

*Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society*

# **SPORT, IDENTITY AND INCLUSION IN EUROPE**

**THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ  
PEOPLE IN SPORT**

Edited by  
Ilse Hartmann-Tews



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# Sport, Identity and Inclusion in Europe

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This book explores and critically assesses the challenges and experiences of LGBTQ people within sport in Europe. It presents cutting-edge research data and insights from across the continent, with a focus on sport policy, sport systems, and issues around anti-discrimination and inclusion.

The book introduces the theoretical and methodological foundations of research into LGBTQ people in sport and then presents in-depth comparative surveys of systems and experiences in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the UK, and Spain. A final section considers the effectiveness of policy in this area and motives for participation, and looks ahead at future directions in research, policy, and practice.

Tracing the frontiers of our understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ people in contemporary Europe, this is fascinating reading for anybody with an interest in the sociology of sport, sport policy, LGBTQI studies, gender and sexuality studies, or cultural studies.

**Ilse Hartmann-Tews** is Professor of Sociology and Head of the Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies at the German Sport University Cologne, Germany.

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The Experiences of LGBTQ People  
in Sport

Edited by Ilse Hartmann-Tews

First published 2022  
by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-032-01884-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-05253-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-19676-1 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003196761

Typeset in Goudy  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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# Acknowledgements

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The idea for this book can be traced back to the kick-off meeting of the Erasmus+-funded project Outsport in Glasgow in 2016. The central intention of the project has been to develop innovative and educational approaches to prevent violence and to tackle discrimination in sport based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Empirical evidence for these activities would be gained by conducting the first European survey of LGBTIQ people in sport in Europe.

The kick-off meeting was hosted by Hugh Torrance, Executive Director of LEAP Sports Scotland, who provided a perfect setting for our meeting in the headquarters of LEAP and, at the same time, relit my passion for Scottish scones. Our first meeting was an inspiring multicultural get-together of individuals from different fields of work – journalism, academia, and LGBTQ and gender equality advocacy – in five European countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Scotland), characterised by a Babylonian crisscross of languages and a colourful entanglement of experiences and aspirations with regard to the project.

Our meeting triggered my wish to make the diversity of LGBTIQ people and their experiences of homo- and transnegativity in sport visible and to identify the social structures that frame their situations in different European cultures and sports systems. I am very pleased and proud that the initial idea has resulted in this book, with its diverse and rich collection of data and critical reflections on LGBTIQ diversity and sport inclusion policy in Europe.

A European endeavour such as this book can only be successful with the expertise and commitment of the authors. I would like to thank all of them for their willingness to contribute and their dedication to expanding our knowledge of the situation of LGBTIQ people in sport in Europe, as well as for their commitment to and patience with the editorial feedback loops.

I particularly want to acknowledge and thank Tim Schlunski, who efficiently supported the editorial work as an intern, a student assistant, and, last but not least, a co-author.

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# Abbreviations

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|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| ADI           | Agrupación Deportiva Ibérica LGTBI   |
| AFES          | Grup d'investigació Activitat Física, Educació i Societat  |
| AICS          | Associazione Italiana Cultura Sport  |
| ASKÖ          | Allgemeiner Sportverband Österreichs   |
| ASVÖ          | Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sport und Körperkultur Österreich  |
| BANG          | Budapest All Nations' Games  |
| BLV           | Berliner Leichtathletik Verein   |
| BMI           | Bundesministerium des Inneren, Bau und Heimat  |
| BOA           | British Olympic Committee  |
| BPA           | British Paralympic Committee   |
| BuNT          | BundesNetzwerkTagung queerer Sportvereine  |
| CAS           | Court of Arbitration for Sport   |
| CBS           | Centraal Bureau van Statistiek   |
| CEE           | Central and Eastern Europe   |
| CGPIF         | Comité Gay Paris Ile-de-France   |
| CNOSF         | Comité National Olympique et Sportif Français  |
| CONI          | Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano   |
| Consejo COLEF | Consejo General de la Educación Física y Deportiva   |
| CSD           | Consejo Superior de Deportes   |
| DFB           | Deutscher Fußball-Bund   |
| DILCRAH       | Délégation Interministérielle pour la Lutte contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Haine anti-LGBT |
| DNI           | Documento Nacional de Identidad  |
| DOSB          | Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund  |
| DSB           | Deutscher Sportbund  |
| EGLSF         | European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation  |
| EL*C          | Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community   |
| ENGSO         | Equality Within Sport Committee of the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation                 |
| EPS           | Enti di Promozione Sportiva  |
| ETS           | Education through sport  |
| EU            | European Union   |



|            |  |
|------------|--|
| FARE       | Football Against Racism Europe   |
| FFBB       | Fédération Française de Basket Ball  |
| FFF        | Fédération Française de Football   |
| FIGC       | Federazione Italiana Gioco Calcio  |
| FIR        | Federazione Italiana Rugby   |
| FRA        | European Agency for Fundamental Rights   |
| FSGL       | Fédération Sportive Gaie et Lesbienne (until 2021);<br>Fédération Sportive LGBT+ (since 2021)    |
| GSM        | Gender and sexual minority   |
| IAAF       | International Association of Athletics Federations (until<br>2019); World Athletics (since 2019) |
| ICONS      | Iniziativa Contro l'Omofobia Nello Sport   |
| ILGA       | International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex<br>Association                          |
| IOC        | International Olympic Committee  |
| IWG        | International Working Group on Women and Sport   |
| JBF        | John Blankenstein Foundation   |
| KNHB       | Koninklijke Nederlandse Hockey Bond  |
| KNVB       | Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond   |
| LGBTIQ     | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer  |
| LICRA      | Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme  |
| NGB        | National Governing Bodies  |
| NGO        | Non-governmental organisation  |
| NOC        | Nationales Olympisches Komitee   |
| NSOD       | National Sports Observatory for Diversity  |
| ÖBSV       | Österreichischer Behindertensportverband   |
| ÖFB        | Österreichischer Fußball-Bund  |
| ÖFBL       | Österreichische Fußball-Bundesliga   |
| OII-Europe | Organisation Intersex International Europe   |
| ÖOC        | Österreichisches Olympisches Comité  |
| ÖPC        | Österreichisches Paralympisches Comité   |
| PACE       | Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe  |
| PACS       | Pacte Civil de Solidarité  |
| PAS        | Physical and sport education   |
| PE         | Physical Education   |
| PETE       | Physical Education Teachers Education  |
| RIVM       | Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu  |
| SCEG       | Sports Council Equality Group  |
| SGB        | Scottish Governing Bodies  |
| SMK        | Sportministerkonferenz   |
| SOGIESC    | Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex<br>Characteristics                   |
| SOÖ        | Special Olympics Österreich  |
| TAO        | The corporate income tax relief system   |

|      |                                 |
|------|---------------------------------|
| TGEU | Transgender Europe              |
| UISP | Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti |
| UK   | United Kingdom                  |
| UN   | United Nations                  |
| USA  | United States of America        |
| VVCS | Vereniging van Contractspelers  |
| WHO  | World Health Organization       |



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# Introduction – Sport, Identity and Inclusion in Europe

*Ilse Hartmann-Tews*

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Values of equal treatment and policies for inclusion and anti-discrimination have a long tradition in Europe and are clearly expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (Council of the European Communities & Commission of the European Communities, 1992) and Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU, 2000).

In 2010, the first recommendations of measures dealing specifically with the challenge of combatting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity were released by the EU Committee of Ministers (Council of Europe, 2010). The implementation of the respective recommendations in the member states was reviewed in two reports. The review report of 2019 concluded that a considerable number of member states had made substantial progress regarding the legal and social recognition of LGBT people (Council of Europe, 2019). It also indicated that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has been proscribed in legal documents across most European countries, whereas discrimination on grounds of gender identity has been covered to a lesser extent.

The development and implementation of LGBTQ anti-discrimination policies in Europe have been assessed annually by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). The so-called Rainbow Europe Index generally confirms the progress documented by the review report (ILGA-Europe, 2021). Political leadership and the greater visibility of the LGBTQ movement, combined with support and guidance from the Council of Europe, are identified as among the driving forces behind this progress. However, both the review report and ILGA have underlined the heterogeneity of the LGBTQ rights implemented across European countries and the fact that not all European countries are continually expanding anti-discrimination policies with regard to LGBTQ people.

Based on a demand for data on the human rights situation of European citizens, the Council of Europe launched a huge EU-wide survey in 2012, delivering, for the first time, comparable data on how LGBT people experience their daily lives. A second wave of this survey was conducted in 2019, now including intersex people and participants of a younger age (15 to 17 years; European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights, 2014, 2020). The results of the surveys revealed little progress in the way LGBT(I) people in the EU experience their human and

fundamental rights in their daily lives. The surveys have uncovered variations in the extent of experienced homo- and transnegativity with regard to two reference points: areas of life and countries. Discrimination, harassment, and violence on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity vary between the areas of life covered in the report (i.e. education, work, housing, and healthcare) as well as across national contexts, predominantly in correspondence with the findings of the Rainbow Europe Index. Thus, the overall EU average result of little progress in curtailing homo- and transnegativity conceals important differences between member states (European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights, 2020).

### **(In-)Visibility of LGBTQ issues in sport in Europe**

It is striking that both the EU surveys on LGBT(I) experiences did not include physical activity and sport as a specific area of life. However, the 2019 review report on the implementation of measures referred to sport in its section on “Trends and Challenges”. Sport, in particular, is identified as “a hostile environment for LGBT persons where little real progress is being made compared to other areas” (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 14). Moreover, the fact that only very few professional athletes have come out as LGBT is interpreted as “a consequence of the lack of inclusive policies in the sports sector regarding SOGI [sexual orientation and gender identity]” (Council of Europe, 2019, p. 14). These observations, together with evidence from international research and LGBTQ advocacy work, are reflected in the Revised European Sports Charter (Council of Europe, 2021), which, in a section entitled “Sport for All”, includes Article 10 “The Right to Sport”. For the first time since the adoption of the European Sport for All Charter in 1975 and its update in 1992 and 2001 as the European Sports Charter, this includes a no-discrimination clause that specifically integrates sexual orientation as one of the grounds listed.

There has been a growing spectrum of international studies providing evidence that LGBTQ people regularly experience discrimination in physical education and sport (Denison et al., 2021). However, while there is a large body of research from North America, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (Anderson et al., 2016; Anderson & Travers, 2017; Denison et al., 2021; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Krane, 2019), LGBTQ issues in sport in European countries still need to be critically assessed by scholars (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021).

From a social science perspective, it is evident that sport is particularly predestined to be a homo- and transnegative area of life on the grounds of its specific characteristics as a societal system. The general mindset of sport, evident in all sports activities, is the communication of body-centred performance (Hartmann-Tews, 1996; Stichweh, 1990). This sport-specific mindset unfolds within the heteronormative gender order of society, which is reproduced and reinforced by the social structures and processes of the sports system. Heteronormativity is based on three interwoven beliefs: first, there are only two biologically natural and immutable sexes, male and female; second, there is a natural (sexual) attraction between

males and females; third, there is a hierarchical order between men and women, placing men and masculinity above women and femininity. A huge amount of critical research documents as to how sport reproduces heteronormativity through its structures and processes (e.g. sex segregation and gender verification tests; Krane, 2019). It is this general cultural matrix, reinforced by the sport-specific mindset, that gives rise to homo- and transnegativity and discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals.

As shown in reviews of research, there is a dearth of research on the situation of LGBTIQ athletes in Europe (Denison et al., 2021; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). This book intends to fill the gap with regard to a critical assessment of the situation of LGBTIQ individuals in sport and inclusion policies in Europe.

## Diversity

Comparative research on sports development and governance shows that historical contexts and political configurations of nations are evident in sports systems. Structures and governance of sports systems vary across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and South America (Hallmann & Petry, 2013). The roots of modern sport in Europe refer to freedom of association, one of the central ideas of liberalism. Thereby, they differ from the features of the sports systems in, for example, the USA or Asia. The dominant policy framework of sports development in Europe is the autonomy of non-profit voluntary sports organisations (Chappelet, 2010). Based on this idea, there are many parallels in the development of organised sports and policy making across European countries. However, there are also significant differences between the countries. Variations can be identified with regard to the importance attached to leisure and grassroots sports compared to elite sports. Another crucial difference is the division of responsibilities for sports development between civil society (i.e. the non-profit voluntary sports organisations), the public sector (i.e. government), and the private market sector (Hartmann-Tews, 1996; Henry, 2009; Scheerder et al., 2017).

Although there is a dearth of research literature on LGBTIQ issues in sport in Europe, research cooperation between researchers and advocacy policy practitioners in the context of LGBTIQ issues in sport in Europe is increasing. Against this background, one of the intentions of this volume is to explore and critically assess the challenges and experiences of LGBTIQ people in sport and sports inclusion policies with regard to LGBTIQ people in various European countries.

Another central intention of the book is to raise awareness of and be sensitive towards the different experiences and challenges of LGBTIQ individuals in face of the heteronormative and often hegemonic masculine social structures of sport in Europe and elsewhere (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Cunningham, 2019). Over the past decades, there has been growing evidence regarding the heterogeneity of sexual and gender identities, the potential intersections of both, and the mediating effects of gender, sexual and gender identity, and gender expression with regard to experiences of discrimination (Calzo et al., 2014; Harrison et al., 2012).

LGBTQ individuals and LGBTQ issues are the central reference points of the contributions. The term LGBTQ embraces lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, transgender individuals, and those who are identified as queer. The latter denotes a political stance and intentionally subverts the heteronormative gender order by providing a characterisation devoid of sex or gender categories. Little is known about the specific situation of intersex athletes in European sport, and none of the contributions or sections of the contributions are explicitly devoted to the specific situations and experiences of this group. Therefore, this book uses the acronym LGBTQ and does not include “I”. However, there are various cases of exclusion of intersex elite sports athletes, most of them are black women, on the grounds of regulations that treat testosterone as the essence of masculinity. The social construction of these regulations indicates the fragility of heteronormativity and should be critically assessed by social scientists in the field of sport.

The authors of the chapters use terms and identity labels in ways that, to the best of our current understanding, are most appropriate for the people being discussed and the focus of their analyses. Moreover, the terms homonegativity and transnegativity are preferred to describe anti-LGBTQ sentiments and actions, and thus, we refrain from using the common terms homo- and transphobia. This is because phobia implies an irrational fear, which is often linked to avoiding a specific phobic context. By contrast, the terms homo- and transnegativity more adequately grasp the active enactment of negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviours (MacDonald, 2018).

### **Contents of the book**

These reference points shape the structure of the book, and the chapters are organised into three parts. Part I situates the book as a contribution to the field of sport-related LGBTQ research, with an explicit focus on the situation in Europe. Part II focuses on country-specific issues, examining the experiences of LGBTQ people in sport and inclusion policies in seven European countries. Part III covers a variety of topics with regard to specific subgroups of LGBTQ people (gay men, lesbian women, and transgender people) and the (policy) contexts of sports in which they are involved (leisure sports and competitive sports).

### **Part I**

The first section contains three chapters that map the field with regard to theoretical and methodological approaches for analysing LGBTQ issues in sport, empirical findings of research on the experiences of LGBTQ people in sport in Europe, and European LGBTQ sport advocacy policies.

Braumüller and Schlunski (Chapter 1) present a critical overview of the concept of LGBTQ and the theoretical approaches that researchers refer to when studying the situation of LGBTQ people in sport. In Chapter 2, Hartmann-Tews,

Menzel, and Braumüller present data from the Erasmus+ Outsport survey on the experiences of LGBTQ people in sport in Europe (based on a sample of 5,524 self-identifying LGBTQ people). The analysis takes into account the diversity of LGBTQ people, different sports contexts that reflect the broad scope of sports cultures, and the general legal and political situation of LGBTQ people in the EU member states. Complementing this section, Wachter and Torrance (Chapter 3) outline the development of the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF), highlight priorities, and explore areas of advocacy work being undertaken in relation to these priorities. They also pinpoint some internal and external cultural and structural constraints to establishing LGBTQ advocacy.

## Part II

The second section is devoted to seven country-specific reports on the situation of LGBTQ athletes and policies of inclusion in the respective national sports systems. The chapters include contributions from Western Europe (UK/Scotland, France, Germany, and Austria), Eastern Europe (Hungary), and Southern Europe (Italy and Spain). The countries represent different policy frame configurations, including sports systems with little state intervention (Austria, Germany, and Italy) and countries with strong state involvement (France, Hungary, and UK/Scotland) (Willem & Scheerder, 2017). Moreover, these countries are located across the annual Rainbow Europe Index, representing various degrees of implementation of LGBTQ legal and political rights and different cultures of LGBTQ acceptance (Gerhards, 2010; ILGA-Europe, 2021). In the Rainbow Index of EU-27 plus UK, Spain (65%) and the UK (64%) are listed in the upper third of the index, while France (57%), Germany (52%), and Austria (50%) are positioned in the middle third, and Hungary (33%) and Italy (22%) are in the lower third (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

Each chapter includes brief information on the structure of the sports systems, the experiences of LGBTQ people in sports in each country based on the Outsport survey, and governments' and sport organisations' strategies for LGBTQ inclusion in sport. Although all the authors developed their chapters based on this frame of reference, the foci of the contributions vary according to central issues in the respective countries. The sequence of the country chapters is based on alphabetical order.

Staritz and Sülzle (Chapter 4, Austria) outline Austria's sports culture, with its inherent homonegativity and sexism, and examine the roots of homonegativity in different types of sports. Against this background, they show the struggle of various LGBTQ initiatives against discrimination in organised sports in Austria, with its invisibility of LGBTQ inclusion policies.

Huillard and Hartmann-Tews (Chapter 5, France) outline the central role of the French state and public administration in decision making regarding sports development and their influence in the establishment of equality and diversity standards. The different paths and paces that federations are taking to implement



LGBTQ anti-discrimination measures are illustrated through interviews with central stakeholders.

Hartmann-Tews and Csonka (Chapter 6, Germany) illustrate the effects of the missionary corporatist policy framework of sports in Germany on the development of LGBTQ anti-discriminatory activities. Within this framework, queer sports clubs and their federal networking conference (BuNT) play an important role in increasing the visibility of LGBTQ issues in sport and fostering inclusion policy.

Szlávi (Chapter 7, Hungary) explores the obstacles that LGBTQ athletes, especially (cis and non-cis) women, are facing in Hungary, a country with decreasing equality rights for LGBTQ people. An account of initiatives aiming to challenge stereotypes and to make sports more inclusive completes the chapter.

Heusslein, Coco, and Bibbiani (Chapter 8, Italy) consider the conservative culture and low level of implementation of LGBTQ rights in Italy as the dominant frame for the homo- and transnegativity found in Italian sport. However, they identify several recent grassroots initiatives and voices that are beginning to signal a change towards a more LGBTQ-inclusive climate in sport.

