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# The Integrative Power of Sport: Imagined and Real Effects of Sport Events on Multicultural Integration

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Despite a lack of supporting empirical evidence, the belief that sport participation can be used to address a wide range of social problems remains popular. In this study we explored ways in which the social-integration value of sport participation was constructed by participants in an Amsterdam soccer tournament created to enhance integration. We used a critical discourse analytical perspective to analyze survey, interview, and ethnographic data. We found that the construction of the socially integrative values of this event created a space in which participants could construct its effects to reflect their own interests. The resulting practices seemed to do little to challenge problematic dominant discourses and social relations.

En dépit d'une absence de fondement empirique, la croyance à l'effet que la participation sportive peut être utilisée pour s'attaquer à un large éventail de problèmes sociaux demeure populaire. Dans cette étude, nous avons exploré les façons dont la valeur d'intégration sociale de la participation sportive était construite par les participants lors d'un tournoi de soccer créé à Amsterdam pour améliorer l'intégration. Nous avons utilisé une analyse critique du discours pour explorer les entrevues et les données ethnographiques et d'enquête. Nous avons trouvé que la construction des valeurs d'intégration sociale de ce tournoi a créé un espace au sein duquel les participants pouvaient construire ses effets pour refléter leurs propres intérêts. Les pratiques résultantes semblaient faire peu pour mettre au défi les relations sociales et les discours dominants problématiques.

Participation in sport, especially a popular one such as soccer, is widely regarded as an effective way of addressing a range of social problems (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2007; Elling & De Knop, 2001; Holden & Wilde, 2004; Tacon, 2007; Walseth & Fasting, 2004). Countless soccer leagues, matches, and tournaments have been organized around the world with the explicit goal of challenging

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violence, racism, social exclusion, and even environmental issues. Relatively few studies, however, have investigated whether these events actually have the pro-social effects that are ascribed to them (Bailey; Coalter; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Tacon). Existing studies have investigated the effects of such tournaments on a diverse set of outcome measures ranging from health and self-esteem to crime reduction and social inclusion. Unfortunately, most studies lack controlled research designs, and their results often cannot be compared because of incompatible outcome measures. Reviews of these studies, therefore, conclude that there is no support for the assumption that sport participation is a social panacea (Bailey; Coalter; Long & Sanderson; Tacon).

The lack of scientific support for the assumed social effects of participation in a sport such as soccer raises questions of why this belief is so persistent and why the number of soccer projects with such goals is increasing. What particular assumptions constitute this belief? How does it function in the production, experience, and outcomes of such projects? Which interests are served by asserting it?

This article addresses these questions in the context of soccer projects that seek to contribute to multicultural societal integration. We present a case study of an annual Dutch tournament that was established with the explicit aim of using soccer for the development of intercultural respect and tolerance. The Amsterdam World Cup (AWC), is a local, one-day tournament that mimics the FIFA World Cup competition for national teams. At the AWC in 2006, each of the 31 “national” teams who competed consisted of local immigrants of that nationality in Amsterdam. Among these were teams from the larger ethnic communities in the Netherlands such as Surinam, Morocco, and Turkey, as well as smaller communities such as Ghana, Iraq, and Bosnia. Only one team, the Dutch “national team,” contained members of the Dutch White majority. The AWC is immensely popular, as is evident from the thousands of spectators from various ethnic communities that come to support their respective teams each year.

The AWC is a concrete manifestation of the widespread belief that participation in soccer tournaments can serve as a vehicle for addressing complex social issues such as multicultural integration. Given its size and appeal, the AWC is an ideal case to investigate key theoretical and empirical issues pertaining to beliefs about the social effects of participation in soccer tournaments. The following research questions guided this study. First, what role does the belief about the social-integration value of soccer play in the production of soccer tournaments for social change? Second, which assumptions underlie this belief? Third, whose interests are being served by this particular belief or discourse and the practices that it engenders?

