives of Refugees and Voluntary Sports Clubs in Germany*

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## **Abstract**

In recent years thousands of refugees from the Middle East and Africa have moved to Europe. Many of them have experienced extremely stressful events and suffer, amongst other things, from lack of social relationships. Policy makers do often convey the impression that voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) can easily help to deal with these issues, as they provide broad offers matching every person's individual needs. With only few exceptions, research has focused on the view of VSCs and their officials, but mostly left out the perspectives of refugees themselves, especially those outside organized sports. Thus, the focus of the present contribution is on the mutual fit between refugees' expectations and the offers that sports organizations have. Following a socio-ecological perspective, data from a research project will be used to illustrate both perspectives. Refugees were asked about hindering conditions for participating in sports. In addition, functionaries of sports organizations were asked to answer survey questions regarding the efforts that sports organizations make to include refugees. The results reveal that the majority of the refugees had already actively participated in sports offers in their countries of origin. After arriving in Germany, the sporting habits changed, mostly due to organizational and financial reasons. With respect to functionaries we found that the idea that sport is integrative per se is widely believed in the field.

Keywords: refugees, voluntary sports clubs, integration.

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## 1. Introduction

Around 5.9 million people have applied for asylum in Germany since 1953, whereas the largest proportion of all asylum applications (84.2 percent) has been made since 1990. The highest number of refugees in Germany was counted in 2016, when 745.545 people applied for asylum in Germany. Even if, since then, the number of asylum seekers has been declining, in 2019 there still was a high number of 146.619 persons applying for asylum. The highest number of refugees in 2019 came to Germany from countries of the Middle East, followed by Afghanistan and several African countries (BAMF, 2020).

Many refugees had to face persecution, inhuman or degrading treatment or arbitrary violence in their country of origin and experienced enormous levels of fear of their own live as well as fear of the well-being of children, family and friends (Wahlström Smith, 2018). Experiences like that can lead to trauma and psychological diseases (Blossfeld et al., 2016). It is well known from literature that the experience of escaping from the homeland leaves traces in the psyche, soul and mind of the refugees (Fegert, Plener, Kölch, 2015). Even after arriving in the host country, refugees are often confronted with barriers and hurdles, e.g., learning a new language, forming new social connections and adapting to the unfamiliar rules of their host communities (Edge, Newbold, McKeary, 2014). As a consequence, their psycho-social situation is characterized by psychological challenges and mental health strains (Middleton et al., 2020). Carswell, Blackburn and Barker (2011) documented a broad spectrum of post-migration problems and lined out that the fear of being sent back, the separation from family members, worries about family, poverty, not being able to work, isolation, loneliness and boredom are the most prominent problems, often co-occurring with post-traumatic stress disorders or feelings of distress (Acarturk et al., 2018; Kaltenbach et al., 2017).

To establish a better understanding of refugees' views and expectations, it might be helpful to look at the specific conditions that are influencing their living situation in Germany after the escape. According to various authors, the situation of refugees is characterized by uncertainty as to whether they will stay and where, a high level of spare time, a lack of stable social contacts and of course cultural and language barriers. Furthermore, a certain inflexibility due to strong financial constraints makes the everyday life for refugees more difficult (in general see Marx, 1990; Valenta, 2009).

While the integration of migrant workers into German society is an explicitly defined goal of the German government (Bundesregierung, 2007), and sports have always been considered an important instrument to achieve this goal (Braun, Nobis, 2017), policies towards refugees are somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, as long as refugees' rights of residence are insecure, a long-

term social integration is not fostered; possibilities for working, travelling and thus socializing are restricted. On the other hand, there are also initiatives and measures designed to make refugees' everyday life somewhat easier or "normal", and thus to support their integration at least to some degree. With regard to this aim of – at least partial – integration of refugees, politicians as well as researchers often ascribe high potential to sports, too. According to Seiberth, Thiel and Hanke (2018), integrative sports programs focusing on the target group of refugees have been increasingly created by German voluntary sports clubs (VSCs) and organizations, as a response to this new immigration movement (Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018). However, although there are of course similarities between migrant workers and refugee migrants, there are also differences in terms of experiences, status' and perspectives – and thus the question arises whether the long-established strategies of German sports organizations to integrate migrants are matching refugees needs and expectations, too. Therefore, the present contribution focuses on the mutual fit between refugees' expectations on VSCs and the offers that sports organizations have for this target group.