Torrance (Chapter 9, UK) outlines the entrepreneurial sports policy configuration in the UK and the growing commitment of organised sports in England and Scotland to basic principles of diversity in sport based on the UK Equality Standard in Sport. The chapter discusses whether these developments correlate with improved experiences of LGBTQ athletes.

Gil-Quintana, Sáenz-Macana, López-Cañada, Úbeda-Colomer, and Pereira-García (Chapter 10, Spain) describe the trailblazing role of Spain with regard to the implementation of LGBTQ equality standards and its effects on sports development, while at the same time documenting prevailing homo- and transnegativity issues in physical activity and sport.

### **Part III**

The third section covers selected thematic foci regarding LGBTQ issues in sport, mainly based on first-hand empirical research. The selection mirrors the main idea of the book by giving consideration to the diversity of LGBTQ experiences, including both sexual orientation (gay men and lesbian women) and gender identity (transgender and non-cisgender), and by analysing stakeholders' policies of inclusion and their effects in various fields (e.g. leisure sports and competitive sports).

In Chapter 11, Aldaz Arregui, Martínez-Merino, Usabiaga Arruabarrena, and Fernández-Lasa analyse policies and strategies for the inclusion of LGBTQ people in physical activity and sport based on interviews with 43 sports managers in a province in Spain. The results add to the country report of Gil-Quintana (Chapter 10) and confirm international research on the (implicit) resistance of sports managers to engage in diversity management with respect to LGBTQ athletes. Elling and Cremers (Chapter 12) provide an overview of policy directed towards gay-inclusive cultures in men's team sports in the

Netherlands since 2008. They present findings of their research monitoring developments towards inclusive masculinity, which has resulted in ambivalent conclusions about the progress.

Soler-Prat, Vilanova, Solanas, Martos-Garcia, and García-Puchades (Chapter 13) provide an overview of research on lesbianism and sport in Europe and show that the heteronormative gender order has different impacts on lesbian women and gay men in sport. Against this background, they delineate the role of sport as a safe zone for the construction of lesbian women's identities. Pedra and Moscoso-Sanchez (Chapter 14) present the results of a qualitative study on the experiences of gay athletes participating at an international sports event, the OutGames, thus providing some clues on so-called dissonant or disruptive sports activities. In Chapter 15, Devís-Devís, López-Cañada, Pereira-García, Fuentes-Miguel, Valencia-Peris, and Pérez-Samaniego provide an overview of the small amount of research on trans people's experiences in physical activity and sport and the individual and sociocultural factors that structure their engagement. The results of a survey of 212 transgender people in Spain and a follow-up interview study with 43 of them are presented and added to the international evidence.

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Part I

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# Mapping the Field

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# **Theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches for studying LGBTQ experiences in sport**

*Birgit Braumüller and Tim Schlunski*

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## **Introduction**

This chapter aims to summarise and reflect on the different theoretical and methodological approaches applied in recent empirical studies (published since 2010) on LGBTQ athletes' experiences. Research on the relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport and the situation of LGBTQ athletes is certainly complex. In sport, sex and gender (identity) play a crucial role, which can be traced back to the importance of the male and female body at the centre of sporting activities and the continuing male domination, with masculine appearances, behaviours, and characteristics seen as promising success in most sports contexts. Based on gendered expectations and assumed male physical superiority, sex segregation serves as the main structural principle in sports systems. Associated with an unquestioned assumption of heterosexuality, these gendered and binary characteristics transfer manifold expectations and stereotypes concerning the expression of sex, gender (identity), and sexual orientation. The interplay of these sports-related and contextual factors creates a complex research field that is accompanied by the sometimes unsystematic terminology used in LGBTQ research. Thus, before we turn to theory and methodology, it seems appropriate to clarify some of the terms and acronyms used in research on gender and sexual minority (GSM) individuals.

## **Terms and acronyms**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals are persons from either sexual minorities (i.e. with non-heterosexual orientations [LGB]) or gender minorities (i.e. with non-cisgender identities, an umbrella term for, among others, transgender, non-identifying, and non-binary/gender queer individuals [TQ]). Non-cisgender identities indicate that the sex assigned at birth does not match the inner feelings of one's gender identity or that one is not able or willing to fit into the binary gender system (Krane et al., 2012). Gender identity as "one's sense of one's self as a gendered person" (Enke, 2012, p. 12) can – but need not necessarily – be expressed publicly, while gender expression refers to the ways in which gender is expressed and performed through "behavior, mannerism, clothing,



speech, physicality” and other aspects (Enke, 2012, p. 18). Neither gender identity, nor gender expression, nor the assigned sex at birth has to correspond to each other, which is referred to as gender non-conformity. The term queer originates from political activism – people who identify as queer stand up against the cisgender heteronormativity of society and against any discrimination in terms of sex, gender (identity), and sexual orientation.

A major function of the acronym LGBTQ is raising awareness regarding the concerns and demands of GSM individuals, but the various reference points already suggest that the subgroups face different realities and encounter manifold and quite diverse issues (Anderson et al., 2016). Due to the sports-related characteristics outlined earlier, this holds particularly true for sporting contexts, as research has revealed a different prevalence of discrimination and differing forms of discrimination between GSM groups (Braumüller et al., 2020; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2012). Thus, a differentiated consideration of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer athletes is needed to draw comprehensive and detailed pictures of their different experiences (Kokkonen, 2019). This claim is further strengthened by the fact that some of the groups themselves represent umbrella terms comprising different subgroups with various concerns and realities, such as male and female transgender individuals and femme- or butch-identified lesbian women (i.e. women who express or represent traditional feminine or masculine heterosexual stereotypes; Braumüller et al., 2022).

In addition, the terminology for discrimination against LGBTQ people needs to be reconsidered. Discrimination against non-heterosexual individuals is often referred to as homo- or biphobia in scientific papers (Anderson et al., 2016; Symons et al., 2017; Vilanova et al., 2020). The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, 2009, p. 8) defined homophobia as “irrational fear of, and aversion to, homosexuality and to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals stemming from prejudice”. Accordingly, discrimination against non-cisgender individuals is called transphobia, defined as “irrational fear of gender non-conformity or gender transgression, such as a fear of, or aversion to, masculine women, feminine men, cross-dressers, transgenderists, transsexuals, and others who do not fit into existing gender stereotypes about their birth gender” (FRA, 2009, p. 26; Fischer & McClearen, 2020; Symons et al., 2010). Today, these terms are being increasingly critically discussed. Phobia refers to an anxiety disorder, so the use of this term can be understood as an attempt to put this behaviour into perspective. Besides, the term phobia neglects the behavioural and action-related dimensions of discriminating against LGBTQ individuals. Thus, it seems appropriate in academic discourse to replace homo-/bi-/transphobia with other terms, such as homo-/bi-/transnegativity, to make clear that such behaviour is not a pathological disease pattern but rather an open aversion to and hostility against LGBTQ individuals, which is manifested in discriminatory actions (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021).

## **Theoretical perspectives**

Theoretical perspectives in research on LGBTQ athletes' experiences span a wide spectrum, ranging from the concepts of heteronormativity (Kokkonen, 2019; Phipps, 2021) and masculinity (Anderson et al., 2016; Vilanova et al., 2020) to poststructuralist and feminist queer approaches (Caudwell, 2014; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012) and minority stress (Baiocco et al., 2018; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021) and multilayer (Braumüller et al., 2020) models. Furthermore, some studies have examined the intersectionality of GSM identity with race (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). The following section reflects on the most commonly used concepts and theories for studying LGBTQ athletes' experiences and the exclusive and discriminatory structures of sport.

### **Concept of heteronormativity**

As a social regulatory principle, heteronormativity provides the norms for gender and sexuality within a society based on three central conditions: the gender binary, the gender hierarchy, and heterosexuality. First, the concept suggests that there are only two genders, male and female, which are understood as being natural, unambiguous, and immutable and to which everyone can easily be assigned. Second, it refers to a hierarchical order of men and women, placing men at the top, as they are considered to "possess physical, mental and social power over women" (Elling & Janssens, 2009, p. 72). Third, heterosexuality is defined as natural, with all real men being masculine and only attracted to real feminine women (and vice versa). These conditions lead to the marginalisation and discrimination of GSM individuals (Robinson, 2016).

Sport appears as a social environment in which heteronormativity is expressed in terms of physical performance and bodily appearance (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021). In sports contexts, heteronormative norms and values shape the socially constructed expectations and requirements of stereotypical male and female expression and influence choice of sport (Braumüller et al., 2022). In addition, gender marks the most significant performance category in sports and is mainly thought of in terms of male and female. This reflects the often unquestioned assumption of the physical advantage of a man's body and the particular relevance of body-related characteristics in sports. Sports-related LGBTQ research is often anchored in the concept of heteronormativity, as it sketches fundamental conditions in sporting cultures that generally relate to the social constructivist perspective of the gender order (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Kokkonen, 2019; Symons et al., 2010).

### **Masculinity theories**

Theories on masculinity are often applied in LGBTQ research and frequently drawn on Bourdieu's (2001) theoretical reflections on homosocial male communities,

which influence many areas of sports and enable athletes to construct and display male gender identities (Elling & Janssens, 2009).

Also based on Bourdieu's work, Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity marked an important theoretical cornerstone in the study of LGBTQ athletes' experiences. It describes the hegemony of one form of masculinity over femininity and other forms of masculinity in the context of institutional structures and patriarchal power relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity marks the most valued form of masculinity in society, which leads to the subordination of other gender identities, as they cannot comply with this dominant ideal (McVittie et al., 2017). Although most men do not meet the requirements of hegemonic masculinity, they still benefit from the patriarchal dividend, gaining from their status as males in societies where men are favoured, which is referred to as complicit masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 79). Homosexual or feminine-appearing men are considered not to possess the male toughness requirements of hegemonic masculinity and thus represent the bottom end of the hierarchical order as subordinated masculinities. Men who are structurally excluded from the benefits of hegemonic practices due to their racial, social, or economic background belong to marginalised masculinities (De Boise, 2015).

While this provides a widely used theory in sport (Baiocco et al., 2018; Melton & Cunningham, 2012; Symons et al., 2017), some criticisms have been raised over the years. First, the concept is thought to fail to "explain the understandings and behaviors of individual men" (McVittie et al., 2017, p. 126), although this has already been recognised and named by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Second, there has been criticism regarding the lack of opportunities to integrate non-hierarchical, diverse forms of masculinities (Anderson, 2009). Third, the assumed omnirelevance of the theory of hegemonic masculinity appears problematic (McVittie, 2017), as it is often applied in research without considering its usefulness, even though it was formulated as "a conceptual model with a fairly narrow empirical base" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 835).

Referring to this criticism and his own research, Anderson (2009) developed inclusive masculinity theory, which has mainly been used in research on gay athletes (Anderson et al., 2016; Baiocco et al., 2018; Bush et al., 2012). Inclusive masculinity theory is based on an assumed decline in homophobia, understood as a "fear of being homosexualised" in cultures that reject homosexuality and associate it with femininity, increasing the pressure to appear heterosexual in order not to be associated with homosexuality (Anderson, 2009, p. 7). As Western cultures are considered to have low rates of homophobia, men are enabled to demonstrate more inclusive forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Therefore, different from Connell's concept, men do not feel the need to construct their masculinity in opposition to subordinated forms of masculinity or through homonegative language.

While concepts of hegemonic masculinity are seen as dependent on institutional privilege and power, inclusive masculinity represents an archetype – an internalised, psychological predisposition that primarily affects the personal level

(De Boise, 2015). Structural or institutional forms of exclusion are neglected in Anderson's theory, which focuses solely on micro-level interaction (De Boise, 2015). Another point of criticism is the relatively selective samples of the empirical research body, consisting mainly of young, white, middle-class males with university education degrees; class and race, as well as the intersection of dimensions of inequality, are thereby neglected (De Boise, 2015; Magrath, 2017).

### **Multilevel model**

Cunningham (2019) developed a multilevel model, which aimed at explaining the discriminatory experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) athletes in sports settings based on factors operating on three interrelated levels: societal factors (macro-level), organisational/team-level factors (meso-level), and individual factors (micro-level). With the exception of the Outsport research group (Braumüller et al., 2020, 2022; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021), this theory has seldom been used as a theoretical framework in LGBTQ research.

Organisational factors such as laws (e.g. on LGBT rights), governing structures (e.g. regarding transgender participation), regulations, and institutionalised norms and practices are located on the macro-level. Although these norms and practices often refer to heteronormative and (hetero-)sexist structures and beliefs, Cunningham (2019, p. 374) emphasised their “context-specific nature” depending on the subgroup, sport context, and culture. On the meso-level, organisational culture is relevant. This relates to widely shared values and beliefs regarding (in-)appropriate behaviours in organisations (as well as leader behaviours). Coaches play a key role in terms of openness and sensitive speech in teams, which strengthens the need for diversity training. Moreover, supportive allies can use the power and privilege of the majority to advocate for LGBT concerns. On the micro-level, LGBT status is important, as GSM athletes' experiences differ substantially in sports. Moreover, athletes' demographics (e.g. sex, race, and age) and the intersections of these socio-demographics with LGBT status have an impact. Cunningham (2019) also pointed to the importance of openness and acceptance in expressing LGBT identities and the intersection of these with other personal identities, such as those related to race or athletic ability.

The development of this model was prompted by the enormous variety and diversity of experiences of LGBT athletes, which Cunningham (2019) wanted to explain through the complex interplay of social, organisational, and individual factors. Besides, the theory offers many points of departure in terms of practical implications and recommendations for establishing inclusive structures for LGBT individuals in sports.

### **Minority stress model**

Based on sociological and psychological theories of conflict between majority and minority groups, the minority stress model originally aimed to explain the

high prevalence of mental disorders among LGB individuals in non-sports contexts (Meyer, 2003). However, its value for determining the effects of homo- and transnegativity in sports has gradually been acknowledged (Baiocco et al., 2018; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

Meyer's (2003) model analysed minority stress, which culminates in stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, in a complex setting comprising environmental circumstances, the statuses, and identities of the minority group, distal and proximal stressors, and social support. Distal stressors comprise external events and conditions, such as prejudice, discrimination, and violence, while proximal stressors reflect subjective "perceptions of the self as a stigmatised and devalued minority", incorporating expectations of rejection, internalisation of homo- and transnegativity, and concealment of one's LGBTQ status (Meyer, 2003, p. 678). In LGBTQ research, distal stressors (e.g. personal negative experiences) as well as proximal stressors (e.g. refraining from sports of interest) have been revealed (Baiocco et al., 2018; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021).

## **Methodical approaches**

The body of research on LGBTQ athletes' experiences contains various methodological approaches that complicate comparisons and account for quite different results regarding the situation of GSM people in sport. This section gives a brief overview of (1) general study designs, (2) recruitment and sampling strategies, (3) reference points for experiences, and (4) the researcher reflexivity in current LGBTQ studies.

### ***Study design***

Until the last decade, the body of LGBTQ research in sports consisted mainly of qualitative approaches, with interviews being the most common method for examining the experiences of LGBTQ athletes (Elling & Collot d'Escury, 2017; Jones et al., 2017a). Further qualitative methods, applied more sporadically, include participant observation (Travers & Deri, 2011), case analysis (Fischer & McClearn, 2020), and focus groups (Phipps, 2021), which are often applied within mixed-methods approaches in conjunction with interviews. Concerning the samples, the number of participants varies considerably, though the majority include 10 to 30 participants, mostly adults. Due to the divergent issues of different LGBTQ groups as outlined earlier, qualitative research often focuses solely on either sexual or gender minority athletes, with the latter being slightly more often considered. The benefits of exploratory qualitative research are its in-depth insights into individual experiences of athletes; however, such individual narratives are difficult to generalise, which strengthens the need for quantitative and/or mixed-methods approaches.

In recent years, quantitative research on the experiences of sexual minority individuals (LGB) and, to a smaller extent, gender minority individuals (TQ) in

sports has seen an upswing. The most used quantitative methods by far are surveys, with some studies involving more than 1,000 participants, mostly adults, and focusing on more than one country or region. For example, Denison and Kitchen (2015) looked at six English-speaking countries, while Menzel et al. (2019) included LGBTQ people from all EU countries. Other quantitative research conducted in Europe is from the UK (Bush et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012), Italy (Baiocco et al., 2018), the Netherlands (Elling & Collot d'Escury, 2017), Finland (Kokkonen, 2019), and Spain (López-Cañada et al., 2020). Some quantitative studies have been published only in the form of non-peer-reviewed project reports (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Smith et al., 2012), which lack theory as well as a precise description of the methodology used.

With a few exceptions, the quantitative and qualitative research to date consists primarily of cross-sectional studies. However, in response to the increasing research corpus, several reviews have been conducted in recent years to further structure the literature and discover potential gaps in the research. The focus varies between looking at the discrimination experiences of LGBTQ athletes, both in general (Denison et al., 2021; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020) and in terms of specific groups (e.g. transgender athletes; Jones et al., 2017b; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019), and considering experiences within specific sports (Cleland, 2018) or specific fields (e.g. PE; Greenspan et al., 2019).

### **Recruitment and sampling**

Generally, most LGBTQ research focuses on grassroots sports contexts and adult LGBTQ individuals. As the LGBTQ population generally appears to be “hard-to-reach, hidden and vulnerable”, it is useful to combine several sampling techniques to recruit adequate and sufficient samples (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021, p. 7). To recruit survey participants, many quantitative studies use the digital facilities of sports and LGBTQ organisations (e.g. social networks, mailing lists, and websites) as well as tailored advertisements in online platforms and snowball techniques (Kokkonen, 2019; López-Cañada et al., 2020; Menzel et al., 2019). Snowball techniques are also applied in qualitative studies, often combined with personal contacts in advance (Herrick et al., 2020; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012; Travers & Deri, 2011) or help from specific institutions (e.g. health services; Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017a). Recruitment of these hard-to-reach populations has to consider the self-identification of LGBTQ individuals. Depending on how individuals deal with their LGBTQ status, some methods are better suited to collecting non-biased data than others. Online surveys enable closeted individuals or those with an uncertain handling of their LGBTQ status to participate anonymously, while telephone and particularly face-to-face surveys represent a barrier for them and thus might bias the findings (FRA, 2014).

Two other aspects should be considered when assessing the quality of sampling and recruiting. First, quantitative surveys with LGBTQ people (in sports) cannot

claim to be representative, as there are no reliable data concerning the numbers and sociodemographic parameters of GSM individuals in general and GSM athletes in particular (FRA, 2009; Menzel et al., 2019). As this is the case in most countries and sports systems, the research body is comprised mostly of studies with self-selective instead of random samples (FRA, 2014). However, only a few studies reflect on this issue, report self-selection biases as a limitation, and critically reflect on the use of inferential statistics in data analyses (Baiocco et al., 2018; López-Cañada et al., 2020; Menzel et al., 2019).