## **Where is the Proof?**

In the last few decades, the notion that sport participation can be used as a tool for social interventions has gained popularity (Coalter, 2007; Houlihan & White, 2002; Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak, & Velboer, 2006). This perspective builds on late 19th century and 20th century belief systems that saw sport participation as essential for the reproduction of societal norms, values, and institutions (Messner, 1992). This increasingly instrumental approach to sports, however, is also

related to neoliberal socioeconomic developments and policy changes (Coalter; Krouwel et al., 2006). The inner city dilapidation and social disintegration that accompanied economic restructuring and reduction of the welfare state produced the need for particular cost-efficient governance strategies and social interventions. According to Krouwel et al., recreational sports became one of the social interventions of choice to bolster individual civic attitudes and social regeneration.

Soccer, one of the most popular sports around the world, is currently regarded as a powerful instrument for social intervention, as is evident from its widespread use and the range of problems to which it has been applied. Soccer matches and tournaments have been used to intervene in issues ranging from youth delinquency to racism and multicultural integration, emancipation of women, environmental issues, and even the Israel–Palestine conflict (Coalter, 2007; Tacon, 2007; Elling & De Knop, 2001; Sugden & Wallis, 2007; Walseth, & Fasting, 2004).

The increase in the use of soccer tournaments as a tool for social change, however, has not been accompanied by an equal rise in critical evaluations (Coalter, 2007; Collins, Henry, Houlihan, & Buller, 1999; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Rowe, 1998). The majority of the projects in which playing soccer is used as a tool for social change have not been evaluated (Tacon, 2007). This failure to evaluate has been attributed to a lack of resources and a lack of interest in more than general “output” measures such as number of attendees (Collins et al., 1999; Tacon, 2007). Tacon argues that the theoretical coherence of the arguments concerning the social benefits of soccer is in part responsible for the lack of critical evaluations. Soccer events are generally expected to generate cognitive changes in participants, such as developing confidence and trust in others. Participation in soccer is also assumed to lead to behavioral changes, such as the acquisition of social skills, and to prevent adolescents from committing petty crimes elsewhere while they are competing (Holden & Wilde, 2004). The plausibility of these arguments makes a critical evaluation seem superfluous (Tacon). Yet none of these expected social effects are convincingly supported by research (Coalter; Tacon). The persistence of the belief in the social-integration value of participating in soccer tournaments and the lack of evidence to support this therefore requires further research that also addresses the role of this belief itself in events like the AWC.

## **The Integrative Powers of Soccer as a Discourse**

We approach this research from a Foucauldian poststructuralist perspective that emphasizes the role of discourse and power in the (re)production of social reality, ideology, and social regulation in society (Foucault, 1978). We define discourse as shared, historically derived structures of meaning that are reproduced on a daily basis through social practices and interactions. These shared meanings form the basis for the construction of social identities, social relations, and, consequently, power and authority. Any discourse excludes other meanings than the ones it enables. Hence, it might exclude perspectives and interests of groups that are in a position of insufficient power to challenge its content. Once a particular discourse becomes dominant within a specific social setting, it reproduces and legitimates

particular social (power) relations through the social realities and identifications that it both enables and constrains.

This poststructural perspective suggests three avenues of empirical investigation when it is applied to the role of discourse in soccer tournaments that are assumed to enhance social integration and cohesion. First, it is necessary to investigate the discursive construction of the belief that participating in a soccer tournament like the AWC has a significant social impact on social integration. To what extent is it possible to speak of a dominant discourse about the social effects of participating in a single project like the AWC? Second, when such a tournament is used to address a particular social problem, the discourses through which the problem itself is understood also need to be considered. In multicultural societies like England and the Netherlands, for example, the dominant discourse about multicultural integration has been criticized for producing and essentializing cultural differences in society rather than merely reflecting them (Gilroy, 1987). How is cultural difference discussed and negotiated at the tournament? How does this relate to the belief in the effects of participation at the AWC? Third, the combination of these different discourses will produce social practices in which actors can take up different and potentially unequal positions. The practical consequences of the belief in the power of success thus need to be analyzed for each of the actors involved.

## Methods

To manage such an empirical investigation, we adopt a cultural studies methodological approach as used by du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997) called the "circuit of culture." From this perspective, cultural phenomena are conceived as the end result of the combined actions and mediations of a set of social actors. These actors are articulated around the particular cultural artifact under study, which in this case is a soccer project to enhance multicultural integration. Each actor may be positioned differently in discourses about the power of soccer and discourses about multicultural integration. They use their position to negotiate the meanings of the AWC and engage in particular discursive practices at the tournament. An investigation of a tournament like the AWC thus consists of an analysis of how the claims, negotiations, conflicts and contributions made by the various actors together produce the tournament in its final form.