Over the past years, research on refugees and forced migration in sports has been increasing. In a recent literature review Spaaij et al. (2019) found that, along with sports organizations' efforts to include refugees, themes of hindering as well as promoting factors to participation in sports and social integration have gained attention. Though, sport is often seen as a facilitator for integration by sports organizations and policy makers (Spaaij et al., 2019), VSCs' efforts have yielded mixed results according to a successful integration of refugees to date. Former research has clearly pointed out that sport activities can function as a supportive environment to get in contact with people, language and culture of a new living environment (Abur, 2016; Burmann, 2011; Rittner, Breuer, 2004; Spaaij et al., 2019). On the other hand, it can also be argued that sport is often marked by competitiveness and can therefore even magnify inter-ethnic differences and tensions (Kalter, 2003; Krouwel et al., 2006). Thus, there is no deterministic pathway from participating in organized sport activities to social integration. Sport can support acculturation and integration, but it has to meet certain preconditions (Tuchel et al., 2020). However, in the everyday practices of VSCs, only few systematic approaches exist and many offers have an ad-hoc nature or follow a kind of "one size fits all principle", as Tuchel et al. (2020: 4) argue. How integration processes are influenced, especially regarding refugees, is not fully understood yet. Recent research pointed out that integration in sport is much more influenced by performance level and sporting abilities than by the legal and social status of migrants (Stura, 2019; Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018). Tuchel et al. (2020) report that some VSCs separate the members of different sport groups or teams mainly because of different performance levels rather

than on the basis of ethnicity or migration status. Furthermore, Dowling (2020) lined out that it is a further problem that clubs make hardly any offers allowing to learn a sport from scratch. This might explain a tendency that was found by Stura (2019), who describes that refugees choose their sport in the host country based on their previous sporting experiences in their country of origin. Thus, these findings indicate that individual needs and offers by sports organizations have to match, in order to promote the integration into a sport group.

Therefore, refugees' expectations and the offers of VSCs are strongly connected and the assumed integrative potential of sport activities would be subject to various influencing factors. The number of VSCs specific measures and programs for integrating refugees has rapidly increased in recent years (Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018). With regard to the underlying motives of the VSCs, different perspectives are conceivable. On the one hand, a kind of prosocial motivation, based on the assumption that sport can support the integration process of refugees and help them to cope with their situations (Tuchel et al., 2020), is possible. But on the other hand, a kind of more self-interested and self-serving motivation would also be possible. The integration of refugees would then be motivated by social appreciation, maybe even monetary rewards and a positive public image (Dowling, 2020).

Although VSCs may well benefit from integrating refugees, Nowy, Feiler and Breuer (2019) have shown that only about 14 % of a sample of more than 5.000 German VSCs offer concrete measures for the integration of refugees. Taking a closer look at this finding, it gets obvious that there are many challenging and hindering aspects with respect to the integration of refugees that VSCs have to overcome. The lack of personnel and financial resources turned out to be the biggest barriers to an adequate implementation of integration measures (Burrmann et al., 2018; Tuchel et al., 2020). In addition, findings from the research of Burrmann et al. (2018) have shown, that in some cases VSCs integration programs may cause a kind of fear of change, or at least fear of a reorientation in the management strategy.

Beyond these perspectives of functionaries and VSCs themselves, there are very few studies dealing with the views and needs of refugees. According to Waardenburg et al. (2018), refugees do express the wish for sport activities. However, their special situation and individual needs should be considered, too, when thinking about refugees' integration in sport (Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018). What can be learned from previous research is that refugees report different motives for making use of an offer, and that they have different requirements (Waardenburg et al., 2018; Stura, 2019). Moreover, past research opens an additional perspective: There is a critical view that the target group of refugees is assumed to have a general need for sports offers – but this need is probably not existing at all from the subjective perspective of the refugees (Dowling,

2020; Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018). Rather, it should even be considered that not participating in sports offers of VSCs can also be seen as a form of autonomous decision-making and thus integration (Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018); or that “participation in sports offers seems to be less important for the moment due to the consequences of migration and social borders (e.g., habitual discrepancies, language barriers) that have to be overcome” (Adler Zwahlen, Weigelt-Schlesinger, Schlesinger, 2017: 70). Even if results from Waardenburg et al. (2018) show that the desire for sport is certainly present, the perspective shown above should be considered as a possibility.

