

## **Sport Policy in Canada and Hungary: Lessons of Inclusion and Exclusion**

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**The level of academic** and policy debate around issues of multiculturalism, integration and related concepts and approaches has grown enormously in recent years. In the European context it has been fostered 1) by the need to deal with issues related to the post-colonial period when the end of empire signalled a new relationship with migrant populations from the former colonies, and 2) by the aftermath of the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and wars in the Middle East that led to displacement of large number of people. Although transnational agreements have reflected a need for a broader response to the recent large-scale migration, considerable varieties in national policies still remain.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, Canada represents to the world a culturally pluralistic society. Canadian political policies project the sentiment that racial and ethnic groups in Canadian society are useful and even desirable. The Canadian government has traditionally supported the policy of multiculturalism that originated in the early 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the modern era, society has romanticized the belief that sport is “the great equalizer.” This notion implies that an ultimate common goal of competitive rivalry and victory exists within a sporting context and, as a result, concerns about race or ethnic differences supposedly diminish when weighed in comparison to the desire to win. On the contrary, sport can operate both as a component that may reinforce the separation between classes and ethnic groups, and also as an element that may create and reinforce temporary links between participants from different social and cultural backgrounds.

This study analyses the emergence of sport as a sector of public policy interest in two countries: Canada and Hungary. Central to the paper is the manifestation of “equal opportunity in sport” as a key policy concern in both countries. While the emergence of the concept “equality in sport – equality through sport” is the focus here, the increased sporting activities at regional and sub-regional level in Canada and Hungary

require some attention. The paper draws from data gathered on two particular areas of sport policy representing equal opportunities in sport: sport for minority groups and sport for people with disabilities. The study relies on primary sources such as the published texts of various government initiatives, directives and reports; secondary sources including books, conference papers and unpublished theses; as well as on interviews with academics who have been involved in empirical investigations of equal opportunity in Canadian or Hungarian sport.

## **Canada**

Although Canada's culture and economy are greatly influenced by the United States, the country's historical roots are largely European. Canada's style of governance can best be described as a liberal democracy — within a federalist system of power sharing. Even though sport has been named as one of the important elements in Canadian history to build a nation divided geographically, religiously, and ethnically, for a long time Canadian governments have not had direct policy interests in sport. The shift towards increased federal government involvement in sport and away from what can be termed as a “voluntarist” approach became pronounced in September 1961 with the introduction of Bill 131 “An Act to Encourage Fitness and Amateur Sport.” Since this initiative, Canadian sport policy must be contextualized in light of the broader political tensions surrounding the separatist tendencies in Quebec, ideological predominance of the Liberal Party in promoting cultural pluralism, and the growing influence of American capital in all aspects of Canadian life.

In 1996, a Census Canada survey showed that 12.5 million Canadians — 44% of the population — reported origins other than British, French or Canadian. Half a million people — around 2% of the total population — reported only Aboriginal origin.<sup>2</sup> From another perspective, Canadian society can be also described as a complex network of relations among different ethnic groups that have unequal economic, political, and social positions or capacities. These relations can be characterized in the following ethnic polarities:

- Natives vs. non-Natives
- French vs. English
- Colonizing (English, French) vs. other immigrant groups

The Canadian Multicultural Act<sup>3</sup> is a supplementary document to the Constitution. Multiculturalism as a government policy perspective has influenced sport policy as well.

With respect to certain ethnic issues in sport, Christine M. O'Bonsawin, a sports historian at the University of Western Ontario, suggests that

The political, social, and cultural context, in which Native athletes participated in Canadian sport throughout the 1970s and 1980s, assists in understanding their position in the Canadian mainstream sport system. The political context of Native participation relates specifically to federal policies addressing the government's role in both Native affairs and the development and implementation of federal sport policies.<sup>4</sup>

Significant policies of the federal government included the 1969 Trudeau-Chretien "White Paper on Indians." This Paper was partly the result of ongoing Aboriginal disapproval of government policies during the 1960s regarding the appalling living conditions in Aboriginal communities, and partly of the government's desire to place the Aboriginal question into a wider context of multicultural/bilingual Canadian policies. Concurrently the Canadian government's desire to promote sport specifically at the elite level, led to the formation of an Aboriginal sport policy and to increased participation of Aboriginal athletes in different sports. After the inception of the Canada Games in 1967, government officials realized that Native people of the North did not have opportunity to participate in the event. This was caused mainly by the fact that Aboriginal people were not exposed to mainstream sports.