The "circuit of culture" of the AWC extends to at least four different actors. First, the organizers of the tournament themselves can be considered an actor at the AWC. Second, the local government contributed to the AWC through its funding and advertising activities and was therefore considered an actor in our analysis. Third, the participants who actually came to play the game at the tournament formed another distinct actor at the AWC. Their position is different from that of the organizers and the local government because they participated in an event that had been organized for them by a third party. Fourth, the spectators and supporters also constitute an actor in the circuit of culture of the AWC because they came to watch and support their teams and seemed initially to be in the position with the least power to determine the form and content of the tournament.

To investigate the ways in which the different actors participating in the AWC constructed the role of soccer in achieving the goals of cultural integration, we collected and analyzed four different sources of data. First, we analyzed the official discourses of both the organizers of the soccer tournament and the funding municipality as they were recorded in their documents, business plans, and public communications. Second, we drew on quantitative data with a survey ( $N = 223$ ) of visitors to the 2005 edition of the tournament.<sup>1</sup> This survey contained demographic questions, as well as closed-format questions about people's motivation to come to the tournament and their evaluation of the tournament. Only answers to questions about reasons for participation were used in the current analysis. These were single items asking for a particular motivation, such as "did you come to the tournament to enjoy other cultures?" that could be answered with yes or no. No composite scales were used and hence reliability coefficients were not computed. Third, 23 in-depth interviews were held before and after the 2006 AWC with organizers, soccer players, and team captains or coaches. Finally, our research also consisted of ethnographic fieldwork at the tournament itself—which included participatory observation, as well as ad-hoc interviews and discussions with the organizers and participants.

We used a critical discourse analytic approach to investigate the meaning of participation in the event. This focused our attention on two main aspects of the discourse of each actor. First, it emphasized the rhetoric and narrative structures of accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). We therefore specifically looked at the kinds of discourses about the social consequences of the AWC and about multicultural integration that actors drew on to make sense of the tournament. We also looked at how this legitimated their own participation and contributions to the AWC. Second, following the work of Teun van Dijk (1993), we paid particular attention to the ways in which social power relations between the actors at the tournament were being reproduced and contested through their discourse.

The data analysis consisted of a constant comparative qualitative analysis as described by Seale (1999). The first step in the analysis consisted of a careful reading of all documents and transcripts and subsequent coding phases in which all sections of the texts were labeled by their content. We used these codes to make an initial inventory of all sections of text in which organizers and interviewees were constructing the meaning of soccer and the tournament itself. Such segments could be identified because the social effects of soccer were either explicitly discussed or, alternatively, reflected in talk about personal motivations or experiences that made a connection between the tournament and wider society. Using constant-comparison techniques, we then identified the ways in which organizers, the funding municipality, the participating teams, and spectators converged or diverged in their constructions of the social effects of participating in soccer and of multicultural social reality. A comparison of the codes across actors furthermore served to highlight the dominance of certain constructions and implied that a particular kind of discourse was dominant at the AWC. Finally, we assessed how these accounts led to particular practices for the actors using ethnographic field notes, survey data, and information about tournament practices gathered from the interview material.

## Results

The discourse of the organizers of the tournament was, for obvious reasons, most closely related to the ways in which the tournament was designed and established. We therefore first present their discourse and practices followed by those of the funding municipality. Subsequently we present an analysis of the ways the participating soccer teams and the spectators made sense of the tournament and their participation.