Second, to draw a realistic picture of LGBTQ athletes' experiences, it is crucial to promote surveys in neutral, unbiased ways, without priming interviewees to report negative experiences, discrimination, and homo- or transnegativity. Differences in the identified prevalence of negative experiences are partly due to (un-)biased calls for participation. As one of several initiatives to combat homonegativity in the context of the World Cup of Gay Rugby, Denison and Kitchen (2015) promoted participation in their study with the slogan "Share Your Story: The First International Study on Homophobia in Sports" (2015). As a result, they identified about half of the LGB respondents as reporting negative experiences. By contrast, Menzel et al. (2019) made efforts to promote their survey in neutral ways and found that 16% of the LGBTQ respondents reported negative experiences in sports contexts. Different recruitment strategies are one reason for variances and point out the importance of approaching respondents in ways that do not potentially prime them.

### **Reference points for experiences**

Another major factor for the different prevalences recorded is the focus on either lifetime or current experiences in sport. The lifetime perspective is rather useful for qualitative approaches, helping to draw and enhance pictures of the distinct experiences, perceptions, and biographical narratives of LGBTQ individuals in sporting contexts (Fischer & McClearn, 2020; Jones et al., 2017a; Vilanova et al., 2020). In quantitative studies, lifetime experiences can cause considerable biases due to the age and generation of respondents, which are associated with specific cultural and societal circumstances (Anderson et al., 2016). Accounting for this problem, some quantitative studies refer to specific periods (Kokkonen, 2019; Menzel et al., 2019) or life stages (e.g. university sports; Phipps, 2021). However, others leave the period open or refer to lifetime experiences (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Smith et al., 2012).

As well as the period, the personal character of experiences appears to be important. Some studies explicitly emphasise the "personal character of the negative experiences" that are causally attributed to one's own sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Menzel et al., 2019, p. 28). However, other researchers refer generally to either homo- or transphobia in sports, without considering the personal nature of the respondents' negative experiences and thus lump together personally

experienced and witnessed incidents in an undifferentiated manner (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Symons et al., 2010).

### **Researcher reflexivity**

The final aspect that needs to be briefly discussed touches upon researchers' ontological and epistemological approaches and whether they consider their own positioning in the research process. Many qualitative researchers reflect on their specific gender (identity), sexual orientation, race, body-related abilities, etc., with regard to their premises and lenses of interpretation when collecting data, approaching respondents, etc. (Caudwell, 2014; Elling & Collot d'Escury, 2017; Herrick et al., 2020). Regarding researcher positioning, Herrick et al. (2020, p. 6) pointed out that their "research has been guided through the lens of the first author's experiences as a self-identified able-bodied white queer cis-femme settler", while the other authors similarly provided their own positionings. Moreover, this research group expounded their individual epistemological and ontological approaches as well as the "emancipatory purpose [of the study], to create social change for transgender athletes by raising awareness of their experiences within sporting contexts" (Herrick et al., 2020, p. 6). Researcher reflexivity is an important topic that has, to some extent, permeated qualitative research, but it has not yet really reached quantitative studies.

### **Conclusion**

The consideration of different theoretical and methodological approaches in recently published studies on the experiences of LGBTQ athletes has yielded some key insights. First, the acronym LGBTQ serves as an important instrument for raising awareness but masks important distinctions between GSM athletes. Researchers need to consider and acknowledge different realities related to sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as intersectionality with sex, race, etc., particularly (but not only) in sport as a heteronormative, male-dominated, and sex-segregated societal field. Second, starting from heteronormativity and usually masculinity, manifold theoretical considerations are applied in LGBTQ research, drawing on societal, organisational, and individual factors as well as the interplay between them. Theoretical anchors are crucial to explain findings in broader and higher-level contexts, enabling practical implications to be derived. Third, from a methodological perspective, the research body is increasingly diverse, using different approaches and various recruitment techniques. Nevertheless, the challenges regarding selective and self-identified samples of LGBTQ athletes, the blending of personally experienced and witnessed incidents, and the biased promotion of surveys needs to be addressed in further research. Careful consideration of these aspects of empirical research can contribute to critically assessing the potential homo-, bi-, and transnegative nature of sports, based on solid and meaningful empirical data and reliable theoretical frameworks.



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# Experiences of LGBTQ individuals in sport in Europe

The impact of societal, organisational, and individual factors

*Ilse Hartmann-Tews, Tobias Menzel, and Birgit Braumüller*

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### Introduction

There is a broad academic consensus that physical activity and sport have positive effects on the status of people's health and quality of life (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010). Against this background, the Council of Europe ratified the European Sport for All Charter in 1975, with the recommendation that all member states create an inclusive environment allowing physical activity and sport for all people, irrespective of age, gender, and ability (European Sport for All Charter, 1975/1976). In addition, the EU has developed policy strategies to foster social inclusion and decrease discrimination on grounds of a variety of categories, including gender, ethnicity, religion, and, more recently, sexual orientation.

As there is a lack of research on LGBTQ individuals in European sports, this chapter presents and discusses data from the first European survey on the situation and experiences of LGBTQ people in sports, based on the Erasmus+ Outsport project ([www.out-sport.eu](http://www.out-sport.eu); Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Menzel et al., 2019). It starts with a short discussion of the differing legal and political situations of LGBTQ people in Europe and the differing homo-/transnegative attitudes of the populations of European countries. Against this backdrop, the chapter seeks to assess the impact of societal factors (i.e. the legal and political situation of LGBTQ people), organisational factors relating to sports (e.g. performance level and team/individual sports), and individual characteristics of LGBTQ people on their experiences in sports. The chapter asks three questions: First, to what extent does the legal and political situation of LGBTQ people in European countries correlate with perceived homo-/transnegativity in European sports systems? Second, to what extent do individual characteristics of a person (e.g. sexual orientation and gender identity) and sports settings (e.g. performance level and team/individual sports) have an impact on the prevalence of homo-/transnegative incidents in European sports? Third, to what extent do LGBTQ individuals refrain from sports due to their status and experiences as LGBTQ persons?

## **The political and legal situation of LGBTQ people and homo-/transnegativity in Europe**

Supranational communities such as the EU and the United Nations (UN) adopted legally binding rules of equal treatment and anti-discrimination with regard to sexual orientation as early as the 1970s. Since then, and strengthened by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which came into effect in 2009, this has had an impact on the inclusion policies of member states of the European Union. However, the situation for LGBTQ people differs significantly between European countries, as do the homo- and transnegative attitudes of the populations.

The legal and political situation of LGBTQ people is assessed annually by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) based on 69 criteria across six areas: equality and non-discrimination, family, hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition and bodily integrity, civil society space, and asylum. The so-called Rainbow Europe Index measures the implementation of LGBTQ anti-discrimination policies every year. It ranges from 0%, which implies gross violations of human rights and extended discrimination, to 100% for full respect of human rights and full equality of LGBTQ people. In 2021, Azerbaijan (2%), Turkey (4%), and Armenia (8%) were at the bottom of the index, while Malta (94%), Belgium (74%), and Luxemburg (72%) were at the top (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

Analysis of the implementation of inclusive policies and LGBTQ rights indicates the relevance of European laws and transnational visibility of norms, as EU member states have a higher score compared to non-EU member states (Ayoub, 2016). From a longitudinal perspective, there has been a general tendency towards a more inclusive and non-discriminatory policy framework across the countries. However, there have also been movements down the scale. For example, Hungary is a country that has seen a dramatic drop in its score in relation to suspended procedures for legal gender recognition.

Similar to the general development of an improving political and legal situation for LGBTQ people in Europe, findings from large surveys have revealed an increasing acceptance of homosexuality in many nations (Poushter & Kent, 2020). However, substantial national differences in the degree to which citizens think of homosexuality as acceptable can also be identified. Comparative data analysis based on the European Social Survey revealed an association with regard to the Rainbow Index: attitudes towards homosexual individuals are more positive in countries where policies and laws guarantee human and civil rights to LGBTQ people (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020).

Recent research based on large comparative European datasets identified macro-level factors and individual factors that explain variations in general attitudes of the populations. Among the macro-variables, countries' levels of economic development (gross domestic product) and modernisation (Human Development Index) have significant positive associations with general attitudes towards gay and lesbian people (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Gerhards, 2010). With regard

to individual factors, research showed that women, younger people, educated people, and secular people have more favourable attitudes towards homosexuality, irrespective of the macro-contexts of economic development and modernisation (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Gerhards, 2010; Poushter & Kent, 2020).

In contrast to the general development of more LGBTQ-inclusive policies in Europe, international and European sports confederations lag far behind. Only in 2014, following a number of campaigns by LGBTQ organisations, did the International Olympic Committee (IOC) amend the Olympic Charter to explicitly integrate non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation as a fundamental principle of Olympism (Ayoub, 2016). The non-discrimination principle now encompasses the following:

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

(IOC, 2020, p. 12)

Regarding the inclusion and participation of transgender athletes, the IOC implemented the Stockholm Consensus (IOC, 2004). Based on subsequent criticism, this policy was updated by the IOC in 2015 and again in 2021 (IOC, 2021, 2015).

This time lag with regard to a clear commitment to LGBTQ anti-discrimination and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in sports reflects crucial issues with regard to sports and sports systems. On the one hand, sport is an autonomous, self-contained societal system with its own rationality and a specific dominant mindset focused on the communication of body-centred performance (Hartmann-Tews, 1996; Stichweh, 1990). As such, it may co-operate with other societal systems (e.g. education, politics, and health) and adapt their policies and values, but it is not obliged to do so. On the other hand, sport in general, and competitive sport in particular, is framed by a general mindset of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity assumes a gender binary: the conviction that there are only two distinct, opposite sexes and that heterosexuality is the default, natural mode of sexual orientation. It involves an alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles, while suggesting the dominance of males and masculinity over females and femininity (Krane, 2019). This generalised mindset of sport and its respective social structures (e.g. rigid sex segregation) sets the frame for hegemonic masculine social structures that impede acceptance of sexual and gender diversity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

A growing number of research studies have pointed to the ongoing presence of homo- and transnegativity in sports institutions (for an overview, see Denison et al., 2021; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020), while increasing attitudinal openness towards homo- and bisexual persons in sports has also been witnessed (Magrath et al., 2015). The majority of academic research is from the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia, and there are only a small number of large-scale quantitative studies.

## Experiences of LGBTQ persons in sports

As part of the Erasmus + -funded Outsport project, the first ever European survey on the experiences of LGBTQ people in sports was conducted. The intention was to collect data on personal experiences in sports related to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and derive evidence for formulating anti-discrimination policy. In total, the final sample included 5,524 persons, of whom 60% were female and 40% were male, while 83% were categorised as cisgender and 17% as non-cisgender individuals (including transgender female, transgender male, non-binary, and not identifying people). The number of participants varied across the countries, but the proportion of each country's respondents corresponded approximately to each country's number of inhabitants with respect to the total EU population.

The total sample comprised active LGBTQ athletes (62.7%) as well as persons who had previously been active in sports but had not participated during the last 12 months (21.8%) and persons who had no activity in sports since physical education at school (15.6%). Most of the LGBTQ athletes in the survey were involved in recreational sports (60.9%), while a further 28.5% were involved in competitive sports and 10.5% in high-performance sports.

## Perceived homo- and transnegativity in various social contexts

To answer the questions to what extent perceived homo-/transnegativity in European sports correlated with the legal and political situation of LGBTQ individuals in these countries and whether sport was more prone to homo- and transnegativity than other social contexts, a two-step approach was chosen. First, all respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed that there was a problem with homo- and transnegativity in sports (1 = no problem, 5 = big problem). Second, and more specifically, they were asked to what extent they had witnessed homo-/transnegative language in sports and other social contexts.

A huge majority of 90% considered homo- and transnegativity to be a problem in sports. Transnegativity was perceived to be a bigger problem in sports ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) than homonegativity ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). Particularly striking was the finding that neither the perceived problem of homonegativity nor the perceived problem of transnegativity in sports in the 28 countries was related to the Rainbow Europe Index ( $r = -.024$ ,  $p = .904$ ;  $r = .150$ ,  $p = .445$ ). This implied that the legal and political status of LGBTQ people in a country did not have an impact on the perceived acceptance of LGBTQ athletes in the respective sports system.

The prevalence of homo- and transnegative language is a specific indicator of homo- and transnegativity, and the survey included a question asking if and how often participants had witnessed homo- or transnegative language in the last 12 months in a specific environment. Homo-/transnegative language was defined as the use of expressions such as "that's so gay" and derogatory words and/or jokes



about sexual orientation and gender identity issues, regardless of their intention". This was assessed separately for workplace/educational settings, physical activity/sports, and other leisure activities apart from sports, using a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = very often). In all three areas, the use of homo- and transnegative language was widespread. It was highest in other leisure activities apart from sports (3.16, SD = 1.26), followed by work/education (3.01, SD = 1.37), while it was lowest in sports (2.94, SD = 1.32). Against this backdrop, sport seems to be less prone to homo-/transnegative language than other social settings.

The perception of homo- and/or transnegative language varied across the 28 European countries (Figure 2.1). Overall, it was most widespread in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Slovakia and least perceived in Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Austria.

Remarkable statistical correlations showed up between the respondents' perceptions of the use of homo- and transnegative language in their country and the legal and political positions of LGBTQ persons. As expected, there were significant (negative) correlations between the Rainbow Europe Index 2018 and the frequency of perceived homo- and transnegative language in the contexts of leisure ( $r = -.452, p < .05$ ) and work/education ( $r = -.454, p < .05$ ). However, once more, there was no significant correlation in the context of sports ( $r = .032, p = .871$ ). In other words, the more LGBTQ-inclusive the political and legal situation of a country, the less homo-/transnegative language was perceived in the contexts of work, education, and leisure; by contrast, the use of homo- and transnegative language in sports seemed to be independent of the general situation of LGBTQ persons in each European country.

Neither the general assessment of homo- and/or transnegativity as a problem in sports nor the more specific indicator of perceived homo-/transnegative language in sports was associated with the Rainbow Europe Index. They were thus independent of the macro-level context of modernisation. This finding confirmed our theoretically based assumption that sport is a specific, self-contained societal system characterised by its own social structures that frame the mindsets and inform the behaviours of its participants (Hartmann-Tews, 1996).

The generalised mindset of sport (body-centred performance), as well as the ideology of a heteronormative gender order, sets the frame for the hegemonic masculine social structures found in many sports (e.g. rigid sex segregation). These continue to privilege male hegemony and encourage language that polices masculinity (Bush et al., 2012; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012; MacDonald, 2018). Against this background, it makes sense that the perception and use of homo- and transnegative language in sports did not correlate with the ILGA index.

## **Homo- and transnegative episodes in sports participation**

A further analytical interest of the survey was to gain evidence about potential homo- and/or transnegative experiences of LGBTQ athletes in Europe.

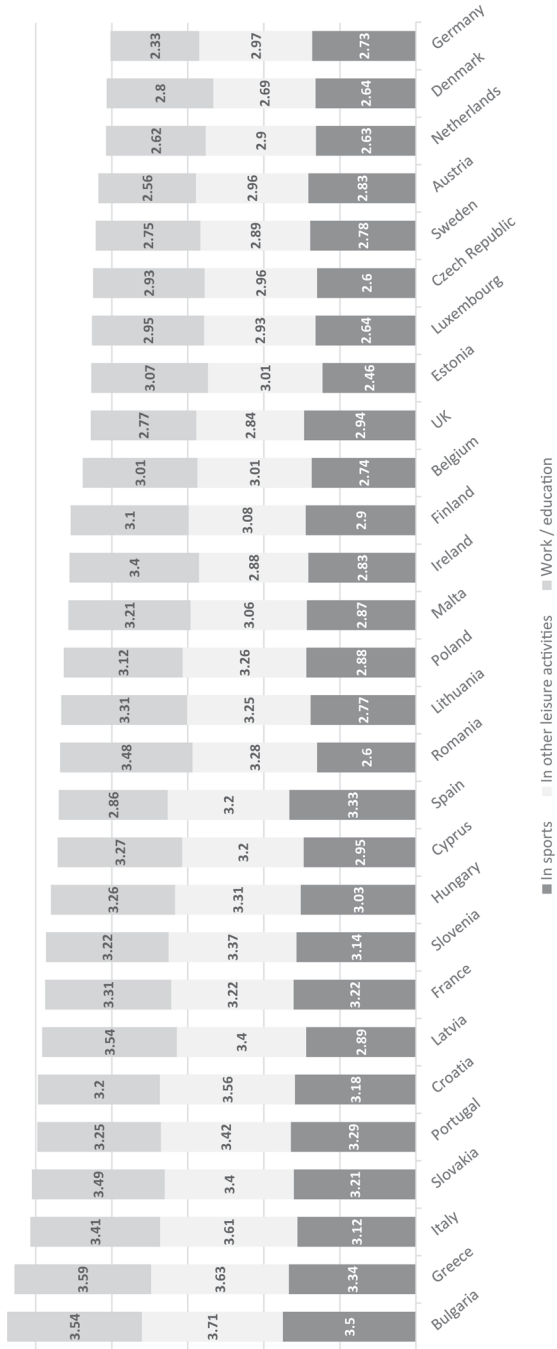


Figure 2.1 Perception of homo-/transnegative language in various settings (mean values, scale from 1 = never to 5 = very often)

The leading question was to what extent LGBTQ athletes' perceptions and experiences of homo-/transnegative incidents varied in relation to the individual characteristics of a person (e.g. sexual orientation and gender identity) and contextual markers of sports settings (e.g. performance level and team/individual sports). In addition to bivariat analysis, which provided a descriptive overview of the frequencies, multiple linear regression models were calculated. They predicted the frequency of homo-/transnegative incidents (dependent variables) based on the respondents' specific individual LGBTQ status and sports contexts (independent variables).

### ***Homo- and transnegative language***

LGBTQ athletes were asked whether they had witnessed the use of homo-/transnegative language in the last 12 months in their main sport and, if so, how often this language was perceived as discriminatory. Both answers used a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = very often).

About half of the LGBTQ athletes had witnessed homo- and transnegative language (49.1%) in their main sport. The mean of 1.86 (SD = 1.08) indicated that the frequency was rather low. The perception of homo- and/or transnegative language by LGBTQ athletes in their sports varied considerably across the 28 European countries. It was most often reported by LGBTQ athletes in Croatia (73.5%), Bulgaria (62.5%), France (64.9%), and Italy (64.4%), while it was least reported in Denmark (32.0%), the Czech Republic (31.5%), and Sweden (29.5%). However, there was no significant correlation with regard to the Rainbow Europe Index ( $r = .033$ ,  $p = .869$ ).