The initiative to organize a competition similar to the Canada Games but primarily for the people of Canadian North came from native leaders and northern politicians. The initiative met the broader political interest of the federal government for establishing a prominent Canadian presence in the Arctic. The Arctic Winter Games featured not only some of the more popular mainstream sports but also Native games such as the high kick, the whip contest, and Eskimo dance. Even though the Games emerged within the context of Native sport policy and in reality served wider political goals of the federal government, they became eminent in Aboriginal sport policy for decades. As Donald Macintosh, Tom Bedeck, Tom Bedeck and C. E. S. Franks pointed out in this regard: "For whatever reason, the Arctic Winter Games became a reality in Yellow-

knife in [the] 1970s.... Eight hundred athletes, representing the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Alaska competed in this first Arctic Games.”<sup>5</sup>

Another initiative in sport policy definitely followed the prospective of the White Paper, encouraging Aboriginal athletes’ participation in mainstream sports. The most relevant program of Aboriginal sport policy was the TEST — Territorial Experimental Ski Training initiative. The government’s concern was to motivate Indian and Eskimo youth to achieve academically and socially within the broader scope of competitive Canadian society. As O’Bonsawin concluded in her analysis of TEST, this project had been established explicitly to assimilate Aboriginals.<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal sport leaders wished to assimilate, but in a way federal officials did not expect. Rather than assimilate into the mainstream sport system, they insisted on maintaining an all-Native sport system, where successful Aboriginal athletes would emerge and compete against the best Euro-Canadians in provincial and national championships.

Throughout the 1980s, Aboriginal leaders sought to have their sport activities acknowledged as legitimate national sport events. They tried to argue that this type of organization should have an equal access to government funding with other national sport organizations. In their understanding, this would achieve an equal opportunity for Aboriginal participants. These ideas led to the formation of the concept of the North American Indigenous Games, an all-Native multi-sport competition and cultural festival, as a branch to the World Indigenous Nations Games. As Janice Forsyth of the University of Manitoba pointed out, the 1980s “were a period of transition for Aboriginal Sport in Canada. The rise of the all-Native sport system, and the initiative to develop a national sport coordinating body as part of the National Indian Brotherhood clearly demonstrated that Aboriginal people believed they had a right to self-determination.”<sup>7</sup> Self-determination ran counter to the federal policies targeting Aboriginals for assimilation.

The 1970s can be described as a decade for the incorporation of sport for disabled people into a broader concept of federal sport policy. In 1976, as a result of the efforts of Dr. Robert F. Jackson, a Toronto Orthopedic Surgeon, Toronto hosted the so-called “Torontolympiad,” which later became known as the 5<sup>th</sup> Paralympic Games. Historically, in the domestic context, these Games can be referred to as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Games for Athletes with Disabilities. Although the timing of the Games was excellent and followed the Montreal Olympics, the Canadian government withdrew its financial support after the organizers decided to allow

an integrated South African team to compete. But using the initiative and the general idea to sustain the Games as an important tool of integration for people with disabilities into the wider Canadian society, the federal government targeted funds to a newly established coordinating committee after the successful accomplishment of the Torontolympiad.<sup>8</sup> This coordinating committee was the founding organization of the recently formed Canadian Paralympic Committee.

At the end of the 1970s, the federal government integrated athletes with disabilities into the Athlete Assistance Program. They were carded using the criteria similar to the other athletes. In 1984, nine wheelchair and five blind athletes received direct funding. During that decade, a growing number of member organizations required more sophisticated and increased coordination of activities.<sup>9</sup> The Paralympic Committee focused on the matters of promotion, rules and coaching integration, participation in international competitions and administration involving more than one disability group. In the "Year of the Disabled" in 1981 the Canadian government provided \$200,000 to assist with the programs of the organization. As a result of lobbying efforts, the International Paralympic Committee approved the creation of a Commission for Inclusion of Athletes with a Disability into major international competitions. This organization was chaired by Rick Hansen and located in the National Sport Centre in Ottawa. In 1996 the Canadian Paralympic Committee — after an unsuccessful participation at Atlanta Paralympic Games — reviewed its mandate. The report identified declining Canadian performance and significant organizational challenges as the most serious concerns for the organization. The federal government adjusted the Athlete Assistance Program to include more athletes with disabilities. In the beginning of the 1990s there were 16 carded athletes with disabilities. Until 2001, the Canadian Paralympic Committee membership base consisted of 22 national sport organizations. The growing membership needed new vision and a new business plan to guide the limited resources, while ensuring the priorities and objectives of the organization were met. This new vision replaced the "event based" concept of the earlier strategy and it became a "movement" based organization on behalf of the community of athletes with disabilities. Whatever changes the organization needed to secure the necessary funds, it sent its athletes to all of the Winter and Summer Olympic Games. The athletes even achieved higher ranking results at the Paralympic Games than the National Team of the regular Olympic competition.