### The AWC Organization

The organizers explicitly presented the AWC as a tool with which different cultural communities could be brought into contact with each other. Moreover, they explicitly placed these encounters within the context of a perceived Dutch multicultural society. As a result of these soccer-mediated encounters, participants were expected to learn to enjoy and respect each other's cultural differences, as is exemplified in the following statement from the organization's business plan:

Historically soccer has been THE instrument to connect different cultures. Through the love for the ball, many nationalities living in the Netherlands are brought together in the Amsterdam World Cup. . . . While retaining their own identity, visitors and participants of the Amsterdam World Cup gain understanding and respect for other cultures.<sup>2</sup> (AWC Foundation, 2005b, p. 2)

As the emphasis on "respect" and "understanding" in the quote exemplifies, the organizers expected the soccer tournament to foster a particular pluralist, multiculturalist ideal of "respect" for other cultures. Note, for example, how cultural communities are positioned within the wider Dutch nation state by the phrase "many nationalities living in the Netherlands are brought together in the AWC." The expression "are brought together" furthermore suggests that they currently are not yet together and thus implicitly constructs these nationalities as separate, unconnected communities. These communities, moreover, are to develop respect and understanding for each other's cultural differences *at the tournament* ("visitors and participants . . . gain understanding and respect"), thus implying that their relations cannot be defined as very respectful or understanding before their participation in the AWC.

On the one hand, these constructions of multicultural reality seem to reflect the dominant multicultural integration discourse mentioned earlier, because it reduces cultural heterogeneity to a collection of homogeneous national minority communities. On the other hand, they also imply a number of assumptions about the role that soccer tournaments can play in reworking the relations between communities. The game of soccer is described as an "instrument" that can "connect" groups, thus implying that a third person (namely the organizers of projects like the AWC) can unproblematically use soccer tournaments to bring about connections between groups. The main effective ingredient of the game is here furthermore described as "love of the ball." The many facets of the game and its associated culture are thus reduced to an object (a ball) for which anyone can and will develop "love" when they encounter it. The general, unspecific, and uncontroversial emotion "love" is subsequently transferred onto the participants

of the game and transformed into the desirable outcomes of mutual respect and tolerance.

The ways in which the organizers sought to realize the potential of the game to promote respect and tolerance were clearly influenced by these discursive constructions. First, participation by a team in the tournament was literally conditional on identification with a single national community. In the first few years of the AWC, this orthodoxy was partly produced by the organizers themselves as they actively recruited most participating teams for a full tournament. At the time, many of the national communities in Amsterdam did not play soccer in organized collectivities, and it was therefore difficult to find enough teams. Volunteers actively scouted the various communities for people who played soccer and wanted to participate. A number of “national” soccer teams were thus created specifically for the tournament (Interview with AWC founder, June 2005). The multiculturalist understanding of the social potential of soccer was reflected in a small but significant ceremony at the end of the tournament in 2006. Just before the kickoff of the final game, between Ghana and the Dutch Antilles, a White Dutch opera singer walked onto the pitch, stood between the two teams, and sang the Dutch national anthem. This performance mimicked the singing of the national anthems of both teams at World Cup matches, but replaced the teams’ own national anthems with the Dutch one. In a ceremony lasting a mere couple of minutes, the envisioned Dutch pluralist multicultural integration was thus symbolically performed—subordinately articulating all immigrant nationalities to an overarching national Dutch collectivity.

## Municipality

The Amsterdam municipality, which provided a substantial part of the funding for the tournament, drew on the same discourses as the organizers of the AWC, although, as will be shown subsequently, they expected the tournament to have different effects. The funds for the AWC came from the city program “We Amsterdammers,” which was established in the weeks after the murder of critical filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004. One of the explicit goals of this program was to foster social cohesion and participation in the city through promotion of a shared commitment to the idea of an inclusive, multicultural urban community.<sup>3</sup> The policy documents of the “We Amsterdammers” campaign defined the Amsterdam community as “all people living in Amsterdam who reject violence and subscribe to the basic norms and values of our society” (Amsterdam Municipality, 2004, p. 5) and thus explicitly avoided defining the different cultural groups that are supposed to be included in this community. These shared norms and values were elaborated later as respect for human, gay, and women’s rights; free speech; and other mainstays of liberal democratic societies (Amsterdam Municipality, 2005).

Local projects like the AWC received funding from the “We Amsterdammers” program if they could demonstrate their potential to stimulate social participation across ethnic groups and promote interaction and dialogue. Projects were therefore not required to take up a discourse of a shared urban identity or seek to promote this explicitly, but were merely required to bring people from different ethnic backgrounds together and stimulate the development of social capital in the city.