This multitude of aspects that influence the acceptance or rejection of sports offers emphasize the need to take a closer look at the expectations of the refugees with regard to sports, in VSCs as well as in other, informal or commercial sport settings. The present contribution relies on recent research highlighting that successful coping with stressful life-events and situations is not only based on individual psychological resources, e.g., self-efficacy (Chung et al., 2017), but rather based on a sense of control or self-determination experienced in relevant life-spaces (Farello et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems to be important to take a closer look at the match between individual needs and external resources (Ryan, Dooley, Benson, 2008). With regard to our research context, dealing with the integration of refugees in VSCs, it seems to be important to analyze refugees’ expectations towards sport, VSCs and possible barriers hindering a participation in sport. As described by Bronfenbrenner (1994), an individual forms links between relevant contexts of action or life spaces (Zander, 2015). It might thus be argued that the perception of a match or fit between individual needs and social offers in relevant live spaces can contribute a subjective sense of control or self-determination. According to self-determination theory (Ryan, Deci, 2000; 2008), an individual’s well-being is increased by feelings of being knowledgeable and capable in a specific area of life and by the ability to act. As a consequence, it has to be stated that the motivation to change or to adapt to new situational demands depends on the perceived autonomy (Ryan et al., 2008). Moreover, Ryan et al. (2008) critically examined Berry’s (1997) acculturation framework and they observed that cultural factors are not the most important obstacles for refugees. Instead they pointed out that the situation of refugees is more often dominated by a loss of resources. Therefore, refugees’ behavior should not primarily be interpreted as a reaction to environmental demands, but rather as striving toward the recovery and protection of resources.

It might thus be assumed that refugees are looking for opportunities offered by their host culture which match their individual needs in order to experience a sense of control instead of exposing themselves to acculturation stress and loss of resources. Therefore, the present contribution analyzes which

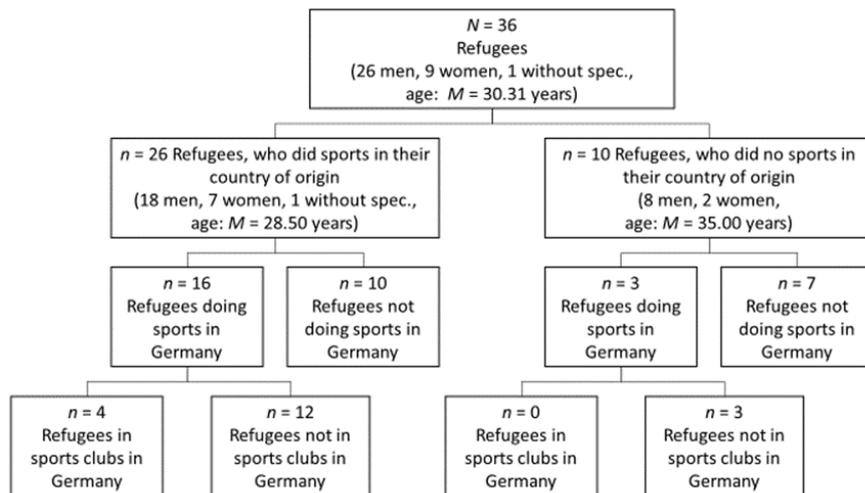
expectations refugees have in regard to sports offers and VSCs. Furthermore, these findings will be contrasted with the perspectives of functionaries of VSCs to find out whether they anticipate such special needs.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Sample

The study was realized from 2018 to 2020 in Frankfurt/Main in Germany, and included one data collection period with functionaries of sports organizations and a period of collecting data with refugees. In sum  $N = 85$  functionaries of sports organizations ( $n = 26$  women,  $n = 53$  men,  $n = 6$  gender not reported) and  $N = 36$  refugees participated in the present study ( $n = 9$  women,  $n = 26$  men,  $n = 1$  gender not reported). The mean age of the functionaries was 52.67 years,  $SD = 15.01$  years and the mean age of the refugees was 30.31 years,  $SD = 8.27$  years. Most refugees reported to live in Germany for at least 2 years ( $n = 34$  out of 36).