The prevalence of witnessed homo- and/or transnegative language varied across sports contexts and in relation to the individual characteristics of the athletes (Table 2.1). Multiple linear regression analysis showed that performance level and type of sport had a significant effect on witnessing homo-/transnegative language, when controlling for other effects in the model, while organisational frame did not determine its prevalence (Table 3.1). LGBTQ athletes perceived homo- and transnegative language significantly more often in competitive and high-performance sports (64.8%) compared to recreational sports (46.3%) and significantly more often in team sports (63.2%) compared to individual sports (44.2%).

The analysis also indicated significant effects of individual characteristics of the athletes. For example, sexual orientation, gender identity, and the status of being out had significant effects on the frequency of perceived homo-/transnegative language. At an individual level, being non-cisgender, as well as being gay, enhanced the probability of witnessing homo-/transnegative language in sports. Being out to everyone in the specific sport context, which applied to one-third of the athletes, had a negative effect in terms of witnessing homo-/transnegative language compared to being out to no one. This finding is interesting, as there are

Table 2.1 Multiple linear regression analysis for the variables predicting witnessed homo-/transnegative language (n = 2,728) and feeling offended by homo-/transnegative language (n = 1,466)

| Variable  | Witnessing homo-/<br>transnegative language |      |                    | Feeling offended by<br>homo-/transnegative<br>language |      |                  |
|---|---|------|--------------------|--|------|------------------|
|   | B   | SE   | B <sup>1</sup> β   | B  | SE   | B <sup>1</sup> β |
| <b>Organisational frame</b>                         |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| <i>(Ref. organised sports clubs)</i>                |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| For-profit organisation (e.g. fitness centre)       | -.008                                       | .058 | -.003              | .218   | .097 | .071*            |
| Other organisation (e.g. company sport)             | .010  | .078 | .003               | .126   | .122 | .029             |
| Informal group (non-organised/self-organised)       | -.060                                       | .063 | -.019              | .110   | .113 | .029             |
| Other   | -.173                                       | .138 | -.021              | -.241  | .221 | -.025            |
| <b>Type of sport</b> <i>(Ref. team sports)</i>      |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| Individual sports                                   | -.267                                       | .052 | -.109***           | .206   | .075 | .077**           |
| <b>Performance level</b> <i>(Ref. recreational)</i> |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| Competitive   | .341  | .053 | .140***            | .055   | .085 | .021             |
| High performance                                    | .445  | .077 | .124***            | -.007  | .114 | -.002            |
| <b>Gender identity</b> <i>(Ref. cisgender)</i>      |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| Non-cisgender                                       | .310  | .069 | .102***            | .630   | .105 | .187***          |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b> <i>(Ref. gay)</i>         |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| Lesbian   | -.245                                       | .054 | -.100***           | .025   | .084 | .009             |
| Bisexual  | -.316                                       | .058 | -.122***           | -.118  | .093 | -.039            |
| Other   | -.292                                       | .073 | -.098**            | .012   | .112 | .004             |
| <b>Being "out" in this sport</b>                    |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| <i>(Ref. "out to no one")</i>                       |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| Out to some   | .041  | .053 | .017               | -.075  | .080 | -.028            |
| Out to everyone                                     | -.278                                       | .054 | -.121***           | -.219  | .086 | -.081*           |
| <b>ILGA Rainbow Index</b>                           |   |      |                    |  |      |                  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                      | -.002                                       | .001 | -.036 <sup>†</sup> | -.002  | .002 | -.036            |
| R <sup>2</sup> (corr.)                              |   |      | .072               |  |      | .060             |
| R <sup>2</sup> (corr.)                              |   |      | .067               |  |      | .051             |
| Model (F)   |   |      | 15.05***           |  |      | 6.62***          |

<sup>†</sup>p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001; <sup>1</sup>parameter estimation based on bootstrapping (BCa method)

huge debates across Europe about the risk of coming out in (professional) sports, in particular football. Our data suggested that coming out reduced the likelihood of being exposed to homonegative language.

The vast majority (82%) of those who observed homo- and transnegative language in their sports felt offended by it. This emphasised the harmful impact of homo-/transnegative language, irrespective of the intentions (i.e. whether or not it is malicious) of those who use such discriminatory language. Controlling

for contextual and individual variables, the data showed that non-cisgender respondents were the most vulnerable group, of whom 89.9% felt offended by the use of this language compared to 80.4% of cisgender respondents. Moreover, homo- and transnegative language was significantly more frequently perceived as harmful by LGBTQ athletes who were hiding their sexual orientation and were out to no one in their sports. With regard to the effects of sports settings, LGBTQ athletes more often felt offended by perceived homo-/transnegative language in individual sports (where it was witnessed less often) and in for-profit organisations.

### **Negative personal experiences**

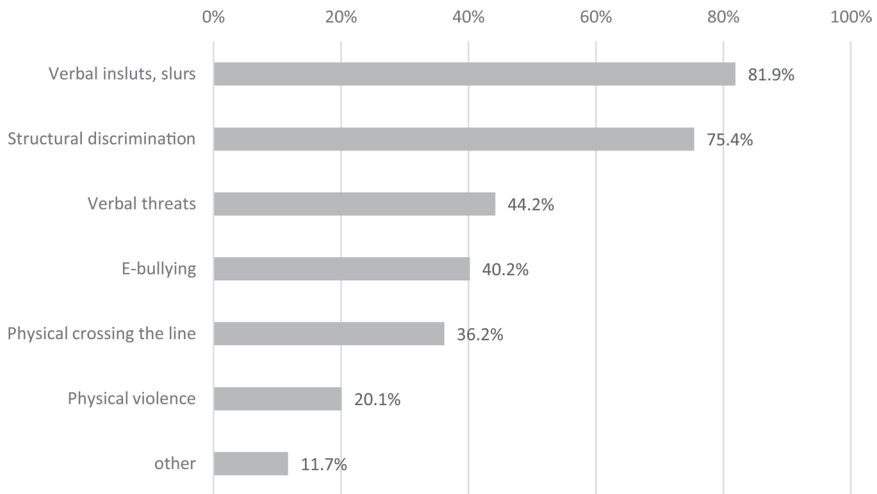
Apart from their perceptions of homo-/transnegative language in their specific sports, the LGBTQ athletes were asked whether (yes/no) they had negative experiences in the last 12 months in their main sports due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In the case that they had experienced negative incidents, they were presented with a list of different forms, ranging from verbal insults to physical violence.

Overall, 11.7% reported incidents of homo- and transnegativity in their main sport. Across Europe, the reported incidents were lowest in Luxembourg (3.7%), Romania (4.8%), and Italy (7.0%) and highest in Latvia (18.3%), Slovenia (18.6%), and Finland (22.7%). Again, there was no significant correlation with the Rainbow Europe Index ( $r = .111$ ,  $p = .572$ ).

At the same time, the proportion of respondents who experienced homo- and transnegative incidents varied across the 32 sports practised by the LGBTQ athletes. Of these 32 sports, 12 showed a disproportionately high proportion of reported negative incidents. With ballet (22.2%), ice skating (21.9%), and skateboarding (20.6%), the list was led by sports with a focus on expression. As expected, the classic team sports of basketball (18.5%), handball (15.5%), football (14.1%), rugby (12.3%), and field hockey (12.2%) were above average.

All respondents who had negative personal experiences in their sports in the 12 months prior to the survey were asked to rate each of seven listed forms of discrimination and/or harassment individually on a 5-point frequency scale (1 = never, 5 = very often). The percentages presented in Figure 2.2 describe the proportion of respondents who had experienced relevant incidents (2–5), irrespective of their frequency.

Among those who had faced personal homo-/transnegative hostility in the past 12 months, the most common forms were verbal insults and slurs, including ridiculing, name calling, derogatory words, such as “dyke”, “faggot”, and “poof-ter” (81.9%), and structural discrimination, such as unequal opportunities, unfair treatment, and exclusion (75.4%). Verbal threats and intimidation occurred in 44.2% of cases and harassment via social media (e-bullying) in 40.2% of cases.



**Figure 2.2** Forms of experienced homo-/transnegative incidents

Physically crossing the line, such as pushing or inappropriate touching, happened to 36.2% of respondents, while 20.1% even experienced severe forms of physical violence (e.g. kicking).

A binary logistic regression model was conducted to predict the likelihood of homo-/transnegative incidents based on sports context variables and respondents' individual characteristics, while controlling for all these variables (Table 2.2). Athletes' gender identity had the strongest effect, suggesting that being non-cisgender dramatically increased the likelihood of negative experiences. The proportion of non-cisgender persons who had experienced negative episodes (27.3%) exceeded the proportion of cisgender persons (8.6%) by a factor of 3. Being out to some people (compared to no one) in their sports context had a significant enhancing effect, suggesting that respondents who hid their sexual orientation and/or gender identity were less likely to experience discrimination, harassment, and violence. This finding was in contrast to the perception of overt homo-/transnegative language, where being out to mostly everyone reduced the probability of witnessing homo-/transnegative language. It may be that concrete homo-/transnegative activities take place in a more hidden and concealed way, whereas homo-/transnegative language, such as jokes, is publicly communicated and therefore seen as unacceptable when openly gay or lesbian athletes are around. With regard to sports settings, homo-/transnegative incidents were more likely to happen in competitive (12.6%) and high-performance (16.6%) sports than in recreational sports (10.2%).

Table 2.2 Binary logistic regression analysis for variables predicting homo-/transnegative incidents (n = 2,731)

| Variable   | B     | SE B | Wald<br>$\chi^2_{(1)}$ | p    | Exp(B)               |
|--|-------|------|------------------------|------|----------------------|
| <b>Organisational frame</b><br>(Ref. organised sports clubs) |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| For-profit organisation<br>(e.g. fitness centre)             | -.104 | .182 | .327                   | .567 | .901                 |
| Other organisation (e.g.<br>company sport)                   | .088  | .207 | .181                   | .670 | 1.092                |
| Informal group (non-organised/<br>self-organised)            | -.034 | .194 | .031                   | .860 | .966                 |
| Other  | -.398 | .458 | .755                   | .385 | .672                 |
| <b>Type of sport</b> (Ref. team sports)                      |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| Individual sports  | .082  | .149 | .307                   | .580 | 1.086                |
| <b>Performance level</b> (Ref.<br>recreational)              |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| Competitive  | .275  | .158 | 3.034                  | .082 | 1.317 <sup>+</sup>   |
| High performance   | .596  | .199 | 8.945                  | .003 | 1.814 <sup>**</sup>  |
| <b>Gender identity</b> (Ref. cisgender)                      |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| Non-cisgender  | 1.410 | .159 | 78.794                 | .000 | 4.097 <sup>***</sup> |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b> (Ref. gay)                         |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| Lesbian  | -.118 | .167 | .494                   | .482 | .889                 |
| Bisexual   | -.446 | .189 | 5.590                  | .018 | .640 <sup>*</sup>    |
| Other  | -.046 | .197 | .054                   | .816 | .955                 |
| <b>Being "out" in this sport</b><br>(Ref. "out to no one")   |       |      |                        |      |                      |
| Out to some  | .654  | .161 | 16.526                 | .000 | 1.924 <sup>***</sup> |
| Out to everyone  | .323  | .169 | 3.674                  | .055 | 1.382 <sup>+</sup>   |
| <b>ILGA Rainbow Index</b>                                    | .006  | .004 | 2.879                  | .090 | 1.006 <sup>+</sup>   |
| Likelihood ratio $\chi^2_{(14)}$                             |       |      | 148.206 <sup>***</sup> |      |                      |
| Cox & Snell $R^2$  |       |      | .053                   |      |                      |
| Nagelkerkes $R^2$  |       |      | .102                   |      |                      |

\*p < .10, <sup>+</sup>p < .05, <sup>\*\*</sup>p < .01, <sup>\*\*\*</sup>p < .001

## Reasons for non-participation in sports or refraining from specific sports

Since more than one-third of the respondents (37%) were not participating in sports at the time of the survey, it was of interest to identify their reasons and whether these reasons were related to negative experiences based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The reasons for non-participation in sports were captured by two questions. First, LGBTQ persons who had not participated in sports since physical education at school (15.8%) were asked why they had never participated in sports (apart from physical education). Second, those who were formerly active in sports but inactive for more than the last 12 months (21.2%) were asked why they had stopped doing sports. Persons in both groups

were presented with a list of 11 multiple-choice options to indicate their reasons (e.g. lack of time, lack of money, and negative experiences due to LGBTQ status).

Overall, three reasons for being inactive accounted for about half of the answers of those in both groups (i.e. those who had been inactive since leaving school and those who had stopped doing sports during adulthood). In descending order, these reasons were lack of time, lack of friends for sporting activities, and an aversion to competition. Reasons related to gender identity or sexual orientation formed a smaller proportion of mentions in the survey: 7.2% felt uncomfortable due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, 5% anticipated not being accepted because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and 3.8% even had negative experiences in PE or extra-curricular sports activities. Overall, LGBTQ persons who had never participated in sports apart from PE more often indicated these reasons (19%) than those who had stopped participating in sports during adulthood (9%). This finding pointed to the high relevance of physical education at school and the necessity to create physical education as a more inclusive and safe space for all (Greenspan et al., 2017, 2019).

There were notable differences in terms of the proportion of reasons for self-exclusion relating to respondents' gender identity and sexual orientation. Taken together, 27.0% of all mentions by non-cisgender respondents referred to reasons related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, while the proportion was significantly lower among cisgender respondents (10.1%). Furthermore, of the cisgender respondents, gay men referred to such reasons more frequently (18.7%) than lesbian women (7.8%) and bisexual respondents (5.0%).

In addition, all survey participants were asked whether there were any sports from which they felt excluded or which they had dropped out because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Those who responded yes to this question were additionally asked to indicate up to three sports to which this applied.

Overall, 19.2% of respondents felt excluded from one or more sports of interest because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In relation to refraining from specific sports, group differences mirrored the pattern of respondents who were currently inactive. Far more non-cisgender (45.9%) respondents refrained from sports they would actually enjoy participating in compared to cisgender persons (13.8%). Among the cisgender respondents, gay men (18.4%) were significantly more likely to feel excluded than lesbian women (11.1%) and bisexual persons (11.4%). Those respondents felt that they were excluded from certain sports, most often mentioned were football (27.3%), dancing (17.0%), swimming (16.3%), boxing (13.9%), and martial arts (10.8%). Non-cisgender respondents most often felt excluded from swimming (28.3%), whereas cisgender respondents primarily felt excluded from football (30.9%).

A follow-up open-ended question targeted the reasons for refraining from specific sports. Most of the respondents referred to perceived hostility or experienced exclusion due to 'being different' or because of structural barriers such as binary sex segregation in competitive sports. As expected, non-cisgender individuals



often referred to anticipated or experienced unpleasant situations in locker rooms and showers and problems with clothing or the visibility of their own body (e.g. swimming in trunks as a problem for male transgender people). At the same time, transgender women reported that the social constructs of fairness and level-playing field had an impact, as transgender women's physical characteristics are often seen as offering a competitive advantage compared to cisgender women. Cisgender respondents, in turn, were also confronted with gender stereotypes, stating that their gender expression did not fit with general expectations and that they felt neither sufficiently male/masculine nor sufficiently female/feminine (or, vice versa, too male/masculine or too female/feminine) for particular sports. These findings suggest that social norms and expectations about adequate gender expression in terms of the appearance and mannerisms of men and women (and boys and girls) play a major role with regard to discrimination, irrespective of the sexual orientation or gender identity of a person.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The Outsport study is the first large-scale survey to recruit LGBTQ participants from all EU countries and the first to give voice to all sexual and gender minorities within the umbrella of LGBTQ individuals regarding their experiences in sports. The findings outline the presence of homo- and transnegativity in European sports and their negative impacts on LGBTQ individuals and their motivation to take part in sports. They suggest that a considerable share of gender and sexual minority athletes still face various problems and barriers and are implicitly denied the positive effects of sport on health and quality of life (WHO, 2010). These findings from the European dataset reflect, and are consistent with, a growing number of international qualitative studies that have analysed the homo- and transnegativity experienced by LGBTQ people with regard to sports (see the reviews of Denison et al., 2021; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020).

Two findings of the analysis stand out compared to the already existing international evidence. The first relates to the diversity of LGBTQ people and the different vulnerabilities that they face, while the second relates to the lack of relationship between the legal situation of LGBTQ people in the various European countries and the perceived and experienced homo-/transnegativity in sports in these countries.

Our data analysis explicitly considered the diversity of LGBTQ people with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, as research often uses the umbrella term LGBTQ with little or no awareness of the various constellations and experiences of its subgroups. As a result, we were able to substantiate and differentiate previous research findings. With regard to the prevalence of homo-/transnegativity, gender identity is more relevant than sexual orientation, indicating that non-cisgender persons more often experience negative incidents and refrain from sports than cisgender persons. The particularly challenging situation faced by non-cisgender people is primarily induced by the structure of the

sports system and its binary sex segregation (especially in organised competitive sports), which – for the time being – denies non-cisgender persons the opportunity to participate on an equal footing. For female transgender people, in particular, assumed competitive advantages and unequal opportunities are structural barriers for sports participation.

Taking diversity within cisgender individuals into account, our data also revealed that gay men more often faced challenges and encountered harsher homonegative hostility compared to lesbian or bisexual individuals. These findings are in line with other qualitative and quantitative studies and can be explained by sport's hegemonic masculine structures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From a methodological perspective, it is important that further research studies consider these differentiations in order to make variations of experiences visible and generate more in-depth evidence that is useful for sports management.

A further and striking finding is the lack of relationship between the legal situation of LGBTQ people in European countries and the perceived and experienced homo- and transnegativity in sports in these countries. It seems that the legal and political norms of LGBTQ anti-discrimination in the EU countries have been less diffused into the sports systems than into other sectors of society (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). This finding underscores the assumption of sport as an autonomous and self-contained societal system with its own culture, rationality, and mindset, which particularly holds true for European sports (Hartmann-Tews, 1996; Stichweh, 1990). This also adds to the evidence that sexism and homo-/transnegativity, based on heteronormativity and enacted by sports organisations and individual agencies in diverse sports contexts, are a deeply rooted part of sports culture (Denison et al., 2021; Krane, 2019).

Research on the (successful) implementation of LGBTQ inclusion politics across Europe has indicated the high relevance of “norm visibility” (Ayoub, 2016, p. 14) for the development of inclusive actions, which, in turn, have impacts on the attitudes and behaviours of the population. Transnational institutions such as the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and ILGA-Europe have played an important role in encouraging states to come out and in fostering LGBTQ inclusion. Given that European sports systems are relatively autonomous sub-systems of society, sports-related transnational institutions such as the IOC and the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) are playing a pivotal role in this overdue process of the coming out of sport.

