Communicating anti-racism

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CHAPTER 8
The soccer myth
An analysis of the imagined and real effects of sport events for multicultural integration.⁵

Introduction
Participation in 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 violence, racism, social exclusion, environmental issues and even the Israel-Palestine conflict (Coalter, 2007; Tacon, 2007; Elling & de Knop, 2001; Sugden & Wallis, 2007, Walseth, & Fasting, 2004). However, relatively few studies have investigated whether these events actually have the pro-social effects that are ascribed to them (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2007; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Tacon, 2007). The 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 (Ibid.). Unfortunately, most lack controlled research designs and their results often cannot be compared due to incomparable outcome measures. Reviews of these studies therefore conclude that there is no support (yet) for the assumption that sport participation is a social panacea (Ibid.).

Despite this lack of scientific support, the belief in the social powers of soccer projects continues to inspire a plethora of events and tournaments for social change and regeneration. Recalling Thomas’ theorem that “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas (1928), pp.571-572), this suggests that the belief in the powers of soccer may have uninvestigated social consequences of its own. It may, more specifically, affect the production, experience and outcomes of such projects. As such, it may have particular unknown

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social and political implications that, given the increasing number of social issues to which soccer is being applied, demand a critical assessment.

This chapter seeks to contribute to this assessment by examining a soccer event for multicultural societal integration in the Netherlands. This event, called the Amsterdam World Cup (AWC), is a local one-day tournament that mimics the FIFA World Cup competition for national teams. At the AWC, each ‘national’ team consists of local migrants of that nationality. Amongst these are 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’, is allowed to consist of members of the Dutch white majority. The Amsterdam World Cup 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 the beliefs about the social effects of participation in soccer tournaments. The following research questions guided this study. First, what does the belief in the social effects of soccer consist of exactly? Second, what role does it play in the production of soccer tournaments for social change? 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, Velboer & Duyvendak, 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). However, this increasingly instrumental approach to sports is also related to neo-liberal socio-economic developments and policy changes (Coalter, 2007; Krouwel, Boonstra, Veldboer & Duyvendak, 2006). Economic restructuring and the reduction of the welfare state in the 1980s resulted in problems of inner city dilapidation and social disintegration. These problems created the need for particular cost efficient governance strategies and social interventions. Recreational sports became one of the social interventions of choice to bolster individual civic attitudes and social regeneration (Krouwel et al., 2006).
Social soccer projects are generally expected to generate cognitive changes in participants such as developing confidence and trust in others (Holden & Wilde, 2004). Participation in soccer is also assumed to lead to behavioural changes such as the acquisition of social skills and to prevent adolescents from committing petty crimes elsewhere while they are competing (Ibid). However, proliferation of social soccer projects has not been accompanied by an equal rise in studies that critically examine these expected effects (Coalter, 2007; Collins et al., 1999; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Rowe, D. 1998). The majority of the projects have not been evaluated at all (Tacon, 2007). This lack of evaluation has been attributed to a lack of resources among organizers. Moreover, it has also been noted that organizers generally lack an interest in anything more than general ‘output’ measures such as number of attendees (Collins et al., 1999; Tacon, 2007). Tacon (2007) argues that the common sense wisdom about the social benefits of soccer is in part responsible for the lack of interest. The plausibility of these arguments makes a critical evaluation seem superfluous (Tacon, 2007). At present, these expected social effects are yet to be convincingly demonstrated through scientific research (Coalter, 2007; Tacon, 2007). The persistence of the belief in the social integrative value of participating in soccer tournaments therefore requires further research that also addresses the role of this belief itself in soccer events like the AWC.

Methodology
The role of the belief in the social effects of soccer can be usefully approached from a social constructivist perspective (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Such a perspective emphasizes the role of discourse and knowledge in the reproduction of social order and power in society (Foucault, 1978). Discourse is defined here as shared, historically derived structures of meaning that form the basis for the construction of social identities, social relations and, consequently, power and authority. Dominant discourses exclude other constructions of social reality than the ones that they embody (Potter & Wetherell, 1992). In this way, dominant discourses simultaneously reflect particular social (power) relations as well as reproduce them. The persistent belief in the social effects of soccer will be treated as a dominant discourse as defined here. Such an approach suggests three main domains of interest in the study of the discourse and practices of various social actors at the AWC. First, it is suggests that the discursive construction of the belief itself needs to be interrogated. Second, when such a tournament is used to address a particular social problem, the role of the dominant discourse about the problem itself also needs to be considered.
In multicultural societies like England and the Netherlands, the dominant discourse about multicultural integration has been described as producing and essentializing cultural differences in society rather than merely reflecting them (Gilroy, 1987). This dominant discourse about the problem to which soccer is addressed may also affect the meanings and practices that are produced at the AWC.