FIGURE 1. Sports habits of the sample.



With respect to the countries of origin the sample reflected the description of the introduction section:  $n = 11$  refugees came from Afghanistan,  $n = 1$  from Iraq,  $n = 7$  from Iran,  $n = 1$  from Pakistan,  $n = 6$  from Eritrea,  $n = 1$  from Ethiopia,  $n = 1$  from Ghana,  $n = 5$  from Fiji and  $n = 3$  from Bolivia. The functionaries were asked about integration and related offers that the sports

organizations had. As we were especially interested in refugees' opinions about sport and their perception of sports offers in Germany, we asked them about their sports habits. A description of these is presented in Figure 1.

## **2.2 Questionnaire**

### *2.2.1 Questionnaire for refugees*

All participants of our study were asked to fill in a questionnaire containing questions about sports habits in their country of origin and in Germany, as well as additional items asking for demographic variables. The first section of the questionnaire asked if the refugees were doing sports and what kind of sports they were doing. Participants had to answer one question with respect to sports in the country of origin and one with respect to sports in Germany. Afterwards they had to write down which sports they were doing.

The following questions differed for persons participating in sports or not participating in sports. Refugees who were not doing sports in Germany were asked to report why. We presented 15 different reasons for not participating in sports and the participants had to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale the level of agreement from 1 (Does not apply) to 5 (Completely applies).

The whole sample was asked to answer questions concerning reasons hindering participation in VSCs. We presented 10 different reasons that hindered the participation and the refugees were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale the level of agreement from 1 (Does not apply) to 5 (Completely applies).

Persons who had reported to participate in a VSC in Germany were asked for more details about their participation, e.g., "How often do you visit the VSC?" or "Do you participate in competitions?" or "How were you welcomed in your VSC?".

### *2.2.2 Questionnaire for functionaries*

The functionaries received a questionnaire that asked for various aspects of the VSCs, the social interaction patterns in the VSCs and the offers that the VSCs had for different target groups. However, for the present contribution only the items asking for special offers for migrants and refugees will be reported. This part of the questionnaire comprised nine questions asking for the integration of migrants and refugees and the offers that the VSCs had for these groups. Three of them had to be answered with a written statement, comparable to responses in an interview. The questions were as follows: "Is there a person in your VSC who is responsible for integration?" (possible answers were yes or no), "Do you have concrete measures for integration in

your VSC?” (possible answers were yes or no), “Which measures are these?” (open question), “Who is allowed to join these measures?” (only club members, everybody without prior notice, a prior notice is required), “How are these measures accepted?” (5-point Likert scale from 1 very bad to 5 very good), “Is your VSC working with cooperation partners on integration?” (possible answers were yes and no), the next question asked for the cooperation partners and had an open answer. Finally, the functionaries were asked to indicate if they believe that special offers to integrate migrants and refugees are necessary (possible answers were yes and no) and they had to give the reasons for their answer (open answer). The data were entered into the computer program SPSS 26 (IBM, 2020) and were subjected to statistical analyses.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Analyses for refugees

First, we analyzed which sports were performed by the refugees in their countries of origin and in Germany (see Table 1). Most of the refugees reported that they played soccer in their country of origin ( $n = 7$ ).

With respect to the sports that was performed in Germany we found that the majority of the refugees reported to do fitness ( $n = 8$ ). Only two of the refugees had continued playing soccer. We analyzed the changes in the performed sports with the SPSS cross-tabs procedure in more detail, but we were not able to identify any systematic changes in the sports performance.

TABLE 1. Sports that were performed by the refugees.

		Sports in Germany				
		Soccer	Running	Gymnastics	Fitness	Total
Sports in the country of origin	Soccer	2	1	1	3	7
	Running				1	1
	Fitness		1		1	2
	Martial arts		1			1
	Swimming				1	1
	Chess				1	1
	School sport				1	1
Total		2	3	1	8	14

### *3.1.1 Refugees' reasons for doing sports in Germany*

The following analyses were conducted exclusively for persons who had reported to participate in sports in Germany. In sum,  $N = 19$  refugees had reported to perform sport activities in Germany. In the questionnaire we presented five different reasons for being active in sports and the participants had to rate their level of agreement. The reason for the participation in sport activities that had the highest level of agreement was "Because I feel healthier." ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ), directly followed by "It motivates me to be active and to do things." ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ). Three other reasons received also high levels of agreement: "I feel better accepted." ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ), "I learn to speak German." ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) and "I get in contact with new people." ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ). The comparison between people who had started to do sports in Germany and refugees who had already been active in sports in their country of origin was not computed due to the very small number of people in the sample who had started doing sports in Germany ( $N = 3$ ).