The municipality, however, attributed meanings to the AWC that were very closely related to their particular policy interests.

Exemplary for the perspective of the municipality are the words of the mayor in a television ad for the tournament that was shown on local Amsterdam television in the weeks preceding the tournament day. Sitting at his office desk with a soccer ball in his hands, the mayor looked into the camera and addressed his Amsterdam audience in the following way:

Amsterdammers love their city. And their own culture. And soccer. And that's why we are organizing the Amsterdam World Cup again this year. 32 teams of various nationalities will be competing for the world cup. Of their city. Of our city. Of Amsterdam. (AWC, 2005b)

In this quote, the mayor of Amsterdam constructs the participants of the AWC, in the first place, as residents of Amsterdam by beginning his speech with a description of all "Amsterdammers." Furthermore, he frames the competition among various nationalities at the AWC as a competition in which the Amsterdam identity and the shared love for the city is to be celebrated above and beyond any national identity. This is achieved by first specifying the audience as "Amsterdammers" and then making reference to "their own culture," which might at this point still be read as a collective culture defined against an external entity such as a different city. It subsequently becomes clear that he is in fact referring to the various national cultures of different communities living in Amsterdam when he mentions the fact that 32 teams of various nationalities will be competing for the world cup. In the final sentence of the quote, these cultural differences are progressively subsumed under the collective identity of Amsterdammers, mentioned in the first sentence, by associatively moving from the divisive but ambiguous "their city" to "our city" and, finally, to the specific Amsterdammer identity.

These various discursive constructions reveal that although the municipality envisioned a different social effect of soccer than did the organizers, it nonetheless drew on the dominant discourse about the necessity of multicultural integration that was also used by the organizers. Instead of promoting respect and understanding among the separate national cultural communities living in the city, the municipality expected the tournament to result in the celebration of a shared urban identity. The municipality therefore shared an assumption with the organizers of the event that a soccer tournament would impact national groups (who "love their own cultures") and their relations with each other, although, in this case, they would be articulated together in an urban identity.

In the following section, the discussion of the ways in which the participants themselves constructed the powers of a soccer tournament will show that many participants readily took up this same discourse because it allowed them to construct the effects of their participation in this sport in ways that served their own group needs.

## **Participating Soccer Teams**

Some of the coaches we interviewed also gave explanations for their communities' participation that reflected a belief in the social consequences of participating in the AWC soccer tournament. For example, the coach of the Colombian team

described his community's engagement with the tournament in the following way:

Well, and ehm . . . there were two important factors for participating. . . . Firstly to eh . . . to promote Colombia and [second], to bring Colombians together, those kind of things . . . because Colombians are actually quite unknown in the Netherlands, and most of the times they are associated with cocaine business and problems and eh . . . are the two most important things: bringing Colombians together and promoting Colombia

The Colombian coach therefore constructed the meaning of his participation at the tournament as one of "bringing the community together," as well as "promoting the community." In the above statement, he conceptualizes the tournament as a tool that can be used to improve social conditions for his own community. At the same time, the quote also illustrates how promoting the Colombian community is constructed as an activity directed toward the Netherlands and seeks to address the stereotypes that are present there by referring to being "unknown in the Netherlands" or alternatively "associated with the cocaine business and problems." For the Colombian coach, playing soccer at the AWC was therefore simultaneously related to the improvement of interethnic relations, as well as the improvement of cohesion within his own community.

Participants from diverse ethnic communities such as Surinam, Morocco, Ghana, Iraq, and Afghanistan expressed a similar belief in the social consequences of participating in the AWC. The analysis of the various accounts revealed that these communities shared the basic assumption expressed above that participation could help their community by strengthening their internal cohesion on the one hand and, on the other hand, by improving their standing in Dutch society. As the following quote illustrates, representing an ethnic community at the tournament as a national team that "can play soccer" was also assumed to reduce stereotypes.

Ehh, [we participated] to show once again, ehm, that there are not just bad Moroccans, but (laughs) always when something goes wrong, yeah, you see it right away in the media now, I mean they never look at the good stuff, and ehm . . . the fact that we can play soccer, that in the first instance, and that we are not criminals, I can't emphasise that enough.