In order to manage this empirical investigation, we adopt the methodological approach by Du Gay et al. (1997) called the ‘circuit of culture’. In this approach, 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 artefact under study, which in this case was the AWC. Each social actor may be positioned differently in discourses about the power of soccer and discourses about multicultural integration and, from this position, reproduce or contest the dominant discourses and social practices of 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 Amsterdam World Cup 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 consequently 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 as 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 as they came to watch and support their teams and seemed initially to be in a position of possessing the least power to determine the form and content of the tournament.

In order to investigate the ways in which the different actors participating in the Amsterdam World Cup constructed the role of soccer in achieving the goals of cultural integration, we collected and analysed four different sources of data. First, we analysed 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 of the 2005 edition of the tournament. 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 edition with organizers, soccer players and team captains or coaches. Finally, our research also consisted of ethnographic fieldwork at the tournament day 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 legitimatized 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 labelled 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. Through 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. Therefore, we 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. xviii

(AWC Foundation, 2005, 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 Amsterdam World Cup’. 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 a lack of respect and understanding of cultural differences between communities prior to their participation in the AWC.
On the one hand, these constructions of multicultural reality seem to reflect the dominant multicultural integration discourse mentioned earlier, as it reduces cultural heterogeneity to a collection of homogeneous national minority communities. On the other hand, they reflect a number of assumptions about the role that soccer tournaments can play in reworking the relations between these 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 the ‘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 perceived potential of soccer were affected by its discursive construction discussed above. First, participation in the tournament was literally conditional on identification with a single national community. In the first few years of the Amsterdam World Cup, 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 kick off of the final 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 below, they expected the tournament to have different effects. The funds for the Amsterdam World Cup came from the municipal program ‘We Amsterdammers’. This was a social programme established in the weeks after the murder of Islam-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 the promotion of a shared commitment to the idea of an inclusive multicultural urban community. 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” (Municipality of Amsterdam, 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 (Municipality of Amsterdam, 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....

(Mayor Job Cohen, in a television ad for the Amsterdam World Cup, March 2006)

In the above quote, the mayor of Amsterdam constructs the participants of the Amsterdam World Cup in the first place as residents of Amsterdam by beginning his speech with a description of all ‘Amsterdammers’. Furthermore, he frames the competition between 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 this collective identity of the Amsterdammers as they were introduced 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 the organizers, it nonetheless reproduced the dominant discourse about the uncontroversial positive social powers of soccer. Moreover, it also used the dominant discourse about multicultural integration that characterised the discourse of the organizers. Instead of promoting respect and understanding between the separate national cultural communities living in the city, the municipality expected the tournament to result in the celebration of a shared urban identity. Therefore, the municipality 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 towards 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, as 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 of the participating soccer teams accounted for their communities’ participation in ways that reflected the dominant discourse of the social effects of soccer. 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 ehhh… those are the two most important things: bringing Colombians together and promoting Colombia

Coach for Colombian team

In this account above, the Colombian coach constructs the goal of his team’s participation at the tournament as one of ‘bringing the community together’ as well as ‘promoting the community’. The tournament is thus constructed as a tool that can be used by a community to improve the social conditions within its own ranks. At the same time, the quote also illustrates how promoting the Colombian community is constructed as an activity that is directed towards the Netherlands and seeks to address the stereotypes that are present there. This is achieved by constructing the fate of Colombians as being caught between being ‘unknown in the Netherlands’ and being ‘associated with the cocaine business and problems’. For the Colombian coach, playing soccer at the AWC was therefore simultaneously related to the improvement of inter-ethnic relations as well as to 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 assumptions expressed above that participation could help their community in two ways. On the one hand, it could strengthen their internal cohesion, and on the other hand, it could improve their standing in Dutch society. The ways in which the latter could be achieved was constructed in many different ways. As the following quote illustrates, for example, representing an ethnic
community at the tournament as a national team that ‘can play soccer’ was assumed to reduce stereotypes.

Ehm, [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.

Coach for Moroccan team

Others feared they would not make it to the finals and would not be able to express themselves equally well during the matches. Instead, they 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 performing folk dances in support of the Columbian team.

Other groups sought to realize the potential effects of soccer in yet other ways. 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. This quote and the others above illustrate how practices to realize the social potentials of soccer at the AWC ranged from the very act of playing well for one’s own community to engaging in folkloristic performances.

Practices at the tournament 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 the dominant discourse of multiculturalism at the AWC that assumes national communities to be ethnically homogeneous. 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 against the 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 however, 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

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 1 below shows, only 2.7% of those attending came to the tournament to enjoy other cultures.