## **Acknowledgements**

The research was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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# The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation

## Advocacy work in Europe

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### Introduction

Commentators and academics have often described sport as a “last bastion” of homonegativity (Anderson, 2005; Prestidge & Huddleston, 2020). This is a point, which is recognised by the Council of Europe in its 2019 report “Combating discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Council of Europe Member States”.

Sports continue to be a hostile environment for LGBT persons where little real progress is being made compared to other areas. Despite a definite increase in the number of states reporting measures to tackle discrimination, the invisibility of LGBT persons is evident.

(Council of Europe, 2019, p. 14)

This is strongly supported by recent evidence of the high levels of perceived homo- and transnegativity in the European Outsport research (Menzel et al., 2019), which showed that almost 90% of respondents considered homonegativity and particularly transnegativity in sport to be a current problem, while 82% reported that they had witnessed homonegative or transnegative language in sports in the preceding 12 months.

Equality is a fundamental principle and right enshrined in European policies through the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU, 2012), but equality in sport is more stubbornly resistant to change than equality in wider society and especially in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. European institutions and sport organisations have adopted policies to promote and begin to prioritise equality in sport but as Englefield (2012, p. 9) points out, “while many of these organisations seem to have embraced the agenda for equal opportunities, sexual orientation and gender identity are often made problematic within sport and not given the same consideration as, for example, racism, disability and gender”.

The Council of Europe (2019) reports on some positive developments since 2013 in the policies and action plans of some member states (e.g. Denmark,

Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK), reflecting progress in the field of sports. However, it also acknowledges that, in states where laws and policies do exist, implementation seems to lack effectiveness, while in other states which have implemented measures to tackle discrimination in sports, there is no explicit reference to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. The Revised European Sports Charter (Council of Europe, 2021) now includes an article on the right to sport which includes a no-discrimination clause. This marks, for the first time since the European Sports Charter was adopted in 1992, that sexual orientation (but not gender identity) has been specifically included as a ground:

No discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, language, religion, gender or sexual orientation, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status, shall be permitted in the access to sports facilities or to sports activities.

(Article 10, clause 2)

This is the context within which the European sport and advocacy organisation, the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF), exists. EGLSF is a sporting umbrella organisation for LGBTIQ+ sports federations, clubs, and individuals, representing athletes in Europe with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. As of 2021, EGLSF has more than 160 LGBTIQ+ sport clubs and associations from all over Europe as members, representing more than 22,000 European athletes (About us, n.d.).

## **History of EGLSF and the EuroGames**

While dedicated sports groups for LGBTQ people were not a completely new concept, there weren't too many of these which existed in Europe in pre-1980s. Those which did exist usually had an ambiguous identity to avoid too much unwanted attention as reported by one of the EGLSF founding clubs – Sport Club Janus in Germany (Die Geschichte des SC Janus [The history of SC Janus], n.d.). The 1980s brought a new era with a proliferation of clubs being founded in Europe – mainly Western Europe, while the first editions of Gay Games had taken place in San Francisco, United States, in 1982 and 1986. Inspired by the Gay Games, clubs from Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium started to meet and discuss ideas for an umbrella organisation and a European multisport tournament. In 1989, those clubs were invited to the City of The Hague where the German and Dutch clubs formally established and signed the founding deed for the European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF).

While nowadays EGLSF is explicit that its purpose includes a much broader representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, including non-binary people, intersex, queer, and other diversely identifying people, the origins of EGLSF refer to lesbian and gay people, and this was in common with many of the sports clubs

across Europe at this time. While this gradually changed over many years, it was in 2016 when statutes were formally changed to reflect this.

The central focus for EGLSF throughout its earlier years was the establishment and development of EuroGames and an ambition to build it as the largest European multisport event for the athletes it represented. The EuroGames started on a small scale to give lesbians and gays the opportunity to meet and enjoy participating and competing away from the scrutiny of the greater public and beyond other heteronormative sporting environments. The basic idea was to support athletes in their coming out, to increase the awareness of lesbian and gay people in sport among the greater public, and to do networking between the growing number of LGBTQ (though mostly explicitly gay and lesbian) sports clubs in Europe.

The first official EuroGames took place in 1992 in The Hague, with 300 athletes from five European countries competing in four sports: badminton, football, volleyball, and basketball. One year later, The Hague hosted the EuroGames again with over 500 participants and they were officially opened by the Dutch Minister of Sport. From 1992 until 2021, there have been 18 EuroGames hosted in 16 cities in 11 different countries across Europe with participation of up to 5,400 people in over 25 sports at its largest.

Although it was always the ambition to host EuroGames annually, there are many years where it did not take place for various reasons. Historically, the EGLSF refrained from organising EuroGames in the same year as worldwide LGBTQ sports tournaments in order to be fair to its members and enable them to participate, and to build cooperation with other organisers. This means that in some years where the Gay Games and World Outgames were held, there were deliberately no EuroGames held. There have been other one-off situations too, such as the cancellation of the 2020 Games in Dusseldorf due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The membership of the Federation has significantly expanded and diversified in this time too, with many clubs with different structures emerging and joining over the years. This includes many informally constituted clubs from countries where formal registration of LGBTQ clubs with authorities is difficult or impossible. It also includes many groups of activists and individual members too. The category of “Associate” member was also added to enable a wider membership such as organisations that undertake LGBTQ sports advocacy work but do not organise sport. Many of the clubs themselves have grown significantly in size and therefore member clubs could have fewer than 10 members or in excess of 1,000 members.

## **LGBTIQ+ advocacy role**

As reflected in the introduction to this chapter, it has become increasingly apparent across the years that the autonomy of sport has led to a gap in progressive, equality-based, and inclusive sports legislation, policy, and regulation even where these have developed in other areas of civic society; and thereby increasingly

apparent that EGLSF would require to develop its activities to better include visibility and advocacy related to sport, equality, and human rights in addition to licensing and governing the EuroGames and its direct activities with LGBTIQ+ sports clubs. Hartmann-Tews et al. (ch. 2) referred to the work of Ayoub (2016) who identified the central role that international advocacy organisations can play in ensuring that norms of LGBTQ equality and inclusion become part of laws and policies. Meanwhile, the Council of Europe (2019) recognises this link strongly. As such, this clearly calls to attention the need for EGLSF to fulfil a role of advocacy in this area.

A lack of collaboration between sports bodies and LGBT associations and lack of knowledge of the issues can result in SOGI issues remaining unaddressed in codes of conduct. Some states made no progress in this field.

(Council of Europe, 2019, p. 70)

As a membership led organisation though, developing a critical consensus across the membership to develop an advocacy role and to decide on the relative priority that has to be given to that work hasn't been quick or straightforward and continues to be a topic for discussion within Annual General Assemblies.

In stepping up its advocacy role, EGLSF was accepted as a member of the Consultative Committee of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) in 2012. EPAS sits within the body of the Council of Europe and provides a platform for intergovernmental sports co-operation between the public authorities of its member states, while encouraging dialogue between public authorities, sports federations, and NGOs (Bodin & Sempé, 2011). This contributes to better governance and prioritises human rights in sport, and it aims to make European sport more ethical, more inclusive, and safer. The activities of EGLSF allow EGLSF to advocate LGBTIQ+ issues and influence their integration into many areas of policy such as the European Sport Charter.

As part of continuing to increase visibility and advocacy, EGLSF joined the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe) in 2013 and has presented workshops and hosted seminars on matters of sport and physical activity for LGBTIQ+ people as part of their Annual Gathering.

## **EGLSF today**

Nowadays, EGLSF exists to pursue the open and active inclusion and participation of LGBTIQ+ people in sport and physical activity; to strengthen and empower sporting communities and their diversity across Europe; to promote and develop sporting opportunities and the well-being of LGBTIQ+ people; to protect the sporting rights – rights of access, equal participation, equitable share in sport governance, and representation of LGBTIQ+ people – and to fight against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.



After more than two decades of advocacy and influencing work within the European sports movement, a refreshed strategic focus and a clarification of aims and activities of EGLSF were agreed by members in 2018. The core values of equality, diversity, and inclusion in sport shape the vision of EGLSF and underpin its mission such as follows:

- To be the leading voice for LGBTIQ+ sport in Europe
- To promote the interests of LGBTIQ+ sports organisations
- To challenge LGBTIQ+ discrimination in sports in Europe.

To fulfil its mission, the EGLSF has developed four strategic pillars through which its work is prioritised and pursued. These pillars are the EuroGames, membership support, good governance organisation, and leading organisation for equality in sport.

The EuroGames pillar recognises the history and success of the EuroGames to date but also identifies improvements needed in processes, governance, and diversity and it highlights developmental opportunities for future editions of the Games. Specific areas of challenge include financial barriers to attend for many and a need to develop more far-reaching outreach policies and support in this regard. The most significant proportion of the participating athletes is gay men and further work on communication and marketing is being undertaken to improve levels of participation from among other groups. Recent years have also shown that there is more interest in non-competitive and taster participation opportunities which represents an area for development.

The EGLSF supports their members through projects, collaborative activities, and different services, such as the international sports calendar, which lists all the LGBTIQ tournaments in Europe. There is also a travelling exhibition free for members “Against the Rules” that consists of 37 panels, commissioned in 2010 and available in several European languages. The exhibition gives information on elite athletes, discrimination, LGBTIQ+ clubs and federations, EuroGames, and portraying LGBTIQ+ athletes.

As EGLSF develops, so too must its governance and to this end has established a Legal Advisory Committee to ensure that its activities comply with the Statutes & Bylaws, as well as working with the Board to improve those statutes and to improve the working procedures of the Federation.

Working with European sports institutions and policymakers forms the central part of work in becoming the leading voice of LGBTIQ+ equality in sport in Europe. This involves a number of different activities including advocating on strategic groups and sub-structures, collaborating in European projects, and co-operating with LGBTQ organisations working on other priorities. EGLSF fulfils some of its advocacy remit through membership of ILGA-Europe, by being contributory members of the Equality Within Sport Committee of the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), and of the Football Against Racism Europe (FARE) Network’s LGBT network, and through strategic partnerships with organisations such as Pride House

International, enabling key events at major sports events to take place around Europe.

The introduction of a new specific competence of the EU in the White Paper of 2007 and the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 opened up new possibilities for EU action in the field of sport stating that the EU “shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function” (EU, 2008, article 165). EGLSF has subsequently been successfully involved in a variety of EU-funded projects, including Erasmus+, whose objectives relate to social inclusion and equal opportunities in sport and to promote and improve good governance in sport. See Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1* Key EGLSF projects

| <i>Previous projects</i>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Project</i>   | <i>Coordinator</i>                                    | <i>Link</i>  |
| Pride in Sport. Preventing and Fighting Homophobic Violence in Sport 2011–2013   | EGLSF   | <a href="http://www.prideinsport.info/">www.prideinsport.info/</a>   |
| Football for Equality 2011–2013  | Vienna Institute for Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC)  | <a href="http://www.fair-play.info/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/FFE_Conference_Report.pdf">www.fair-play.info/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/FFE_Conference_Report.pdf</a> |
| VOICE: Combatting Sexual Violence in European Sport 2014–2016  | German Sport University Cologne                       | <a href="http://voicesfortruthanddignity.eu/">http://voicesfortruthanddignity.eu/</a>  |
| Heroes of Football 2016–2017   | John Blankenstein Foundation                          | <a href="http://heroesoffootball.eu">http://heroesoffootball.eu</a>  |
| Pro-Safe Sport for Young Athletes 2014–2015  | Enlarged Partial Agreement in Sport (EPAS)            | <a href="https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/pss/about">https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/pss/about</a>  |
| <i>Current projects</i>  |   |  |
| CEEYOUsports (Central & Eastern Europe networking and development for LGBTIQ+ clubs) 2019–2021                           | EGLSF   | <a href="http://www.eglsf.info/activities/projects/ceeyousport/">www.eglsf.info/activities/projects/ceeyousport/</a>   |
| EQUIP (improving equality in sport in Europe through practical and sustainable policy implementation) 2021–2023          | European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) | <a href="http://www.engso-education.eu/home/equip/">www.engso-education.eu/home/equip/</a>   |
| iSport (promoting diversity and social inclusion in sport through targeted health enhancing physical activity) 2021–2023 | European University Sports Association (EUSA)         | <a href="http://www.eusa.eu/projects/isport">www.eusa.eu/projects/isport</a>   |

## **Targeted action**

Some areas identified in the strategy require additional targeted actions in order to enhance, develop, or progress areas where there may be underrepresentation, or ineffective interventions already taking place. The following three areas are such examples.

### ***LGBTIQ+ women in sport***

EGLSF has been involved in anti-sexist combat strategies since its beginnings in 1989, and signed the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport in 2013, as initiated at the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG). Advocacy for women in sport is a priority of the current EGLSF strategy, and the organisation is represented on the European Commission High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport.

Most recent advocacy work in this field was a 2021 submission to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). As part of its work on gender-based violence and discrimination in sports, the PACE was formulating a report on “The fight for a level playing field – ending discrimination against women in the world of sport” and a consequent resolution. EGLSF worked with a coalition of European networks working on LGBTIQ+ rights, including International Lesbian & Gay Association Europe (ILGA-Europe), Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community (EL\*C), Transgender Europe (TGEU), and Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII-Europe), to collect data to offer a specific focus on the position of lesbian, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LBTI) women in sport. The report revealed the specific situations and barriers that LBTI women face in sport, while discrimination and violence against them remain phenomena largely unknown or not visible. The report makes a series of specific recommendations to member states and to the Committee of Ministers, such as drawing attention to the inequity of media coverage in women’s sport.

Ensure that schools of journalism and media training institutes introduce specialist courses in their core curricula with a view to developing a sense of professionalism which is attentive to the equitable coverage of women in sport with special attention to elimination of lesbophobia, transphobia, and interphobia.

(ILGA-Europe et al., 2021, p. 23)

The report urges decision makers to take into account the needs of LBTI women in sport and ensure the full respect of their fundamental rights.

EGLSF regularly conducts workshops and seminars on the topics such as the workshop “Strategies for reclaiming space for women in sport – If We Can’t March then we will Run” at the EL\*C conference in Kyiv in 2019, which explored and exposed the limits of our traditional sporting structures – mainstream and

LGBTIQ+ – for LGBTIQ+ women. Another example is a workshop based on more recent work “Disrupting the Discourse: LGBTIQ+ Women’s Experiences in Sport” to take place at the forthcoming IWG conference, which will challenge women’s sport to make fundamental changes to include LGBTIQ+ women in ways that allow them to be their authentic selves within sport.

### ***Transgender and intersex athletes***

The encompassing umbrella term of LGBTIQ+ used by EGLSF often masks distinctions between the reference points of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. This in turn neglects the respective experiences and challenges the different groups have to face in the heteronormative and cisnormative social structures of sport systems. Issues of participation and representation of trans and intersex athletes have been a long-standing topic of concern within EGLSF but has become more prominent in its activism work since the membership terms of reference in the statutes were expanded in 2016.

In 2019, EGLSF conducted consultation workshops with transgender athletes who shared many concerning experiences about their sports experiences. Many of the findings were integrated in the final report of the Seminar on human rights in sport held by the Council of Europe such as the disproportionately dominant influence of international regulation on trans athletes at the grassroots level:

There is concern that the impact of high-level policies from bodies such as the IOC and the IAAF have a trickledown effect and, in the absence of clear robust national and localised guidance, policies designed for elite sports are governing access to grassroots sport.

(EPAS, 2019, p. 4)

In 2020, EGLSF successfully represented the need to include the human rights of transgender and intersex athletes on the list of human rights priorities in sport and advocated the topic as the focus for the Council of Europe’s EPAS 2021 Diversity Conference. In preparation for the Conference, EPAS commissioned EGLSF to develop a Study Report and the resultant “Human rights of transgender and intersex athletes in sport”, is due for publication in late 2021.

As noted earlier, Article 10 of the Revised European Sports Charter does not include gender identity in its list of anti-discrimination grounds. It had been included in earlier drafts but was removed by some member states between Drafts 3 and 4. The EGLSF made a formal intervention and had their disagreement with this removal registered. The need to continue advocacy in this area is therefore very clear, and the need for EGLSF to increase efforts in this area is a priority with a focus on collaboration. A key recommendation from the 2021 Diversity Conference will support efforts in this area:

Explore and identify an appropriate mechanism to keep a focus on this area and to carry on discussions about transgender and intersex athletes in a sustained

way. This follow-up should be achieved with enhanced inter-agency work and networking within European institutions and with other stakeholders.

(EPAS, 2021, p. 4)

### **Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)**

As the concepts of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe have differing institutional geopolitical definitions, we will use the European Commission sub-regions' understanding. The EGLSF was founded by clubs from Western Europe and has always been most strongly dominated by Western European members. The same can be said of the participant demographic of EuroGames.

Different initiatives have taken place such as the development and delivery of EuroGames in Budapest 2012 and the building of an outreach policy to enable participants from the CEE region to participate in activities of EGLSF, such as Annual Assemblies, EuroGames, and project work. It is important to acknowledge that there is significant work going on across the region by grassroots activists, and there has been for many years. The work of EGLSF starts from this point of understanding.

Ongoing EGLSF work in this area includes the CEEYOUSPORT project (2019–2021) funded through the European Commission preparatory actions in the field of sport. This project was designed to establish a strong network and an effective intersectional cooperation among LGBTIQ+ sports clubs, their leaders, and volunteers operating in the CEE region, and to explore shared challenges and solutions through working together. The project has brought together countries from the Western region with the CEE region and has comprised of a series of capacity building and developmental workshops, club-to-club development exchanges, and job-shadowing placements. Project evaluation is especially strong in relation to strengthened relationships between member clubs at the European level.

### **Challenges and constraints of EGLSF membership and advocacy work**

This section will highlight examples of some of the challenges faced by EGLSF in the course of its work, both external to and within the Federation.

#### **External**

There is currently no benchmarking tool or regular measurement of equality standards in sport broadly or LGBTQ equality standards in sport specifically at the European level. The ILGA-Europe Rainbow Index (ILGA-Europe, 2021) is an annual assessment of the legal and political situation of LGBTQ people but does not include sport at the domestic level within its areas of assessment. As regular monitoring provides increased opportunity for accountability, and vice versa, a lack of tools in this area represents a challenge for advocacy work.

Accountability can also be sidestepped by sports bodies with reference to the self-contained sporting system. The independence and autonomy, which have been a long tradition in sport in Europe, mean that national and international jurisdictions can only intervene in sporting affairs in limited ways, and this can be problematic in holding sport to account on matters of equality and human rights, thus allowing sports bodies a “back-door” to escape from their societal obligations.