Our analyses revealed that only  $N = 4$  of the refugees who are doing sports in Germany perform sport in VSCs. Therefore, we also took a closer look at the conditions hindering the participation in VSCs (see below).

### *3.1.2 Refugees' reasons for not doing sports in Germany*

The following analyses were conducted exclusively for persons who were not doing sports in Germany. These persons were asked to indicate the reasons for not participating in sport activities in Germany. The reason with the highest rating of agreement was "I do not perform sport activities, because I do not have the proper clothes and equipment." ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ) directly followed by "I do not know sport offers or facilities." ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ). An overview of the response distributions as well as the means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.

In a next step we decided to compare the level of agreement for the different reasons for not participating in sports for refugees who had stopped doing sports in Germany and for refugees who had never been active in sports. The conducted t-tests for independent samples revealed no significant differences between the two groups (all  $t$  values  $> 1.5$ , all  $p$  values  $> .05$ ).

TABLE 2. *Reasons that refugees reported for not participating in sports.*

Item	Response					M	SD
	strongly disagree	rather does not apply	partly	rather does apply	strongly agree		
I don't do any sport because I don't know any possibilities/facilities.	2	2	2	2	7	3.67	1.54
I don't do any sport because I have little money.	4	1	1	4	6	3.44	1.67
I don't do any sports because I don't have any sports equipment/clothing.	3	1	1	1	10	3.88	1.67
I don't do any sport because the training opportunities are too far away.	4	2	2	3	5	3.19	1.64
I don't do any sport because I can't wear what I want.	6	3	4	2	0	2.13	1.13
I don't do any sport because I don't speak the language well enough.	5	2	3	5	0	2.53	1.30
I don't do sports because I don't know anyone who does sports.	4	5	1	4	1	2.53	1.36
I don't do sports because I'm too shy.	5	5	2	3	1	2.38	1.31
I don't do sports because I don't have the time.	5	6	2	2	1	2.25	1.24
I don't do sports because I do not have care for my child/children.	6	1	3	0	0	2.00	1.41
I don't do any sport because I'm afraid I will be treated differently than others.	7	1	5	1	2	2.38	1.45
I don't do sports because my family doesn't support me.	15	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.00
I don't do sports because my family doesn't allow me to take part in sports.	15	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.00
I don't do sports because I'm not interested in sports.	13	0	1	1	1	1.56	1.26
I don't do any sport because religious or cultural reasons speak against it.	16	0	0	0	0	1.00	0.00

Note. The items are ordered descending according to mean values.

### 3.1.2 Refugees' reasons for not doing sports in Germany

In the questionnaire 10 different reasons that could hinder the participation in VSCs were presented and the refugees were asked to report their level of agreement. These questions were presented to all participants who were not members in VSCs (refugees doing sports in Germany outside of VSCs and refugees not doing sports in Germany).

The results for the whole sample can be found in Table 3. The reason that had the highest level of agreement was "I could not afford the fees." ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ).

TABLE 3. Reasons hindering refugees to join a VSC.

Category	Reason	Whole Sample		Active in Germany		Inactive in Germany	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Social aspects	I do sports with my friends.	2.37	1.52	2.93	1.77	1.77	0.93
	I don't know anyone in a VSC.	3.11	1.69	2.86	1.88	3.38	1.50
	I was too shy.	2.50	1.57	2.50	1.74	2.50	1.45
	I was afraid I would be treated differently.	2.12	1.37	2.08	1.44	2.15	1.34
Financial aspects	I could not afford the fees.	3.22	1.72	3.00	1.84	3.46	1.61
	I could not afford the equipment.	3.11	1.72	2.64	1.65	3.62	1.71
	I don't have a permanent address.	1.22	0.80	1.43	1.09	1.00	0.00
Organizational aspects	I don't know how to join a VSC.	3.15	1.54	3.21	1.58	3.08	1.55
	The sports facilities are not accessible to me.	2.70	1.61	2.79	1.58	2.62	1.71
	I don't know what a VSC is.	2.70	1.81	2.57	1.83	2.85	1.86

Note: The items are ordered descending according to mean values for refugees actively doing sports in Germany.