But the story of Canadian disabled sport and its inclusion in policy discourse speaks for itself. It follows the general tendency of the sport policy prospective focusing exclusively on elite development. The sport system supports the elite athletes even with disabilities to achieve the highest possible results in the mainstream policy terrain, specifically at the Olympic/Paralympic Games.

## **Hungary**

The organization and development of sport in Hungary followed a different path. Historically, sport administration in Hungary had developed in tight connection with the educational system. Prussian-style military discipline used to be considered essential at all levels of the county's schools. Physical education played a very important role in this.

Following the establishment of communist rule in Hungary in the late 1940s, both education and sport became organized on a strictly centralized, totalitarian pattern. After the demise of communism in 1989 the Hungarian sport system began its democratic life in a highly turbulent atmosphere. Although the Government faced severe economic, political, and social problems, it managed to focus on the challenges faced by the sport community. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1999 it established the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The Ministry considered a priority the promotion of an active lifestyle for people all ages, both sexes, including citizens with disabilities. In 2002, a "White Paper on the Recent Situation on Sport in Hungary" was undertaken upon the request of the Ministry. The Paper's suggestions and recommendations served as the basis for Hungary's subsequent sport strategy.

"The National Sport Strategy" (NSS)<sup>10</sup> is a political document, that surveys the current situation of the Hungarian sport system. It outlines the long-term goals of the sport community and conceptualizes the operational plans for achieving these goals. The sport policy as health, educational, youth, social and regional policies, became an integral part of the National Development Plan (NDP).<sup>11</sup> The National Development Plan emphasizes that without a mentally and physically healthy population it would be impossible to improve the competitiveness and the quality of life in the country. It acknowledges that the goals of the sport community have to be taken into consideration in the country's long-term socio-economical planning process. The creation of the National Sport Strategy

as part of the National Development Plan of Hungary is a moment of historical importance.

Hungary has a highly homogenous population, where members of ethnic minorities comprise only about 3% of the citizenry. Officially, the Roma ethnic community represents 1.95% of the total population, while other minority groups represent nationalities from different East European countries, as well as Germans and Greeks.<sup>12</sup>

Emphasizing the social importance of sport in promoting equal opportunities, the NSS pays particular attention to society's disadvantaged groups. Analyzing the structure of the document, chapters like "The Role of Sport in Social Cohesion" and "Sport for People with Disabilities" are placed at the very beginning of the document, far ahead of chapters such as "Elite Sport Development" or "Connection between Business and Sport."<sup>13</sup>

Promoting equal opportunities for under-represented social groups, the Ministry of Sport launched the "Moonlight" program in 2001. It is a organized sport competition that takes place in the evenings, targeting the disadvantaged youth of urban communities who otherwise would be spending their time on the streets. In the table-tennis competition, for example, the participation amounted to 8000 individuals. Unfortunately there is no official data provided on the ethnic background of the participants.

The Roma population has been targeted in the formal educational policies, policies that should have included the physical education curriculum. In the period between 2001–2004, over \$100 million was provided through the European Union's educational programs for Roma projects in Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics, but sport currently is not included as a form of activity promoted in existing educational programmes. The so-called non-formal educational programming of sport has never targeted the Roma population on its own.

In 1995, in order to seek some administrative help, the President of the Roma Soccer Federation, which had been established in 1992, contacted the Hungarian Soccer Federation expressing the Romas' desire and willingness to be included into the mainstream sport developments of Hungarian soccer. After long negotiations, in 1997 the Hungarian Soccer federation established a Roma Committee, incorporating the leaders of the Roma Soccer Federation into its own representatives.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Sport, the Ministry of Interior, and the Hungarian Soccer Federation organized the Hungarian Anti-Racism Day first in 2003. The event

included matches involving the national Roma and Slovene minorities' teams at the senior and junior levels. The insignificant percentage of other ethnic groups in relation to the total Hungarian majority probably explains the non-existence of any specific policies that target other ethnic minorities of the country. In both the formal and non-formal educational policies, the only existing measures are those showing the general level of integration for minority groups.