Others, who feared they would not make it to the finals, engaged in an explicit promotion of the national community by staging performances of their traditional national culture near the soccer fields. For example, three male and three female dancers in traditional national costume performed folk dances in support of the Colombian team.

Other groups had different goals. The Afghan coach explained that playing and preparing for the AWC could also be constructed as a tool to empower young men in the community and to provide them with experiences that would help them participate in wider Dutch society.

First of all [we participated because] we wanted Afghans to make contact with each other at the AWC, because with the situation in Afghanistan, which

was also divided in north and south, our youth need to get a “together” feeling of: I am an Afghan, I live in Holland, I am Dutch. They know the rules and need to become a little active to get into contact with Dutch people and in that way get better, play better. Young kids can go to a Dutch team if they want to play better, so we want to take care of that, and (laughs) nobody at the municipality is helping us, so we have to arrange it ourselves.

In the above quote, the Afghan coach constructs the tournament as an instrument for promoting conscious progressive community work and increasing internal social cohesion and identification within the local national community.

The teams engaged in discursive practices about their participation in the AWC, ranging from the very act of playing for their own national community to engaging in folkloristic performances. These practices were enabled and circumscribed both by the interpretation each team gave to the social aspects of participating, as well as by the discourse of multicultural integration that dominated the creation of the AWC. However, the hegemony of this discourse about the role of the AWC was incomplete. Occasionally, it was contested by alternative, somewhat dissonant practices. For instance, the Ghana team captain admitted to us that he included Nigerian players in his team in his bid to win the tournament arguing that “Nigeria and Ghana are the same” and clearly contradicting a discourse of distinct national communities. In addition, in 2007 the Dutch coach included Black players from the former Dutch colonies Surinam and the Dutch Antilles on the Dutch team, thus indicating that the Dutch nation could also be constructed as including non-Whites and being culturally diverse. Such alternative practices subordinated the tournament’s formal discourse of national “purity” to a discourse that winning is the most important aspect of sport participation. This priority on winning constituted an implicit resistance to the formal dominant discourse of the tournament. Although many of the soccer players and coaches who were interviewed were aware that such irregularities in team membership occurred in some of the participating teams, they did not express serious concern or indignation. For most of the participants, winning each match was the only thing that mattered, over and beyond any symbolic meanings that such victories might have for the organizers and officials.

## Spectators

One recurring theme played a central role in the ways participants constructed the meaning of their participation in general and the connections between the AWC and the social world in particular. Contrary to the expectations of the organizers and public officials, most spectators and players professed a lack of interest in the culture of ethnic communities other than their own. As table one below shows, only 2.7% of those attending came to the tournament to enjoy other cultures.

This percentage, however, varied by ethnic group. It was highest (8.9%) for White Dutch spectators, whereas for other groups it was close to zero (e.g., Turkey, Morocco, African countries). In contrast, 54.3% of the respondents indicated that they came to socialize with their friends and to support their own ethnic community at the tournament (see Table 1), and this was often coupled with the desire to support their country at the tournament. The data from our interviews showed a

**Table 1** Participants' Reasons for Attending the Amsterdam World Cup

	Socialize with friends	Support my country	Play soccer	Watch soccer	Enjoy other cultures
All participants ( <i>N</i> = 223)	54.3	25.1	9.4	8.1	2.7
White Dutch	46.6	20	0	22.2	8.9
Surinam	47.5	27.5	15	7.5	2.5
Turkey	60	24	16	0	0
Morocco	50	50	0	0	0
Other South American countries	43.3	37.8	13.5	2.7	2.7
Middle Eastern countries	50	33.3	16.7	0	0
Other African countries	50	13.9	13.9	5.6	0

*Note:* Values in each row indicate the percentage of each group that agreed they had come to the tournament for this reason. Multiple answers were possible and percentages therefore do not add up to 100%.

similar trend. The respondents generally stated that the tournament was a significant event first and foremost because it was an opportunity to party and meet friends of their own community and, of course, to see their community win. As a Moroccan respondent explains, many considered the AWC to be a “soccer party” where you could meet your friends and kin:

Because our team is, yeah, how do you say that, it's always sociable, we aim to party, we eat a lot, we had the most spectators, last year there were more than 2,000 spectators, Moroccans, attending, and if we would have reached the finals then it would have been at least 5000. . . . It is not over when you are defeated, you have a short disappointment, because you still see who is playing in the finals, those are our friends. Of course I am pissed off that Morocco lost, but all in all, yeah, everyone stuck around there, and singing and stuff . . . yeah, that's partying, soccer is a party.