In a next step of the analysis we decided to take a closer look at the reasons hindering refugees in participating in VSCs. Therefore, we differentiated between people who were actively doing sports in Germany and people who were not doing sports in Germany. The means and standard deviations can also be found in Table 3. It gets obvious that financial reasons had the highest level of agreement by people not doing sports, whereas people doing sports outside of VSCs gave as their major reason a lack of information on how to participate in VSCs. We performed t-tests for independent samples and we found that the level of agreement differed statistically significant only for one reason: “I do sports with my friends and do not need to access a VSC.”,  $t(19.90) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ . This significant difference could, however, be due to the fact that those respondents who do not participate in sports basically agree less with this statement than people who do. Although there are no statistically significant differences between the groups with regard to the other barriers to attend VSCs, the items presented can be categorized (social, financial, organizational aspects) and a different ranking can be observed in the two groups of respondents: Financial aspects play a more important role for refugees who are inactive in Germany than for those who do sports. In addition, the fact that they do not know anyone in a VSC is a more significant obstacle for inactive persons than for refugees actively doing sports. With regard to organizational access to VSCs, both groups see relatively large hurdles.

### **3.2 Analyses for functionaries**

#### *3.2.1 Integrative efforts in the VSCs*

To get an impression of the integration efforts of VSCs, we analyzed the questionnaires of the functionaries. The functionaries were asked if there is a specific person in their VSC who is responsible for integration. This question was answered with “yes” by  $n = 14$  functionaries and  $n = 68$  answered no (3 functionaries did not give an answer to this question). The next question focused on concrete measures for integration. Only  $N = 9$  of the functionaries reported that their VSC has such measures. These measures were specified as integrative sports groups ( $n = 1$ ), further education ( $n = 1$ ), presentation ( $n = 1$ ), cooperation with public institutions ( $n = 1$ ), meetings in non-sport contexts ( $n = 1$ ), participation in official programs for integration ( $n = 2$ ), integration of young people ( $n = 2$ ). The functionaries reported that these measures are well accepted ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). However, the access to integrative measures is differently regulated in the VSCs: three functionaries reported that integrative measures can only be accessed by members of the VSCs, three respondents indicated that a pre-registration is necessary, and three functionaries said that integrative measures are open for every interested person. To get a better

impression of the collaboration in regard to integration, the functionaries had to report if the VSC has cooperation partners. Only 10 persons indicated to cooperate with external institutions ( $n = 5$  foundations or clubs,  $n = 2$  government organizations,  $n = 2$  public facilities).

### *3.2.2 Need for concrete integrative measures*

With respect to the question of whether concrete integrative measures are necessary in the VSCs, only 11 functionaries affirmed this. The majority of 69 respondents denied the need for such measures and five persons did not answer this question. To get a more detailed view on the attitudes of the functionaries, a chi-square-test comparing persons with and without migration background was computed. The result revealed no significant differences between both groups of functionaries. In a further step of the analysis, the reasons that the functionaries gave for their assessment of the need for concrete measures for integration were analyzed in more detail. The reasons supplied by 32 of the respondents can be interpreted in a way that leads to a somewhat different impression – these persons described that they are convinced that sport is integrative per se and that therefore no further measures have to be taken. Another 12 reasons that were given revealed that the functionaries were convinced that integration is not possible or difficult, because the offers made would not be used. A last group of arguments could be interpreted in a manner that reflected a kind of inner conflict. On the one hand the functionaries thought that something needs to be done for integration, but on the other hand they thought that such efforts need to be highly target group specific.

## **4. Discussion**

The present study sought to provide better insights in the perceptions of sports and VSCs held by refugees living in Germany. Past research has often focused on the perspectives of VSCs and providers of sports offers only (Spaaij et al., 2019), while only few studies have shed light on the refugees' perspectives (see above). In the present contribution, we sought to examine the perspectives of both refugees and functionaries of VSCs in Germany by conducting a quantitative study using questionnaires. Although findings only reflect the opinions of a small sample of refugees, and may be generalized with the necessary caution only, they allow to estimate and compare the relevance of different factors promoting or hindering sport participation of refugees better than before.