An especially blatant example came in 2019 with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) case of Caster Semenya and Athletics South Africa versus the world governing body for athletics, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).<sup>1</sup> Following the CAS ruling, the IAAF published a press release stating,

the IAAF is not a public authority, exercising state powers, but rather a private body exercising private (contractual) powers. Therefore, it is not subject to human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the European Convention of Human Rights.

(World Athletics, 2019)

European advocacy agencies must make it clear that sport needs to commit to universal declarations or risk losing legitimacy. EGLSF has used its platform to draw attention to this issue such as the following recommendation from its 2021 collaborative report:

States should create laws that explicitly ensure that regulations and practices in public and private sectors, e.g. in competitive sport, do not bypass national protection and anti-discrimination legislation and provisions.

(ILGA-Europe et al., 2021, p. 23)

The culture and structures of sport require athletes to assimilate, and LGBTQ people, whether they are out or not, are most often obliged to adhere to the norms of their respective sports. Thus, many LGBTQ individuals participate in mainstream sports with tolerable levels of homo- and/or trans-negativity, many are reluctant to join “counter spaces”, such as LGBTQ sports clubs, and many reflect compliance with heteronormativity (Elling & Janssens, 2009) and cisnormativity. Sports bodies are increasingly eager to pursue progress via the assimilation path as a strategy for avoiding disruptive or challenging alternatives. It is imperative that EGLSF safeguards and supports disruptive pathways and discourse as legitimate methodology and is willing to be bold enough to use those.

### **Internal**

The composition of EGLSF membership is heterogeneous and there is an array of members representing different regional priorities, perspectives, and delivery methods. However, LGBTQ sports clubs often represent a “norm” that is

non-representative of the wider LGBTQ community, to the exclusion of diversity. As a membership organisation, EGLSF reflects that non-representative norm, and therefore can at times struggle to prioritise or fulfil an advocacy role that fully reflects the diversity of LGBTQ people. It took several attempts before the bylaws of EGLSF were changed to formally include more than lesbian and gay identities in 2016, and at this stage, the name of the federation still only contains lesbian and gay. For the same reasons, there are also disparities in geographic representation within governance and membership. Work is underway to change this, such as delivering the targeted initiatives discussed earlier.

For many members, the key priority of EGLSF ought to be the continued development of EuroGames and membership work with advocacy work as a lesser priority, while others experience frustration with the speed of change and feeling like the advocacy work doesn't go nearly far enough. Inevitably, the position that emerges sits somewhere between these two points and makes it very difficult to achieve a strategic or joint position that is reflective of the whole of Europe.

EGLSF receives no organisational funding or core funding, and there is little flexibility for developmental support enabling the organisation to build its capacity. This means that EGLSF is an entirely voluntary run organisation with no paid staff. As such, the Federation is heavily reliant upon a Board who are elected by the members. This means the role of the Board is a blend of governance, strategy, and operational delivery. Building a Board with the right mix of skills, qualities, and lived experience whom members view as best representative for their clubs presents some challenges. In addition, there are significant burnout factors, such as the voluntary nature of the work usually carried out in addition to an individual's paid employment; the same people are often contributing voluminous voluntary work in their own local clubs; representing a minority group in a heteronormative and cisnormative environment at the same time as increasing one's own visibility has a personal impact.

Although the internal constraints and challenges are specific experiences of EGLSF, they are somewhat typical of those facing many international NGOs.

## **Conclusion**

Research shows us the importance of European advocacy organisations to develop and implement norms and to make them visible for all and in particular to stakeholders and activists to refer to and strive for greater equality. In relation to LGBTQ people in sport in Europe, EGLSF, as a membership-based and constituent-led sports and advocacy organisation, is uniquely and strongly placed to fulfil this.

## **Note**

- 1 The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) changed its name to World Athletics in 2019.

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Part II

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## Country Reports

Policy of Inclusion and  
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# **Masculinity, homonegativity, and ignorance as barriers to the inclusion of LGBTQ people in Austrian sports cultures**

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## **Introduction**

The following chapter aims to illustrate the situation that LGBTQ people are facing and the roots of homonegativity in Austrian sports. In general, the legal human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and sexually/gender-diverse (LGBTQ) people in Austria has improved in recent decades, similar to the EU. In the most recent Rainbow Index of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), Austria ranks 14th out of the EU-27 plus UK countries (ILGA-Europe, 2021). We begin by outlining the specificities of the Austrian sports system. Against this background, homonegativity in Austrian sports is analysed based on three dimensions. First, we look at reports by LGBTQ people about their concrete experiences. Second, we examine the roots of homonegativity within different types of sports. Third, we analyse the current situation in terms of LGBTQ initiatives and policies against homonegativity within organised sports in Austria. Finally, we offer recommendations on how to change the situation and include LGBTQ people.

This article is based on two resources: data derived from the qualitative Study on Homophobia in Austrian Sports (based on interviews with sports officials from 24 different sports; Staritz, 2021) and country-specific results from the European Outsport survey (based on a quantitative online survey along with interviews with key stakeholders; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2019; Menzel et al., 2019).

## **The Austrian trinity: Specificities of the sports system**

To understand how homonegativity plays out in sports and the challenges faced in anti-discrimination work in Austria, we need to know about the organisational structure of the sports system. The way this system is structured in Austria is complex (Weiss & Norden, 2015). The central non-governmental organisation representing organised sport is Sport Austria, which primarily covers four groups: (1) 60 national and sport-specific sports federations (Sportfachverbände), (2) Austria's national organisation for disabled/adaptive sports (Österreichischer

Behindertensportverband [ÖBSV]), (3) the Austrian Olympic and Paralympic Committee (ÖOC and ÖPC) and Special Olympics Austria (SOÖ), and (4) grassroots sports, with around 14,200 sports clubs represented by umbrella sports associations (Sportdachverbände).

There are a total of three such umbrella grassroots sports associations, each representing multiple sports and each with the same services and an annual funding of €8.5 million guaranteed by the Federal Sports Promotion Act of 2017. The three organisations are the Austrian Association for Sport and Physical Culture (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sport und Körperkultur Österreich [ASKÖ]), the Austrian Sports Union (SPORTUNION Österreich), and the Austrian General Sports Association (Allgemeiner Sportverband Österreichs [ASVÖ]). The fact that today there are still three popular sports associations with identical functions in Austria stands as a testament to the country's history. The Austrian Sports Union, founded in 1889 as the Christian German Gymnastics Union (Christlich Deutsche Turnerschaft), is based on Christian social core values; the Austrian Association for Sport and Physical Culture, founded in 1892, is rooted in the tradition of socialist sports culture; and the Austrian General Sports Association, founded in 1949 with no obvious political alignment, served as a melting pot for all of those who did not feel represented by ASKÖ or SPORTUNION. Although the political culture has changed, these institutions have endured within sports to this day. Since federal sports funding is distributed via the umbrella associations, there is indirect pressure for sports clubs to subscribe to a membership to be eligible for subsidies and infrastructure such as training and further education.

As if this were not complex enough, the principles of federalism also apply: the umbrella sports associations (focusing on grassroots sports) as well as the sport-specific federations (focusing on elite sports) are each divided into nine federal units in accordance with Austria's nine federal states.

Besides corporatism and federalism, the Austrian sports system is characterised by the dictum of the autonomy of sport. This primarily refers to a rejection of state interference in organisational and promotional affairs, including issues such as sending athletes to competitions. This autonomy is relatively ambivalent given that most organised sports are financed through state funds (federal as well as provincial and municipal), so a relationship with the state is inevitable.

The final specific issue to address is the dominance of football and skiing, the two leading sports in Austria, and the respective organisations that represent them. These sports dominate in terms of not only the media and funding distribution but also our image of sports in general.

Organised queer sports clubs play a relatively minor role in Austria. The largest and most popular sports club for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people is Aufschlag Wien (Serve Vienna). It offers diverse sports such as badminton, basketball, football, tennis, Thai boxing, table tennis, volleyball, and hiking. There are also local queer organisations that specialise in individual sports, such as the football clubs FC Ballaver Graz and SV Die Gaynialen and the swimming club Kraulquappen Wien. Most of these clubs are organised within the

Austrian sports structure, which means that they are a member of either a sport federation or an umbrella sports association.

## **Experiences of LGBTQ athletes in Austrian sport**

In the Outsport study, LGBTQ athletes across Europe were asked in an online survey about their experiences in sport (Menzel et al., 2019). Participation in sport was defined very broadly and went far beyond the traditional organised sports described earlier. There were 159 participants from Austria in the Outsport survey. The average age was 27 ( $\pm 11$ ) years. Of these respondents, 37% were identified as lesbian women, 25% as bisexual, 18% as gay men, and 20% as having another orientation. In terms of gender identity, nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents were identified as female, 22% as male, and 14% as non-binary. Overall, 21% reported a gender identity that did not match their sex assigned at birth. Regarding the contexts of sports, 47% of the respondents practised sports in mainstream organised sports clubs (a percentage above the EU average of 40%), 24% were active on their own without being a member of any organisation (e.g. running or swimming), and 12% exercised with commercial providers (e.g. at gyms) or as part of informal friend groups (Menzel et al., 2018).

This showed that mainstream sports clubs are very popular for LGBTQs in Austria, and only 7% of Austrian Outsport respondents trained in a queer sports club. More than half (51%) of the respondents in Austria were out in their main sport, significantly more than the EU average (36%). One reason for this could lie in the fact that female athletes were disproportionately well represented in the sample, while football was the sport practised by most of the respondents; in general, sports seem to be more open to lesbian women than to gay men, particularly in the case of football.

In comparison to the EU average, the Austrian respondents were more likely to perceive homonegative and transnegative language in their own sport (Austria: 54% versus EU: 49%). However, they felt attacked or discriminated against less often than the European average (Austria: 72% versus EU: 82%).

When asking about personally experienced hostility rather than general observations, and when taking a closer look at the sport, very large differences became apparent depending on the type of sport practised and the performance level. In particular, 15% of active athletes had negative experiences directly related to their sexual orientation or gender identity within the last 12 months. Trans people were three times more likely to have had a negative experience (33%) than cisgender people (11%). The majority of these negative experiences (86%) were verbal assaults (insults and verbal abuse), but verbal threats, physical transgressions, and physical violence were also reported (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2019). The figures regarding organised sports merit closer scrutiny. As mentioned earlier, more than half of the respondents (54%) experienced homonegative language within their sport practice. A more detailed analysis showed that this applied particularly in team sports (76%) and more competitive elite sports (76%; Menzel et al., 2018).

Therefore, it appeared that homo- and transnegative insults occurred significantly more often in team sports and elite sports. One possible interpretation, which is supported by the qualitative study presented in the following (Staritz & Sülzle, 2019), is that greater pressure to be better than others leads to a higher frequency of attempts to put others down. Since gay is equated with weakness, anti-gay insults are a way to frame another athlete as weak and oneself as stronger. In competitive team sports, this pressure comes from peers and teammates; in elite sports, it is the pressure to perform those demands that athletes constantly prove that they are better than others.

The Outsport survey also showed that different sports were experienced as exclusionary in differing ways. One in five (22%) felt excluded from a certain sport. The sport most often cited as something people wanted to participate in but felt excluded from was boxing (27%), followed by football (20%) and swimming (20%; Menzel et al., 2018). This affirmed the finding that sports dominated by extreme standardisations of gender images and physicality were experienced as particularly exclusionary of LGBTQ people. Generally, the sports classically practised in clubs were deemed most problematic for LGBTQ people. By contrast, the individual sports preferred by the respondents in the Outsport study, such as fitness and jogging, which are classically not practised in clubs, did not show up in the responses. Therefore, in the fight against homonegativity in sports, club sports require particular attention.

### **It's all about masculinity: Homonegativity and sexism in Austrian sports culture**

In 2016, the Austrian Ministry of Sports commissioned a nationwide, multi-sport study on Homophobia in Austrian Sports, which was conducted by the authors of this article (Staritz, 2021; Staritz & Sülzle, 2019). The aim was to find out how homonegativity shows up in different sports and how this corresponds to gender relations. We contended that a comparative view of various sports cultures revealed indicators that either resulted in systematic discrimination against LGB people or, alternatively, fostered diverse communities.

The study focused on organised sports in Austria (i.e. those sports that are organised by the 60 sports federations and practised in clubs). The study combined qualitative interviews with representatives of 24 different sports federations (in most cases, the interviews were conducted with the person responsible for gender topics within each federation), ten complementary expert interviews (e.g. with sports psychologists and PE teachers), and an in-depth analysis of four selected sports (the contrasting cases of football, skiing, volleyball, and gymnastics). It concluded with three evaluative multi-sport focus groups with (queer and non-queer) athletes, youth trainers, and supporters.

With the term sport culture, we refer to the entire social and cultural fabric that makes up a (club) sport, including its values, norms, and self-image cultivated by the respective agents (for more information on the concept of sport culture, see

Bausinger, 2006; Markovits & Rensmann, 2007). It is precisely this everyday sport culture that dictates who does or does not feel welcome to participate in a given sport, thus granting access to certain social groups while excluding others or exerting great pressure on them to conform to certain behaviours. This culture varies among different sports, and, in addition, men and women are affected differently by the corresponding demands. Our research findings (Staritz & Sülzle, 2019) showed what has long been known in the research: the respective sports cultures are determined predominantly on the basis of gender (Caudwell, 2006; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Messner & Sabo, 1994). Different gender images are prevalent in different sports, yet these are almost exclusively stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity (Marschik, 2003; Müller, 2009; Sülzle, 2011).

In the following section, we briefly outline the five main contributing factors leading to the homonegativity that we identified. Along with the (in)visibility of homosexual athletes in sports, the gender of the sport and related (sexist) stereotypes determine how homonegative the climate is. In addition, there are ways in which the body and physicality inform the sport, while established structures (e.g. gender segregation) determine the daily sports routine.

### **(In)visibility**

The visibility of homosexual athletes is an initial key indicator of the level of homonegativity in a sport. On the one hand, (in)visibility reveals the openness with which the topic of homosexuality is generally dealt with in the respective sport. On the other hand, it can offer clear indications of whether LGBTQ athletes have to hide, depending on the discrimination that they fear upon coming out. Therefore, our first question to the interviewees was whether they knew gay/lesbian people in their sports.

Almost all the club representatives interviewed (22 out of 24) knew homosexual persons in their clubs/sports either personally or from media coverage. In only two sports (swimming and gymnastics) did the interviewees know of none whatsoever (whether gay or lesbian, active or retired, amateur or professional, and national or international). Upon further questioning, in almost all the cases (18 out of 22 sports), it quickly became apparent that the homosexual athletes they knew of were exclusively women. There were only four sports in which the representatives knew of gay male athletes. The sports with known gay athletes in Austria were figure skating, volleyball, equestrian sports, and badminton. Badminton was the only sport where people knew both gay and lesbian athletes, granting it a unique status. In five sports (football, ice hockey, wrestling, boxing, and judo), the experts stated that they would expect extremely negative reactions to a gay man coming out due to the prevailing homonegativity. Yet in these specific sports, there are known and openly lesbian women.

This primarily implies that homonegativity impacted women and men differently in sports. It also seems that lesbian athletes were generally able to be more open about their homosexuality than gay athletes.



### ***Gender of the sport***

Sports cultures are generally described and experienced as male-dominated. The female athletes we interviewed describe their sporting environments as male, and many sports have exclusively male coaches, officials, doctors, and journalists. But the masculinity of the field goes beyond the sheer numerical dominance of men. Homonegativity relates much more to the masculine image of a sport, which conveys certain ideals of masculinity. Our research indicated that sports where the staging of masculinity and qualities such as aggression, determination, toughness, and danger were accentuated (e.g. football, ice hockey, boxing, wrestling, and judo) were those in which hostility against gay men played a particularly large role.

By contrast, sports with feminine connotations are not suitable for displaying classic tropes of masculinity. For example, a female official from synchronised swimming described what a suitable swimming partner should look like: “You have to be so very graceful. And in a duet, the man has to fit in. The strong man just doesn’t fit the image” (Official, Swimming Club).

Here, men’s physicality is measured against the model of delicate women’s bodies, which are supposed to match the female appearance. In sports that have feminine connotations, the homophobic exclusions are reversed: gay is fathomable, but lesbian is not. The norm that all women should be attractive to the male gaze, and thus automatically heterosexual, persists unspoken and unchallenged. Lesbian women have a particularly hard time fighting heteronormativity in the few sports that have traditionally feminine connotations; in the sample surveyed here, these included equestrian sports, gymnastics, figure skating, volleyball, and synchronised swimming (as a subdiscipline of swimming). Equestrian sports, figure skating, and volleyball were also the only sports in which the club representatives we interviewed were aware of gay men but not lesbians.

In summary, we were able to underline a fact that has long been known in research: the more a sport is used as an arena for staging masculinity, the fewer the women who are active in it; however, lesbians among these women are more likely to be open about it, whereas homosexual men have to hide even more (Messner & Sabo, 1994).

### ***Sexism and stereotypes about women and homosexuals***

Masculinity in sports is constructed through the attribution of classic traits such as strength, toughness, combativeness, aggression, and determination to win, but above all through the intertwining of sexism and homonegativity. Sexism is inherent in male sports culture, as exemplified by the following statement from a sports official: “He [the president of the federation] sometimes makes comments at international matches like ‘Send them to the kitchen’ when they miss a pass” (Official, Ice Hockey).

Women are devalued and made to feel unwelcome in male sports. Sexism is the breeding ground for homonegativity, because both gay men and women are

perceived as not meeting the requirements of the masculinity demanded in sports; thus, the gay man is feminised and devalued. Images of lesbians and gay men are also heavily influenced by stereotypes. Gay men are seen as soft, weak, non-aggressive, prancing, and extroverted. Thus, they are described with classically feminine attributes: “A gay guy doesn’t have the tendency to grab someone in a headlock and go at them harshly” (Official/coach, Wrestling). The idea of a gay man holding a wrestling opponent in a headlock is considered absurd, as is the idea of a lesbian woman skating elegantly. Indeed, lesbians are considered “man-women” in men’s sports, and classic masculine traits are attributed to them. As most sports have a masculine image, and because masculine traits are more valued, lesbians seem less at odds in the sporting world, but they are still devalued as women (“ugly”, “look nothing like real women”, “man-woman”, etc.).

Kleindienst-Cachay and Heckemeyer (2008, p. 54) spoke of a “suspected homosexuality” regarding successful female athletes. Sports public relations often counter this by staging female athletes as heterosexually as possible (e.g. in sexy clothing) to signal that nobody needs to be afraid “that the traditional gender relations and hierarchy might be challenged by strong women who are active in male sports” (Kleindienst-Cachay & Heckemeyer, 2008, p. 54).