This emphasis on enjoyment and winning at the tournament was the usual way in which people explained what to them seemed self-evident reasons for participating. Some participants, however, appeared to be using the tournament grounds for a different kind of engagement with cultural diversity that was not part of the multicultural discourse used by the organizers to promote the tournament.

During the 2006 AWC, for example, a group of about 10 young Iranian women paraded around the pitches wearing heavy make-up, white trousers, and tight, low-cut tops with *Iran* written in red letters on the front. Their appearance attracted considerable attention, and they repeatedly posed for photographs with spectators and the local media. A middle-aged male spectator from Surinam asked the women why they were not wearing veils. One of the women publicly contested this connection between their identity as Iranians and traditionalist Muslim

practices: "We don't have to wear veils, only ugly people should wear veils!" By supporting their soccer team in this manner at the AWC, they contested the dominant, cultural-integration discourse, which claims that ethnic minority identities are determined by traditionalist, premodern culture. Instead, they "represented" their national community as modern and (arguably) emancipated. At the same time, however, their performances reproduced the emphasis on distinct national communities at the tournament. Moreover, their sexualized appearance also constituted an expression of the limited possibilities for females to participate in the negotiations of meanings given to diverse cultures at the male-dominated AWC. We will return to this point in the discussion.

## Discussion

The discursive analysis of the "circuit of culture" (du Gay et al., 1997) of the AWC showed that each actor constructed the social effects of participating in the tournament in ways that reflected their own interests. The organizers expected that the "love for the ball" affectionately connects ethnic communities with the broader Dutch national community. The Dutch government expressed the hope that playing soccer at the AWC would result in the increased awareness of a shared multicultural urban community. In contrast, members of the teams saw their participation as a way to improve social conditions for their own communities. They assumed participation would enhance social cohesion in their own ethnic community and improve its public image. For most of the spectators, however, a discourse of the socially integrative effects of soccer tournaments appeared to be irrelevant. They came to the tournament to have a good time with their friends and members of their own ethnic community.

The various interpretations of the social effects of participation at the tournament, furthermore, led to distinct social practices and outcomes. First, these interpretations served to motivate a broad range of actors who could each project their own desires onto this general belief to join the tournament. As a result, they were motivated to cooperate with, contribute to, and participate in the AWC. Second, these differently positioned actors subsequently also engaged in social practices at the tournament to realize their own expectations at the tournament. Some engaged in traditional dances to represent "their culture," and others set up training regimens to socialize youth in "their" communities. The organizers also constructed the tournament in ways that would realize the potential effects that they believed the event could have on multicultural integration.

The malleable and diffuse nature of the belief in the social effects of participating in sporting events appears to be crucial for projects like the AWC. It allows different actors to expect that their participation will serve their own particular interests. Similarly the current lack of research might sustain a discursive space in which actors with possibly conflicting interests and views may momentarily converge. Because the belief in sports accommodates widely diverging interests, it could also serve the additional function of reducing possible conflicts among participating actors. This may be of considerable value when used in conjunction with sensitive societal topics such as multicultural integration. The critical discursive approach taken in this study, however, also draws attention to the ways in

which the dominant discourses and practices at the AWC legitimated, reproduced, or challenged power relations. In particular, the tournament appeared to legitimate and reproduce power relations in Dutch intercultural relations on the one hand and the domain of gender and sexuality on the other.