As a first result of our study we found that most of the refugees had participated in sports activities in their countries of origin. Only one third of

the refugees had not participated in sports activities before coming to Germany. The data revealed clearly that sporting habits changed after arriving in Germany. Not all refugees who participated in sports in their country of origin continued doing sports in Germany, whereas some refugees started accepting sport offers in Germany. We also found that refugees often did not practice the same sport in Germany as they used to do in their country of origin. However, we could not identify any systematics in these changes of the type of sport practiced. That supports the assumption that refugees in Germany choose their sport activities on another basis than in their country of origin. Clearly, the choice of a sports offer is not only determined by one singular aspect, but instead by a combination of different factors, not at least by the relation of supply and demand in the local field of sports (Bourdieu, 1988). It seems that VSCs search for and have offers for refugees who already have a certain skill level in a certain sport, probably because they have already practiced at home. As Tuchel et al. (2020) describe, VSCs separate different groups mainly because of the different performance levels. But on the other hand, it seems that many refugees have to change their sport, because their usual discipline is not offered, and only few offers are implemented to learn a sport from the beginning (Dowling, 2020; Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018; Stura, 2019). This might be interpreted as a constellation in which refugee migrants are unable to convert their sports-related cultural capital (Smith, Spaaij, McDonald, 2019). However, the extent to which a lack of previous knowledge of and experience in a sport or the marginal opportunities to build it up is an obstacle for taking up sport in Germany, could not be explained with our data and might therefore be part of future studies.

Different authors have argued that sport activities can function as a supportive environment to get in contact with people, language and culture of a new living environment (Abur, 2016; Burrmann, 2011; Rittner, Breuer, 2004; Spaaij et al., 2019). This was also true in our study, but in addition the reasons that refugees reported for participating in sport activities in Germany reflected other reasons as well. Refugees who were not participating in sports in Germany, on the other hand, reported primarily financial reasons or a lack of knowledge of sporting facilities as reasons for not being active. From the perspective of functionaries, these hindering reasons are certainly also perceived and, as previous research shows, taking them into account in the design and implementation of sports offers can have a positive effect on the refugees' acceptance of and commitment to offers (Burrmann et al., 2019; Burrmann et al., 2018; Tuchel et al., 2020). An active and direct contact to the target group, by mentors, employees at government offices or club members themselves, as well as the local proximity of the sports facilities, contributed to making the refugees aware of this (Stura, 2019; Waardenburg et al., 2018). Even if VSCs generally criticize the lack of personnel and financial resources that creates

barriers to adequate implementation of integration measures (Burrmann et al., 2018; Tuchel et al., 2020), this could be seen as one possible approach to process knowledge about the VSC system and to bind refugees to the sports program in the long term. While former studies found that, in addition to the lack of offers or the lack of knowledge about them, a lack of solid contacts among the refugees – often due to differences in language and culture – as well as the fear of meeting strangers are obstacles to sporting activities perceived by refugees (Stura, 2019; Waardenburg et al., 2018), our data indicate that cultural or social reasons played only a subsidiary role. One potential explanation for the relatively small relevance of worries with respect to culture might be explained by the duration of staying in Germany that the refugees had reported in this study. Most of them had been living in Germany for two years or longer, so they might already be somewhat acquainted to the local sports culture.

A further perspective of our analyses is the acceptance of VSC's offers by refugees. Only a little proportion of the refugees who participated in our study are members in a VSC. Thus, the question arises why only such a small number of refugees uses the offers that VSCs provide. Our findings strengthen the impression that financial and organizational aspects – also influenced by the refugees' precarious situation, characterized by fast changing social and spatial conditions (Waardenburg et al., 2018) – play a much more important role than the fear of being treated differently from others, or shyness. A comparison of refugees doing sports in Germany and refugees not doing sports in Germany revealed that financial aspects (e.g. membership fees) or the lack of the proper equipment tend to play a more important role for refugees who are currently not doing sports. In contrast, refugees who do sports argued that they do not need to attend a VSC, because they do sports with their friends. For VSCs these findings can be very interesting, because they allow to adjust offers to the needs of refugees. However, following Dowling (2020) it is questionable if VSCs engagement really aims at helping refugees or rather on having a good image, as they would often consider “integration and diversity in terms of benefits and costs to the organization, rather than a moral imperative to integrate and celebrate diverse members” (Dowling, 2020: 12). With respect to this discussion our findings for the functionaries of VSCs seem to be very interesting. Only a little proportion of the functionaries reported that the VSC has offers that are especially designed for migrants or refugees. Supporting the conviction that there is no need for explicit integration measures – which is also confirmed by our data – the study by Waardenburg et al. (2018) pointed out that refugees go to VSCs particularly when they want to overcome their role as “refugee” and that explicit integration measures for refugees would only further emphasize this special position. With respect to this perspective, Tuchel et al. (2020) state that to open regular training groups for refugees has the highest integration