### ***Bodies and showers: The role of physicality in a discipline***

Physical contact is central to many sports, particularly full-contact sports such as boxing, judo, and wrestling. In these sports, homonegativity is often attributed to this physical closeness; heterosexual athletes are universally assumed to be afraid of touching gay men. But bodies also play a role before and after sports through people changing together in the dressing room and taking showers together. Nudity and physical proximity are present in sports. The myth surrounding communal showering is a central motif in homonegative sports discourse: “People talk about the showers, like, for example, you’re not allowed to drop the soap. If you bend down to pick up the soap, you must be gay” (Female athlete/official, Tennis).

Gay men, in particular, are perceived as a danger to other men, as they are potential criminals who automatically turn into rapists at the sight of a naked backside, while lesbian women are more likely to be accused of trying to turn other women, which is why some officials do not want their own daughters to join the football club.

In sports where close physical contact between adult coaches and young athletes is necessary (e.g. spotting in gymnastics) and where sexual assaults often occur due to authoritarian conditions and male dominance, homosexuality is still confused with paedophilia. Interviewed experts tended to randomly change between those two topics: the huge problem of power and sexual abuse, in particular against minors, and the situation for homosexual athletes or trainers in sports.

The dataset identified a clear correlation between the physicality of a sport (i.e. full-contact or non-contact) and the prevalence of homonegativity: the more

physical contact there is in a sport, the more threatening gay men are perceived to be, and the harder it is to imagine gay athletes.

### ***Other structures in everyday sport: Gender segregation and conversational culture***

The body is also cited as a supposed reason why sport is organised dichotomously by gender: physiological differences, biology, and socially conditioned gendered characteristics are the basis of the argument for gender segregation in competition, which often also leads to social gender segregation. Gender separation dominates sports culture and daily sports life from adolescence onwards. In sports where there are more mixed activities and friendly exchanges, the atmosphere was generally described as more relaxed. By contrast, in sports academies and sports where males constitute the majority, homonegativity was distinctly more prevalent. These findings suggested that less gender segregation creates more relaxed, friendly interactions between the sexes and greater social cohesion.

The club environment is often very hierarchical, and the idea of performance reigns. When topics such as relationships and sexuality were addressed, this tended to be superficial and, especially among men, involved a boastful tone: “So when sexuality or relationships are discussed, it’s in this cool vernacular; how easy the girls are, because that’s a part of it, the super chicks” (Expert interview, Sports psychologist).

The lack of an open conversational culture also means that there is little talk about sexuality in general. In this environment, young people are effectively encouraged to remain silent about their non-heterosexuality.

The factors we have outlined here either enable or impede an open approach to homosexuality within sports cultures and create the environment in which athletes gain their experiences. The next section focuses on the stakeholders, particularly the sports federations and the umbrella sports associations, which should feel responsible for more gender equality and less homonegativity in sports.

### **Not on the agenda? Stakeholder perspectives and involvement**

Although (or perhaps because) Austria has a fundamental problem with homonegativity in sports, the situation LGBTQ people face in sports is scarcely being addressed at an institutional level in the Austrian sports system. For our study on homonegativity, almost all interviewed persons (representatives of sports federations and experts) answered the initial question regarding discrimination of LGBTQ people with “Not an issue with us”. However, through the course of the interviews, a different picture emerged. This picture was reinforced by the reported experiences of LGBTQ athletes in the aforementioned findings of the Outsport study: 83% considered homonegativity to be a problem in sports. In the

context of Outsport, along with the survey, two relevant Austrian sports stakeholders were interviewed about homonegativity: Sport Austria ([www.sportaustria.at](http://www.sportaustria.at)), the umbrella organisation and lobby group of Austrian sport, and 100% Sport ([www.100prozent-sport.at](http://www.100prozent-sport.at)), the Austrian competence for gender equality in sport. The interviews concluded that the two organisations lacked knowledge about the situation LGBTQ people are facing: “I really don’t have an impression of how the affected persons are faring, so to speak, in everyday sports” (Management, Sport Austria). And there was little effort being made to proactively reach out to LGBTQ people to learn more about it.

Experiences of discrimination did not reach the official sports system. According to the Outsport study, 96% of those affected did not report the homonegative hostilities they had experienced to official bodies, because they doubted that they could intervene effectively, and only 20% even knew of a possible contact point in sport. In fact, there is to date no dedicated helpline in the Austrian sports system to report cases of discrimination. Only in football is there a monitoring process (Report Discrimination!), provided by fairplay – Initiative for Diversity and Anti-discrimination (fairplay Initiative), which documents discriminatory incidents and offers expertise in the field of discrimination in sports. However, it seems like sports institutions are not feeling responsible for offering a professional advisory and intervening point of contact for those affected.

One previous attempt in 2016 to set up an advocacy service at Sport Austria failed on two counts. First, it was rejected on the part of those potentially affected, because its planned implementation within Sport Austria meant that there was no guaranteed independence or anonymity. Second, it also received little support from the member organisations. This brought to light a general conundrum concerning the way organised sports in Austria deal with discrimination: in accordance with the autonomy of sports, people do not want to be told what to do from the outside; at the same time, it is not possible to set up reliable structures from the inside, because independence from the sports structures is necessary to assure the confidentiality of those affected.

One major exception is the Homophobia Advocacy Office ([www.fussball-fueralle.at](http://www.fussball-fueralle.at)), which was launched in 2019 by the Austrian Football Association (Österreichischer Fußball-Bund [ÖFB]) in cooperation with the Austrian Football League (Österreichische Fußball Bundesliga [ÖFBL]). Run independently by the association Fußball für Alle, yet funded by the two institutions with a small budget, this agency has the potential to serve as a model for this type of anti-discrimination work in other sports federations.

Among non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the aforementioned fairplay Initiative ([fairplay.or.at](http://fairplay.or.at)) is a case in point. As an NGO that is active but not anchored within organised sports, fairplay has been dealing intensively with the issue of homonegativity for over ten years, raising awareness as well as implementing measures in organised sports. But whether NGOs outside the sports system are successful in their attempts to bring about a more inclusive and anti-discriminatory sports culture depends foremost on the goodwill of the clubs and associations;

there are no (binding) guidelines or recommendations from the funding body (Ministry of Sports), the sports federations, or the umbrella associations.

### Recommended action

The fact that homonegativity functions differently in different sports and differently between the genders implies that there is no unique strategy to combat it. It is precisely the different manifestations of sports cultures, and the degree to which they, for example, celebrate (traditional) ideas of masculinity, that provide us with valuable insights into how homonegativity and transnegativity operate in sports and suggest possible changes that would make sports cultures more inclusive. One thing is clear that homo- and transnegativity are deeply rooted in the (sexist) structures and cultures of the sports. Corresponding structural solutions are necessary to dismantle homo- and transnegativity – not just superficial declarations of “Well, of course, we’re against it!”

Key recommendations for action include education and awareness raising regarding the promotion and valorisation of women in sport, enhancing equal participation, the establishment of an open and respectful culture of discourse, and the reduction of hierarchies and power structures within sports. But first of all, it is important to take the problem seriously. We must not underestimate what we are condoning by this non-action against homonegativity: social groups are being systematically discriminated against and excluded from sports.

Although there is no institutional framework for dealing with the issue of homonegativity, there are proactive players. Apart from the handful of clubs that are deeply committed to the fight against discrimination, the most effective agents against homonegativity in sports in Austria are arguably fans (e.g. Football Fans Against Homophobia), athletes (e.g. Basketball for Diversity), and initiatives beyond organised sports. Still, there is a lack of systematic and financial support from politicians and the big players in organised sports, such as federations and umbrella sports associations.

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# **LGBTQ-related sports policies and the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in sports in France**

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## **Introduction**

The legal and human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and sexually/gender diverse (LGBTQ) people in Europe has improved over the past decades. After a step back in the past few years, France now ranks 11th among 28 European countries in the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association's (ILGA) most recent Rainbow Index (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

With the adoption of the Pacte Civil de Solidarité (PACS) in 1999, France was one of the first countries in the EU to create registered civil partnerships, albeit with limited rights compared to heterosexual marriage. After years of political discussion and aggressive debate, which saw the resurgence and strengthening of the important far-right and Catholic homonegative front, the Taubira Law, legalising marriage for all, was finally adopted in 2013 (Borrillo, 2017) and marked an important milestone towards equality for LGBTQ couples and families. However, it was not until June 2021 that single women and lesbian couples finally received the right to medically assisted procreation or October 2021 that conversion therapy for homosexual and transgender persons was banned. However, other blatant discrimination and human rights violations remain unaddressed, such as the failure to prohibit the genital mutilation of intersex babies.

Over the past decade, the French administration has been more active with regard to the development and implementation of tools for LGBTQ equality, successively launching action plans across governmental entities and establishing collaborations between several ministries (Premier Ministre, 2012). The scope of the previously existing Interministerial Group for Fighting Racism and Antisemitism was extended to specifically tackle the issue of LGBTQ discrimination. The Interministerial delegate for the fight against racism, antisemitism, and anti-LGBT hate (Délégation Interministérielle pour la Lutte contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Haine anti-LGBT [DILCRAH]) has attempted to do this through two successive strategies established over two periods. The first period (2017–2020) focused on acts of discrimination, their sanctions, and the protection of victims (DILCRAH, 2016). The second period (2020–2023) includes the recognition and

advancement of LGBTQ rights as well as actions to simplify the everyday lives of LGBTQ people in terms of administration, education around trans persons, inclusiveness in sports settings, etc. (DILCRAH, 2020).

In this chapter, we first provide an overview of the French sports system and LGBTQ sports movement. We then present quantitative results as well as elements of interviews conducted with French sports volunteers and employees as part of the Outsport study. These results provide a better understanding of the experiences of French LGBTQ athletes and French policies for more gender and sexual diversity, as well as the hurdles still standing in the way.

## The French sports system

The sports system in France is based on a highly diversified, quasi-autonomous, and non-profit voluntary sports sector with about 180,000 sports clubs and 16.4 million registered members at grassroots level. The French National Olympic and Sports Committee (Comité national olympique et sportif français [CNOSF]) is the umbrella confederation at the top, representing 95 national sport associations. These comprise all 31 Olympic sports federations (Fédération française de basket-ball, etc.), 45 non-Olympic federations (Fédération française de rugby, etc.), 14 multi-sport federations or associations with affinity to sports (police sports federation, etc.), and five school and university sports federations. The CNOSF represents the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in France, organises sports towards public authorities, and provides assistance and services to the member federations.

Sports policy in France is characterised by the major role of the national government, thus representing a centralist sports policy model (Houlihan, 1997). Although the autonomy of sport is guaranteed, governments have established a legal framework (the convention of objectives) that secures the influence of the sports federations through a state recognition agreement that is the prerequisite for receiving public funding, which yearly amounts to around €90 million (Cour des Comptes, 2013, as cited in Scelles, 2017). The most important part of this recognition is the delegation and assignment of a public service mission. This implies, on the one hand, the delegation of full management rights (e.g. organising national championships in the particular discipline) and, on the other, a normative framework whereby the federations have to comply with the strategies and objectives of national sports policies set by the government. The public service mission is based on – among other factors – the consideration of sport as a tool for social cohesion and the idea that sport is a space where all social differences are irrelevant and erased (Gasparini, 2008). This discourse on sport is deeply rooted in the French universalist culture, where identity differences are not only unseen but also considered a challenge and sometimes even a danger for the nation as a whole (Guimond, 2019; Le Blanc, 2019a; Schnapper, 2000). As one of the government's roles is to guarantee national unity, we have to contend with the paradox that while sport would naturally ensure social equality, it is the administration and



sports organisations that actually have to actively work against discrimination and for equality.

To materially support the federations in fulfilling their tasks, technical advisors (Cadres Techniques Nationaux) are sent to all registered federations at a total cost of €110 million (Cour des Comptes, 2013, as cited in Scelles, 2017). They hold a central position in the operational work of the federations as a kind of transmitter between government and the voluntary civil sector, thus constituting a direct link between the public sports administration and the sports federations. The state also cooperates closely with other public institutions and associations, especially on anti-discrimination actions and policies, such as the Defender of Rights (Défenseur des droits), DILCRAH, International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme [LICRA]), and SOS Homophobie.

### **The emergence and role of the LGBTQ sports movement in France**

The first French LGBTQ sports clubs and associations emerged in the 1980s as a reaction to the heavy homonegative atmosphere of sports (Mantaci, 2008). In 1986, five Parisian athletes founded the Gay Committee Paris Ile-de-France (Comité Gay Paris Ile-de-France [CGPIF]) to organise the French delegation for the Gay Games in Vancouver in 1990. At first, its members were individuals, but in 1990, it became the umbrella organisation for LGBTQ clubs. Internationally, the CGPIF also participated in the creation of the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) in 1989 and supported the first EuroGames in the Hague in 1990 (Picaud, 2008). From 1993 onwards, the new LGBTQ sports clubs have had a more demonstratively identity-based approach, which is reflected in their names: Aquahomo, Gays Go Goal, les Cochonnets Roses (Pink Piglets), and Double Jeu Tennis (Double Game Tennis; Lefèvre, 1998; Picaud, 2008). They centre their practice on leisure rather than competition and stay outside the federal system (Lefèvre, 1998).

The desire for more big events led to the organisation of the first multisport International Tournament of Paris in 1993, followed by EuroGames 1997, also hosted in Paris. The EuroGames were a financial success, and the CGPIF restructured itself with new statutes and a shift in its mission, eventually becoming the Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (Fédération Sportive Gaie et Lesbienne [FSGL]) in 2003 (Picaud, 2008). Although the CGPIF's social movement dimension and ideal of activism were diluted in the new everyday tasks, there were three major challenges that it had to face in the late 1990s, which helped foster its restructuring: first, the fight against discrimination through the diffusion of another image of gay and lesbian athletes; second, the promotion of another sports ideal, open to all; and, last but not least, support for the creation and development of new sports clubs. As a result, the FSGL has gained recognition not only by the Gay Games Federation but also by the French sports ministry and health administration (Picaud, 2008).

In 2019, the FSGL counted around 50 sports clubs and associations in 45 sports and around 6,000 individual members (Le Blanc, 2019b). In September 2021, the FSGL renamed itself as Fédération sportive LGBT+.

Different and opposing strategies and perspectives coexist concerning the visibility and positioning of the LGBTQ sports movement with respect to traditional sports movements (Le Blanc, 2019a; Le Pogam et al., 2004). The question of visibility in the LGBTQ sports movement is linked with experiences of homo- and transnegativity and the need for protection against bad experiences and violence. One perspective emphasises the need to display LGBTQ identities in public spaces to demarginalise and foster the acceptance of LGBTQ athletes (Le Blanc, 2015) and subvert the traditional sports order (Lefèvre, 1998; Liotard, 2008b). Opposed to this, some LGBTQ athletes favour a more discreet approach through the creation of closed, protecting, and safe spaces (Le Blanc, 2019a, 2019b; Méha & Le Blanc, 2017). International LGBTQ competitions such as the Gay Games and EuroGames facilitate the visibility of LGBTQ athletes in the organising cities and are seen as increasing their legitimacy and feeling of security (Le Blanc, 2016; Méha & Le Blanc, 2017). Expanding on this debate, one strategy aims at the emancipation of the LGBTQ sports movement from traditional sports by making its own rules, particularly against the competitive values of the Olympic Games (Le Pogam et al., 2004; Liotard, 2008b). The opposite strategy would prefer to integrate LGBTQ clubs into the traditional sports movement by cooperating and emphasising a common sports identity rather than an LGBTQ identity (Le Blanc, 2019a; Le Pogam et al., 2004).

## **Outsport results: Experiences of LGBTQ individuals in sports in France**

There is growing evidence from international research that LGBTQ people regularly experience discrimination and exclusion in sport (Denison et al., 2020). The European Outsport survey, involving more than 5,500 LGBTQ individuals, provides further data on the situation and experiences of LGBTQ athletes in France (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a, 2021b). The French sample consisted of 268 self-identified LGBTQ individuals aged 16 to 74 years. Of these, 81% were cisgender persons, and 19% were non-cisgender or transgender people, of whom the majority described themselves as non-identifying or non-binary. Only 57% of the respondents participated in sports at the time of the survey.

With regard to potential homo-/transnegativity in sports, some findings can be highlighted as follows:

- Consistent with the European results, 38% of all respondents did not care if people knew about their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, 48% were trying to hide their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in some contexts and 14% in most contexts. In contrast to these findings demonstrating the (relative) openness of LGBTQ individuals with regard to their

sexual orientation and/or gender identity, athletes were far more hesitant with respect to coming out in the context of physical activities and sport. Only 28% indicated that they were out to almost everyone in their sport compared to 36% of the total EU sample, while 37% were out to no one in their sports contexts compared to 33% in the total sample.

- Seventeen percent of the respondents, whether physically active or not, stated that they felt excluded and had refrained from certain sports as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, a proportion in line with the total EU sample (19%).
- The majority of LGBTQ athletes (72%) were involved in recreational sports, while 25% were in competitive sports and only a very small share (3%) in high-performance sports. Most of the athletes participated in a sports club (53%). The proportion was higher than in the total sample, indicating the high relevance of easily accessible and cheap sports clubs in the French sports system.
- Two-thirds of LGBTQ athletes (65%) had witnessed homo- or transnegative language in their main sport activity in the 12 months prior to the survey, a proportion that was significantly higher than the EU average of 49%. The majority of them (89%) felt offended and discriminated against by this.
- Regarding personal experiences, 11% of all French athletes reported having had negative personal experiences associated with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in their main sport in the 12 months prior to the survey, a proportion in line with the total EU sample (11.7%). These negative experiences included predominantly verbal insults and threats, discrimination, e-bullying, physically crossing the line, and physical violence.
- Overall, the data showed a higher vulnerability to and prevalence of negative incidents (e.g. witnessing homo-/transnegative language and personal experiences) among non-cisgender and transgender athletes compared to cisgender athletes and among gay men compared to lesbian women.

## **LGBTQ anti-discrimination and inclusion policy**

As outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the French sports system is highly centralised, and the sports ministry and public administration play an active role in developing intergovernmental and transversal strategies against LGBTQ negativity in association with other diversity organisations (DILCRAH, 2016, 2020).

This section is based on the small amount of research literature on LGBTQ issues in sports in France and four semi-open interviews conducted as part of the European Outsport study in 2019. The sample consisted of the former co-president of the Paris association that organised the Paris Gay Games in 2018, who has extensive experience of the LGBTQ sports movement in both French and international contexts (LGBTQ Officer); an employee of the French football federation (Fédération Française de Football [FFF]) who is an expert in social issues in sports; a volunteer for the French basketball federation (Fédération Française

de Basket Ball [FFBB]) who is in charge of citizenship promotion processes; and an employee of the public sports administration (Sports Administration) at the national level.