Until the 1970s, the situation of people with disabilities in Hungarian sport can be best characterized as "*persona non grata*." There were no opportunities for them to participate in organized sporting activities, there were no clubs, and facilities for them to use. The first sport clubs, or affiliations for people with disabilities came about in sports like table tennis, archery, sitting-volleyball and, later on, in swimming, bowling, and indoor soccer.<sup>15</sup> Hungarian disabled athletes officially have been able to participate in international competitions only since 1984. Before that, the National Committee of Sport and Physical Education for People with Disabilities approached the National Office for Sport and Physical Education several times for their support to become a member of international organizations and that way secure the right of participation for their athletes, but the Office rejected these pleas without any explanation.

The 1990s brought new opportunities for disabled athletes. Sport clubs organized activities and established national championships in a variety of sports for disabled people. In 1991, Budapest hosted the third Congress of the International Paralympic Committee. Although this was a promising start towards a new and existing sport policy for disabled people, the results quickly became frustrating. While sport organizations, clubs, and affiliations mushroomed, so did misunderstandings and discord among them. Perhaps the explanation for this can be found in the difference of organizational structures between the disabled and mainstream sport organizations: the former formulated their associations on the basis of the type of disability while the latter were organized by disciplines. Unfortunately these problems resulted in a seven year delay in the establishment of the Hungarian Paralympic Committee and its sub-organizations in each sport discipline.

In 1999 the newly established Ministry and the Paralympic sub-committees together launched the first national sport program targeting people with disabilities. The program proudly announced that its primary focus would be on the recreational activities of disabled people — as an integral part of the general sport policy — while fostering and encourag-

ing the participation of disabled elite athletes in Paralympic Games and other international competitions. To achieve these two main goals, the Ministry divided funding for disabled sport into two sections: one to support elite athletes on the basis of a “carded system” similar to one in Canada; the other towards reconstruction of facilities that in most cases did not have any kind of wheelchair access for people with disabilities — either athletes or spectators. Taking into consideration the discourse of the National Sport Strategy, this initiative should have been emphasized in operational planning and consequently in funding, because this aspect of the program should have focussed on general recreation, in other words, on the inclusion of people with disabilities. In fact, an examination of the distribution of funds provided for the Ministry's two goals makes it evident that while the elite development received \$11 million between 1999-2005 from the state budget the amount allocated for the program's second section was just \$2 million.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Social exclusion as a concept entered political discourse in the 1980s. The term was adopted partly to deal with the reluctance of governments to use the word “poverty” and became central in the programming targeted at the most disadvantaged members of society in general. Within this context, a range of different actions have been identified that can promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect between different communities and groups, including legislation but also cultural and educational programs. Sport is one of such areas of policy activities. It has been recognized on the national and international levels as a “social phenomenon.” Sport in policy discourse offers a “common language and platform for social democracy,” “it creates conditions for political democracy and is instrumental for development of democratic citizenship,” “it contributes to the fight against prejudice,” “it plays its part to limit social exclusion of minorities.” However such claims about using sport are rarely made with the support of evidence or detailed analysis of how such goals can be accomplished.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, many aspects of social exclusion share one common feature: the lack of opportunities for some people to participate, that is a lack of social connectedness or social capital. Thus, offering opportunities to people to participate in sport can assist in this respect. As Coalter

pointed out,<sup>18</sup> it is necessary to consider the various features of sport, as individual, team, competitive, recreational; and the aims of provision to find a way of targeting outcomes so that they are appropriate to the different needs of various groups.

This study examined the inconsistencies between sport policy discourses and sport practices regarding equality in sport in Canada and Hungary. The similarities between sport policies and practices of the two countries are the inclusiveness in discourse rather than in practice; the focus exclusively on high performance sport, the result of which is the fact that the only established measurement of a successful sport policy is the numbers of Olympic/Paralympic medals won.

But there are some important differences between the two countries' sport policies, and these are in line with their general orientation towards citizenship. Ian Henry outlined four different models of nationality and citizenship that are illustrative of the range of national approaches to sport and diversity. These are the Anglo-Saxon pluralist; the German ethno-nationalist; the French republican and the Polish post-Communist models.<sup>19</sup> Canada can be characterized as having a relatively heterogeneous population with evidence of multicultural or intercultural policy approaches, while Hungary is perceived as relatively homogenous population employing assimilationist approaches to policies. In spite of this seemingly heterogeneous approach, there is evidence to suggest that Canadian sport policies have been assimilationist as well, even though Canada claims to be a liberal pluralist state that promotes individual freedom of its members, intercultural exchange and separate but equal development for ethnic groups. In Hungary, the social organization and questions of citizenship were constructed under very different circumstances and under the communist regime: the importance of immigration, ethnicity, and national minorities were minimized. Even though Hungary still is in the process of working out its new approach to citizenship, the significance of national minorities has been recognized. Government and non-government agencies have been established to provide services to ethnic minorities and disadvantaged communities. But the policies are associated with an emphasis on cohesion rather than diversity, and with a unitary notion of national culture. The sport programming and practice still remains assimilationist, which seek to incorporate groups into existing national culture.