potential in comparison to other practices to include refugees shown by the VSCs. That might result in a resistance against integration programs that could be stronger than the public opinion and politics. Furthermore, the associations have a rather negative record both with regard to the acceptance of the offers by the refugees and the acceptance and interest of the population and (parts of) the club member in the integration measures. The latter is often the reason why measures are not communicated publicly but only explicitly with regard to the target group, or not offered at all (Burrmann et al., 2019; Tüchel et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that, on the other hand, refugees also expressed the wish for sport activities in former studies (Waardenburg et al., 2018). Thus, not offering sports activities for this specific target group at all might not be the solution, but their settings and living situation and the arising needs should be included when developing such offers (Feuchter, Janetzko, 2018) – “a uniform guideline for inclusion of refugees does not exist” (Tüchel et al., 2020: 17). Altogether, there seems to be a certain gap between the VSCs – who do not see the need for specific “refugee offers”, as they consider their regular offers as open for everyone –, and migrant refugees, who would prefer participating in regular offers, but do not know how to get access or consider financial and material reasons as hindering. Maybe a simple explanation of this seemingly contradictory constellation could be that in many refugees’ countries of origin sports clubs are considered rather as a preserve for highly skilled and ambitious athletes – while the German (or European) notion of VSCs as open for everyone (“sport for all”: Jütting, Krüger, 2017), also at lower skill levels and without ambitions for performance, is not familiar yet (Haut, Emrich, 2011; Haut, 2018).

## **5. Conclusion**

As mentioned in the introduction of this contribution the number of persons applying for asylum in German is still high. Therefore, it is important to support the integration of refugee migrants into sport offers and with the help of sports offers. As sports is seen as having a high integrative potential, the present contribution took a closer look at the mutual fit between refugees’ expectations and the offers that VSCs have. For this purpose, perspectives of functionaries as well as refugees have been considered to create an overview of relevant aspects. From the findings of the present contribution, it can be concluded that the fit of offers that sport organizations or VSCs make and the expectations and needs that refugees have, do not match per se. The analyses showed that refugees expressed a need for sport activities, but at the same time reported a lack of material and financial resources or concrete knowledge about

sport organizations or their communication structure . Usually VSCs charge membership fees, which are a compulsory and often the only source of funding for these clubs. It is also a common practice that members have to buy their own equipment. Moreover, costs for travel to competitions and competition registration fees are coming on top and also the participation in everyday social activities as club parties or excursions may generate costs. These financial aspects seem to hinder refugees from participating in sport activities within VSCs. To overcome this hindering aspect some VSCs provided equipment for refugees and membership fees were waived. However, a comprehensive financial support for a longer duration and/or a larger number of refugees would constitute a considerable problem for many clubs.

To a lesser extent refugees expressed culturally determined aspects, such as the fear of being treated differently, because of their ethnicity as a reason hindering the participation in sport offers. Only a kind of pro-active contact seeking or a very clearly expressed welcome structure could help to deal with this problem, but if functionaries of VSCs believe in the myth that integration is an automatic process in case of sports, this worry will not be handled adequately (Doidge, Keech, Sandri, 2020).

These empirical and theoretical considerations can be seen as a starting point for future research on the topic as well as for conceptual work on adequate integration measures. To better understand the mechanisms happening in migration procedures that, in the end, influence the needs and expectations of refugees in their host country – also for sport offers – ideas of fit (Zander, 2015) or aspects of social validity should be considered (Carter, Wheeler, 2019).

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