Table 1. Participants’ reasons for coming to the Amsterdam World Cup (n=223)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>All participants</th>
<th>White Dutch</th>
<th>Surinam</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Other South American countries</th>
<th>Middle Eastern countries</th>
<th>Other African countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialize with friends</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting my country</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play soccer</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To watch soccer</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enjoy other cultures</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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%.
This percentage varied by ethnic group however. It was highest (8.9%) for white Dutch spectators, whereas for other groups it was close to zero (e.g. Turkey, Morocco and 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), often coupled with the desire to support their country at the tournament. The data from our interviews showed a 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 below, 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 2000 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 to be their self-evident reasons for participating. However, some participants 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.

In the 2006 edition of the AWC, for example, a group of about 10 Iranian young women paraded around the pitches wearing heavy make-up, white trousers and tight, low cut tops that had the text ‘Iran’ in red letters written on the front. Their appearance attracted considerable attention, and they repeatedly posed for photographs with spectators and the local media. During one of their strolls around the pitches, a middle aged male spectator from Surinam asked the women why they were not wearing veils. One of the women publicly contested this discursive connection between their Iranian identity 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 multicultural integration discourse that ethnic minority identities are determined by a traditionalist pre-modern culture. Instead, they ‘re-presented’ their national community as modern and (arguably) emancipated. However, the emancipatory thrust of these activities remained limited given the wider context of the AWC in which they were performed. Their performances therefore remained focused on reproducing a distinct national community defined, like all others at the tournament, by its difference from other communities. Moreover, the sexualized nature of their appearances constituted an expression from the limited possibilities for females to participate at the AWC.

Discussion

The analysis of the AWC shows that all participating social actors 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’ would affectionately connect ethnic communities with the broader Dutch national community. The 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 participating soccer teams saw the AWC as a way to improve social conditions for their own communities. They assumed it enhances social cohesion in their own ethnic community and improves the public image of that community to outsiders. For most of the spectators, however, the dominant 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 from their own ethnic community. Nonetheless, the social practices at the tournament limited their scope to challenge this discourse.

The various interpretations of the social effects of participation at the tournament, furthermore, led to distinct social practices and outcomes. They allowed different social actors to imagine that their particular interests would be served by their participation in the tournament. These differently positioned actors subsequently performed a range of social practices at the tournament to realize their own expectations at the tournament. The overall design of the tournament reflects the particular aspirations of the organizers. Other, less powerful social actors engaged in traditional dances to represent ‘their culture’, and others set up training regimens to socialize youth in ‘their’ communities. The potential for diverging appropriations of the dominant discourse on the social effects of soccer appears to be crucial for projects like the AWC. It creates space in which different actors can expect different effects from their
participation that serve their own particular interests. The current lack of effect studies may be functional in this respect. It serves to sustain a discursive space in which actors with possibly conflicting interests and views may momentarily converge. Since the belief in sports accommodates widely diverging interests, it may also serve to reduce possible conflicts between participating actors. This may be of considerable value in projects dealing 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 legitimatized, reproduced or challenged power relations. In particular, the tournament appeared to legitimatize and reproduce power relations in Dutch intercultural relations and the domain of gender and sexuality on the other. Both will be discussed briefly below as a conclusion to this chapter.

With respect to Dutch intercultural relations, the dominance of a discourse that constructed cultural diversity as a collection of homogeneous national-cultural communities is highly significant. This dominant discourse legitimatized and reproduced power relations at the tournament by simultaneously enabling and constraining the ways in which participating at the AWC could be conceived to impact multicultural integration. On the one hand, it enabled the imagination of this connection by specifying the various communities that make up the cultural diversity of the Netherlands (constructed in this discourse as all homogeneous national-cultural communities) as well as the problems associated with it (a lack of respect and tolerance between these communities). On the other hand, however, this essentialist mosaic conceptualization of cultural diversity determined the kinds of integration that soccer could be imagined to produce. This is reflected in the fact that the effects of the AWC were 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 with the white majority) 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 legitimatized and reproduced in the discourses and practices of the AWC.
The critical analysis of the role of dominant discourses at the AWC may also be extended to discourses on gender and sexual difference that 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 subordinating women to the role of spectators. In contrast, the 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.xx

The results presented here indicate that the study of the discourses that present sport as a social panacea can add to our understandings of the dynamics and outcomes of sports events that are intended as social interventions. The combination of the ‘circuit of culture’ approach outlined by Du Gay et al. (1997) with a critical discursive analytical perspective has proven useful to tease out the various conflicts, synergies and political implications of projects in which several social actors come together in the name of multicultural integration and intercultural tolerance. However, 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 how 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 neighbourhoods classified as ‘poor’. Another important avenue of research is the investigation of projects like ‘Soccer for Peace’, a project for peace between Israeli and Palestine youth, or ‘the homeless cup’, a soccer event created to empower homeless people. An understanding of the discursive constructions of this ‘soccer myth’ remains essential to an analysis of the politics behind these projects and their relative successes and failures.