Since 1989, Canada and Hungary have cooperated on more than 150 projects worth over \$30 million, funded by the Canadian International

Development Agency (CIDA). Some of these projects were accomplished in strengthening civil society and education, but not one particularly in sport. The promotion of sport exchange focusing on young people of under-represented groups and with the intention to measure the number of participants and their attitude towards cultural differences could grow into new connections and into an existing “good practice” benefiting both countries, and especially will give Hungarians the opportunity to learn — for good or bad — from the Canadian experience.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister P.E. Trudeau was seeking ways in which he could counter two strong negative forces in the country: Quebec separatism and American economic and cultural domination. He mentioned sport in connection with culture first in 1968. As a result of his vision on the role of sport in promoting national unity, the first Canada Games was held in Quebec City in 1967 under the slogan “Unity of Sports.” Following this new perspective the federal government did not renew the cost-sharing agreement with the provinces. Troubled by provincial-federal jurisdiction, it created arm-length organizations designed to improve Canada’s international sport performances. In the period between 1970s and 1990s these organizations received \$62 million from the federal budget. A Fitness and Amateur Sport Directorate with a deputy minister was established and Iona Campagnolo, the veteran Liberal politician, became the first Minister of State in sport. Canadian federal government involvement in sport is systematically analyzed in following books: Donald Macintosh and David Whitson, *The Game Planners: Transforming Canada’s Sport System* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990); and Donald Macintosh, Tom Bedecki, and C. E. S. Franks, *Sport and Politics in Canada* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> *Multicultural Canada: Demographic Overview 1998* (Ottawa: Ministry of Canadian Heritage, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> *Canadian Multicultural Act 1985*.

<sup>4</sup> Christine O'Bonsawin, "Failed Test: Aboriginal Sport Policy and the Olympian Firth Sisters," unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Western Ontario, School of Kinesiology, London, Ontario, Canada, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Macintosh, Bedecki, and Franks, *Sport and Politics in Canada*, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> O'Bonsawin, *Failed Test*, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Janice Forsyth, "From Assimilation to Self-Determination: The Emergence of J. Wilton Littlechild's North American Indigenous Games, 1763-1997," unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Western Ontario, School of Kinesiology, London, Ontario, Canada, 2001, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> For details see the homepage of the Canadian Paralympic Committee: <http://paralympic.ca/english/aboutus/whoweare/history2.asp>

<sup>9</sup> Macintosh, Bedecki, and Franks, *Sport and Politics in Canada*, pp. 135-37.

<sup>10</sup> See the homepage of the Nemzeti Sporthivatal [hereafter NSP] (Hungarian Sports Office): <http://nsh.hu/strategia>

<sup>11</sup> See the homepage of the Nemzeti Fejlesztési Hivatal (Hungarian National Development Office): <http://www.nft.hu>

<sup>12</sup> European Commission/Directorate General X, *Studies on Education and Sport; Sport and Multiculturalism — Final Report* (Report by PMP in partnership with Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy Loughborough University, August 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Homepage of the NSP: <http://nsh.hu/strategia>

<sup>14</sup> European Commission/Directorate General X, *Studies on Education and Sport...*, Section 2 "Approaches to sport policy and multiculturalism" (Report in partnership with the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loughborough University, August 2004), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> *A fogyatékos sport története Magyarországon* [History of disabled sport in Hungary], unpublished report, prepared by the Hungarian National Sport Office (NSH), April 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Data provided by Anna Molnár, Deputy Head of the Department for Strategic Developments of the NSH (Nemzeti Sporthivatal Stratégiai Innovációs Főosztály), during a personal interview on 22 April 2005.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission/Directorate General X, *Studies on Education and Sport...*, Appendix E: Report on Project Conference "Sport and Multicultural Dialogue" (Paris, 26-27 April, 2004), pp. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Fred Coalter: "What is the evidence to support claims for the social inclusion effects of sport?" A paper delivered in April 2004, in Paris in a workshop entitled "Using sport for social inclusion." The workshop was organized and supported by the European Commission.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission/Directorate General X, *Studies on Education and Sport...*, section 2: Approaches to sports policy and multiculturalism, pp. 24-26.