With respect to Dutch intercultural relations, the dominance of a discourse that constructed cultural diversity as a collection of homogeneous national-cultural communities was crucial. This dominant discourse legitimated and reproduced power relations at the tournament by simultaneously enabling and constraining a connection between participating at the AWC and multicultural integration. On the one hand, it enabled the imagination of this connection by specifying the various entities involved in the cultural diversity of the Netherlands (all of the homogeneous national-cultural communities living together in the Netherlands), as well as the problems associated with it (a lack of respect and tolerance between these communities). On the other hand, however, this mosaic conceptualization of cultural diversity determined the kinds of integration that participating at the AWC could be imagined to produce. The effects of participation were therefore always imagined to address homogeneous national-cultural communities and the relations between them. Alternative engagements with cultural diversity were therefore marginalized at the tournament. For example, participation at the tournament was not imagined to demonstrate or celebrate the cultural differences *within* these communities or the similarities between them. Similarly, the possibility that the AWC could serve to eradicate the boundaries between these communities altogether (including those of an imagined homogeneous White Dutch nation state) could not be imagined through this dominant discourse. As a result, the power relations embedded in the conceptualization of cultural diversity as a set of distinct, homogeneous, national-cultural communities were legitimated and reproduced in the discourses and practices of the AWC.

The critical analysis of the role of dominant discourses at the AWC might also be extended to the way in which discourses on gender and sexual difference were reproduced during the tournament. Although soccer participation by Dutch girls and women is increasing, soccer is still primarily associated with boys and men (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003). Instead of challenging this inequality, the practices at the AWC reproduced it by systematically assigning women to the subordinate role of spectators. In contrast, male soccer players were positioned to act out their roles as the defenders of "their nation" and were seen as agents of multicultural integration. As such, both the dominant connections between sports and the reproduction of masculinity (Messner, 1992) and those between projects of nation building, national identity, and masculinity (Yuval-Davis, 1997) were reproduced. These gendered dimensions of the tournament remained wholly uncontested at the AWC during the period of the research project.<sup>4</sup>

The role of dominant discourses on multiculturalism and gender in the imagination of the social consequences of the AWC suggests that while the imagined effects of sports participation are not fixed or static, they are also not infinitely malleable. Although all parties involved are able to maintain the expectation that participation will serve their own interests, they nonetheless need to subscribe to those shared dominant discourses through which a shared object of concern (in this case the problem of multicultural integration) is locally conceived. This illustrates how the role of power in the production, experience, and outcomes

of sporting events put on to effect social change is important and deserves more attention than it is usually given in functionalist accounts of the role of sports in society (cf. Coakley, 2007).

The results presented here indicate that the study of discourses that present sport as a social panacea can add to understandings of the dynamics and outcomes of sports events that are intended as social interventions. Combining the “circuit of culture” approach outlined by du Gay et al. (1997) with a critical discursive analytical perspective has proven useful in this regard because it helped tease out the various conflicts, synergies, and political implications of projects in which several social actors come together. The current study focused on an annual tournament that lasts only one day. Further research is needed that explores how participants in other sport situations position themselves in relation to societal discourses about social integration or other problems to which sports are applied. Similar research is needed that looks at the ways the belief in the positive social effects of sports plays a role in social policy that makes use of sports events, such as in the governance of neighborhoods classified as “poor.” Another important avenue of research is the investigation of projects like “soccer for peace,” a project involving Israeli and Palestine youth, or “the homeless cup,” a soccer event created to empower homeless people. An understanding of the discursive practices about the social effects of sport participation remains essential to an analysis of the politics behind such projects and their relative successes and failures.

## Notes

1. Survey data were collected by Dave Mook for a BA dissertation and reanalyzed for this article by the authors. Mook analyzed this data himself in a SWOT analysis of the tournament in 2005 in which ethnicity was of minor interest (Mook, 2005). The cross-tabulation of ethnicity and reasons for participating shown here does not appear in Mook’s work. Data are used with permission of Mr. Mook.
2. This quote and all subsequent quotes were translated from Dutch by the first author.
3. The other two goals are to counter radicalization of Muslim youth and to fight terrorism. Both these goals are generally either thought to be realized through stimulation of urban citizenship, which will be addressed in the next section, or, alternatively, addressed with other strategies, such as increased security measures, which are beyond the scope of this article.
4. The 6-year-old tournament, however, is evolving. Plans have been drawn up for next year’s tournament to include a separate women’s tournament and a children’s tournament to supplement the already existing men’s tournament. Although arguably conservative in design, it remains to be seen how such an alternative engagement with gender will play out in practice.

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