Two main axes of discussion stood out in the interviews. First, it appeared that there was a discrepancy between the public administration's LGBTQ inclusion policy and the pace of its implementation throughout the sports system. Second, some critical obstacles were identified as contributing to the slow process of change.

### **Different paths and paces of LGBTQ-inclusion sports policy**

The strong involvement of the state in the fight against discrimination in general and in the case of LGBTQ issues in particular was appreciated by the sports organisations. As government is “responsible for national solidarity and society” (FFBB), education and citizenship through sports were perceived as a central element. The state is, therefore, at the forefront of launching and implementing diversity policies in the sports system. The first milestone was the Charter against Homophobia in Sports (Ministère des Sports, 2010), which was signed by many federations in 2011 and it expresses expectations about the necessary actions of the organisations that signed up. However, this was not a legally binding instrument and thus did not include any consequences for organisations not fully committed to all its aspects. To foster its implementation, workgroups were created and tools have been developed, such as legal booklets, diversity training kits, and committees (Sports Administration). A new orientation of the national policies, with the possibility of applying sanctions against non-complying federations, is, however, providing a better support to the federations in preventing homophobia and enabling more systematic usage of the existing tools (Sports Administration).

There are substantial differences between sports federations in terms of the implemented measures and the development of tools. This is a result of their autonomy to the state, on the one hand, and the various involvements of individual agents, on the other hand. While some organisations demonstrate that they take the specific subject of LGBTQ discrimination seriously and show the will to tackle it, others are far behind in the process. However, the work of French sports federations and organisations for the equality and integration of LGBTQ athletes remains mostly superficial (LGBTQ Officer). The effects of the Charter against Homophobia in Sports, for instance, have been double-edged: as it was not binding, many federations felt that they had done their part in the fight against LGBTQ discrimination and did not feel the urge to actually implement its recommendations (LGBTQ Officer). Still, following the ministry guidelines, the federations developed tools and campaigns.

One tool recommended in the charter – the observatories of discrimination in stadiums – was created by both football and basketball federations, albeit in different ways, thus illustrating the freedom of the federations in regard to the state's

recommendations. The Observatory of Behaviours (football) and the Observatory of Incivilities (basketball) use different categories: the football observatory considers only the category of racism and discrimination, while the basketball observatory specifically addresses homonegative incidents. Interestingly, both federations report the same difficulty in categorising incidents as homo- or transnegative. Discriminating language remains unquestioned as such, although the athletes feel offended and discriminated against by it.

Related to these differences in the interpretation and application of the measures of the Charter against Homophobia in Sports are two different stances taken by the sports federations concerning LGBTQ anti-discrimination and inclusion. The first is the implementation of sport-for-all inclusion policies based on universalistic values and discourses, seeking the integration of remote groups but blind to their specificities. The second tendency recognises and addresses the specificities of LGBTQ experiences and discrimination in sports. Central to this positioning are individuals committing themselves to tackling the problem and creating political momentum.

The French Football Federation predominantly reflects the first stance of a rather general fight against discrimination. Given the history of this specific sport and the French context of colonialism, the priority topic addressed is racism, as well as the inclusion of women and girls. Despite a general discourse on the necessity of welcoming everyone (thus including LGBTQ people), a relative ignorance of the specificities of the fight against LGBTQ discrimination leads to a discursive hierarchisation of forms of discrimination. Although all forms of discrimination are presented as equally to be condemned, one – racism – is specifically named, while all the others are regrouped under the generic term discriminations. This hierarchisation was reflected in the position taken by the federation's president, Noël le Graet, in September 2019, as he condemned the stopping of games by a referee in response to homonegative chants (Stop Homophobie, 2019a, 2019b).

This universalist stance expresses a blindness to identities: to be fully integrated in football, we have to leave aside all our identities and not talk about them. Blindness to identities hinders the acknowledgement of real or potential discrimination. Some dubious comparisons were made in the football interview between sexual orientation and delinquency and criminality as things to be silent about (FFF). This is not to say that the football federation does not specifically address homonegativity in some of its activities. Indeed, actions against LGBTQ discrimination exist and target different audiences, in both professional and amateur football. Tools such as the Observatory of Behaviours in stadiums and the educational programme for *vivre ensemble* aim to create a more inclusive environment, while more specific plans and campaigns raise awareness regarding homo-negativity in stadiums and train players, managers, referees, and trainers on these topics through workshops, educational kits, etc. The federation also provided material support for the 2018 Gay Games in Paris.

The basketball federation shows greater awareness of the specificities of LGBTQ discrimination. Along with some actions against discrimination in general, a variety

of actions, tools, and campaigns explicitly address this particular topic, pursuing both top-down and bottom-up strategies. In contrast to other federations, the first target group identified by the federation is very young players (Mini Basket) rather than supporters (FFBB). Such awareness campaigns intend to educate and make people “reflect on themselves” rather than “moralise” (FFBB). Central to these actions are the work and personal commitment of individuals in the federation: for instance, the president has the “political willpower”, and his open “mindset” towards “societal subjects” was seen as essential (FFBB). The bottom-up commitment of the federation has been shown in the building of the Forum FFBB Citizen network, aiming to provide a platform for basketball clubs throughout France to cooperate and exchange anti-discrimination tools and good practices (FFBB). Cooperation with external expert associations, such as the FSGL, is also central in this stance to ensure the sensitivity of the resources, delegate specific tasks to experts if internal competences are lacking, and to achieve equality between territories (FFBB).

### **Major obstacles to overcoming homo- and transnegativity and implementing LGBTQ inclusion policies**

The interviewees identified three major obstacles to the real inclusion of LGBTQ people in French sports organisations. These obstacles are the result of both the French sports structure and the particular relationship between sports and homosexuality.

The first identified barrier to LGBTQ diversity in sports is the very intimate and taboo dimension of homosexuality, which makes it more difficult to address than topics such as racism or antisemitism (FFBB; LGBTQ Officer). Moreover, the heteronormative gender order – that is, the strong belief in the natural biological constitution of two distinct (binary) sexes, each with a biologically based natural attraction to the other sex (heterosexuality), and the hierarchical order between men and women – is deeply rooted in Western culture (Krane, 2019). This heteronormative gender order of society is reinforced, naturalised, and internalised in the sports system through social structures and practices, which privilege men and masculine values and translate into gender segregation in most sports. In turn, this causes blindness against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Liotard, 2008a).

The second obstacle is the ongoing difficulty in identifying and proving concrete homo- and transnegative incidents in sports because of the lack of clear norms and appropriate categories to name them, as in football’s Observatory of Behaviours. Homo- and transnegative language is very widespread and commonly used, but awareness is lacking regarding its effects on athletes. The athletes also “don’t even notice they are being discriminated against because of their sexual orientation” due to the competitive nature of Olympism, which carries discrimination in itself and is deeply prejudiced and homonegative (LGBTQ Officer).

The third obstacle is related to the generation gap between the top of the federations and the grassroots basis due to the volunteering nature of the French sports structure. The federations are generally led by elder male managers who are considered as blind to discrimination and not open to LGBTQ issues. By contrast, people at the grassroots of organised sports are younger, more diverse, more open, and with different needs (FFBB; Sports Administration).

## **Towards the better inclusion of transgender people in sports**

The inclusion of transgender athletes in traditional clubs is still far from achieved. The FSGL and other trans-rights associations wrote a charter (*Charte Sport et Trans*) in 2016 (Méha & Le Blanc, 2017), which the ministry supported. However, the charter has not yet really influenced the federations' practices for dealing with transgender athletes (LGBTQ Officer), and transgender athletes remain a minority even in the LGBTQ sports movement, where transnegativity remains present, as seen in the Outsport data (LGBTQ Officer; Picaud, 2008). The FSGLs change of name to *Fédération Sportive LGBT+* is, however, a sign of their intention to better include diverse identities.

A first hurdle to transgender athletes' inclusion is the acceptance climate in clubs and how co-athletes may react in terms of welcoming them (FFBB). Another hindrance is their administrative classification and registration. In this respect, the relative ignorance of issues surrounding the trans question in sports was revealed, as categories such as objectivity, medical advice, subjectivity, and interpretation are being used (FFF). The sex binary works as a compass that cannot be broken or rethought; on the contrary, it is transgender athletes who have to adapt to the binary nature of sport.

The Gay Games position themselves against Olympic values of competition (Le Blanc, 2016; Liotard, 2008b) and emphasise participation, inclusion, and enjoyment rather than winning as a way of going beyond the mandatory binary of sports. Therefore, in terms of participation, the gender category is irrelevant but not absent: where it is mandatory to indicate a gender category for registration, it is possible to indicate both the sex category assigned at birth and that at the time of participation, and, for some disciplines, there is no separation between genders in the rankings (LGBTQ Officer).

## **Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, the French sports system is characterised by the autonomy of the federations along with a strong engagement of the state in sports. This involvement mostly takes the form of contracts and cooperation between various sports and diversity organisations, including LGBTQ sports and anti-discrimination organisations. The organisation of the Gay Games is, therefore, a good illustration of how the topic of LGBTQ people in sports was

treated in France in the 2010s. In the political sphere, there was support for the event: the city of Paris, the Ile-de-France region, and the state supported this event (LGBTQ Officer). In the sports sphere, support was also demonstrated. With a few exceptions (e.g. the federation of boules), almost all the federations supported these games, even if only symbolically: “There was never so many federations that supported the games in the whole history of the Gay Games” (LGBTQ Officer).

The results of the Outsport study show that French LGBTQ athletes are slightly less out to their co-athletes than in other European countries and that homo- and transnegative language is a very common experience. This speaks to the need for their better inclusion and for the education of co-athletes in sports. The sports administration and ministry are at the frontline of launching diversity policies and creating tools such as the Charter against Homophobia in Sports. However, the policies and tools are not being implemented at the same pace and in the same form in the various federations. The work for diversity and equality is, in fact, constrained by a realism principle, mediating between human, material, and financial means and possible strategies within these means. At the state level, the policy now aims to “stop creating new tools and bring to life what already exists” (Sports Administration). The basketball federation chooses a “small steps policy” (FFBB), focusing on making actions last rather than going too fast too far. For the LGBTQ sports movement, there is an accepting regret that what has been done for LGBTQ athletes is not enough: “It’s not perfect yet, but we can’t spit on it” (LGBTQ Officer).

There are various hurdles to the broader and faster advancement of equality as a result of the sports structure and the specificities of LGBTQ discrimination in sports. A first obstacle is the specific taboo of homosexuality, based on the sex binary and gender hierarchy. A second hindrance is the difficulty in categorising incidents as homo- or transnegative. A third hurdle is linked to the volunteering structure of the French sports system, which creates a generation gap between sports managers and the grassroots.

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# Experiences of LGBTQ people in sports and sports inclusion policies in Germany

Sport for all!?

*Ilse Hartmann-Tews and Benjamin Csonka*

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### Introduction

The legal and human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and sexual/gender-diverse (LGBTQ) people in Europe has improved over the past decades. This has also been the case in Germany, which ranks 13th among the EU-27 plus UK countries in the most recent Rainbow Index of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe, 2021). However, there is only limited research on the situation of LGBTQ people in Germany (Groß & Niedenthal, 2021) and a dearth of research on LGBTQ athletes, potential homo-/transnegativity in sports, and respective anti-discrimination sports policies in Germany (Krell & Oldemeier, 2018; Schweer, 2018).

Against this backdrop, this chapter assesses the situation of LGBTQ athletes in sports in Germany and reflects on organised sports' LGBTQ-inclusion policies. First, the findings from the European Erasmus+ project Outsport with regard to the experiences of LGBTQ people in sports in Germany are presented. Second, an outline of organised sports in Germany places LGBTQ anti-discrimination policy in sports within the frame of the sports system. Finally, the chapter focuses on queer sports structures and their relevance for the development of a more inclusive environment in sports in Germany.

Both authors have carried out empirical research on the topic of LGBTQ people and sports (Braumüller et al., 2020; Csonka, 2019; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a, 2021b), while the second author adds expertise as an activist for the queer community in German sports.

### Experiences of LGBTQ individuals in sports in Germany

Over the past decades, there has been little interest in homonegativity in sports, and LGBTQ people's experiences in sports in Germany have rarely been examined. Only recently has research in these areas been conducted. An empirical study of stereotypes and prejudices about minority groups among members of sports clubs suggested that there was (still) homo- and transnegativity in sports

(Delto & Tzschoppe, 2016). The findings of this study of 1,700 members of 175 sports clubs showed that 19% of the membership thought that their club did not welcome homosexual athletes, and more than 30% expressed homonegative attitudes with regard to concrete interactions with homosexual athletes in their sports. The actual experiences of LGBTQ athletes in organised sports have been documented by a qualitative study (Böhlke & Müller, 2020), while a quantitative study by Krell and Oldemeier (2018) focused on the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents in leisure activities.

More comprehensive evidence on the situation and experiences of LGBTQ individuals in sports in Germany can be derived from a survey conducted in 2018 as part of the Erasmus+ project Outsport (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a, 2021b; Menzel et al., 2019). The survey targeted LGBTQ individuals who were at least 16 years old and living in the EU.

The German sample comprised 858 self-identified LGBTQ individuals aged 16 to 74 years (mean value: 33 years). Of these LGBTQ people, 75% were cisgender persons and 25% were non-cisgender or transgender persons of whom the majority described themselves as non-identifying or non-binary transgender. Of the respondents, 85% were participating in sports at the time of the survey. The majority of these (68%) were involved in recreational sports, while 27% were in competitive sports, and only a small proportion (4%) were in high-performance sports (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021b). With regard to (experiences of) homo-/transnegativity in sports, some of the central findings were as follows:

- More than one-fifth of the respondents (22%), whether or not physically active, stated that they felt excluded and had refrained from certain sports as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This finding indicated that LGBTQ individuals had negative experiences and incorporated expectations of rejection and concealment of their sexual or gender identity.
- Almost half of the athletes (45%) in Germany had witnessed homo- or transnegative language in their main sports activity in the 12 months prior to the survey. Homo-/transnegative language was witnessed significantly more in high-performance (69%) and competitive sports (60%) compared to recreational sports (45%) and in team sports (63%) compared to individual sports (45%), particularly in the cases of handball, football, and rugby.
- The vast majority of those who had witnessed homo-/transnegative language felt offended and discriminated against by it (78%). This high proportion emphasised its harmful impact, irrespective of the intentions (i.e. malicious or otherwise) of those who used it.
- Of the athletes, 13% reported having had negative personal experiences associated with their sexual orientation and/or gender identity in their main sport in the 12 months prior to the survey. These negative experiences included predominantly verbal insults and threats, discrimination, e-bullying, physically crossing the line, and physical violence.

- The data showed a significantly higher vulnerability to and prevalence of negative incidents (i.e. witnessed homo-/transnegative language and personal negative experiences) with regard to non-cisgender/transgender athletes compared to cisgender athletes and with regard to gay men compared to lesbian women.
- The most helpful measures for tackling discrimination and/or harassment based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity were identified as “encouraging more sports stars to come out” (indicated by 78% of the respondents), “high-profile anti-homo-/transphobia campaigns” (71%) and diversity trainings (57%).

These results were more or less in line with the general evidence of the European sample as a whole (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a). However, some results of the German sample differed significantly compared to the European dataset, and two of these are noteworthy here.

First, the German sample comprised far more individuals who were out to most of their co-athletes and team members compared to the overall EU sample (51% versus 36%). This finding can be related to the fact that a comparatively high proportion of athletes in the German sample were members of a queer or LGBTQ-friendly sports club compared to the EU average (16% versus 8%). Therefore, later in the chapter, we provide a separate section on the development and relevance of queer sports structures in Germany.

Second, 47% of the LGBTQ athletes indicated that they did not know any organisations or individuals with whom they could get in touch if they experienced homo-/transnegative discrimination or harassment in sports. This proportion was significantly higher than in the total EU sample, where 38% indicated no knowledge regarding supportive structures (Menzel et al., 2019). Moreover, the most often indicated institutions of which the German respondents were aware were non-governmental organisations (NGOs) outside the sports system (32%), followed by local sports organisations (20%). Against this background, the question arises whether organised sports have efficient antidiscrimination policies with regard to LGBTQ athletes. To critically assess LGBTQ anti-discrimination policies in sports, it is first necessary to outline the sports system and the central role of organised sports in Germany.

### **Organised sports in Germany: The mission of sport for all**

Non-profit voluntary sports clubs are the main providers of mass sports in Germany and traditionally the most common organisational frame for participating in physical activities and sports. Currently, there are around 27,000,000 registered members of approximately 90,000 clubs (DOSB, 2020). Most of these are small in size, with 47% of the clubs having fewer than 100 members (Breuer, 2017).

The representation of non-profit grassroots sports clubs within the voluntary sector is twofold. On the one hand, sport-specific federations represent the interests of specific Olympic and non-Olympic sports (e.g. the German Track and Field Association). On the other hand, umbrella sports associations at the level of the 16 federal states represent general issues of the clubs beyond the interests of specific sports and disciplines (e.g. the State Sport Association of North Rhine-Westphalia). The German Olympic Sports Confederation (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund [DOSB]) is the umbrella organisation of voluntary sports organisations and emerged in 2006 from the German Sports Confederation (Deutscher Sportbund [DSB]) and the National Olympic Committee (NOC). It represents the interests of its member organisations to the Federal Government and the international sports community and provides services for its member organisations.

The governance of the German sports system is grounded on the principles of independence, partnership, and collaboration between government and the voluntary sector of organised sports. Overall, this sports policy framework is often described as a missionary configuration, with a highly autonomous voluntary sector that plays a dominant role in supply and public authorities that delegate much responsibility for orienting sports policy to it. This has led to a kind of corporatism, with a complex process of political exchange between the two systems (Willem & Scheerder, 2017). This implies that the states' (and federal state's) role in sports policy is that of a facilitator or supporter that creates the framework enabling autonomous sports organisations to realise their aims and fulfil their tasks (Petry & Hallmann, 2013). An example of a corporatist structure is the Conference of Ministers of Sports of the 16 States (Sportministerkonferenz [SMK]). Along with the representatives of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Inneren, Bau und Heimat [BMI]) and the DOSB, they are setting the agenda of the federal states' sports policies based on the consensus of the public administration and the umbrella organisations of organised sports. At the same time, their resolutions are reference points for policies of the autonomous sport sector. This function has become crucial with regard to various critical issues in sports development, such as the prevention of sexual violence in sports and, more recently, sustainable approaches for growing diversity and the inclusion of queer people in organised sports (SMK, 2020).

### **Sport for all and (the invisibility of) LGBTQ anti-discrimination policy**

Organised sports in Germany have been male-dominated, and they are prone to competition (Hartmann-Tews & Luetkens, 2003). However, since the 1970s, the European Sport for All Charter has established itself as a starting point for inclusion policies in Europe, particularly in Germany (Hartmann-Tews, 1996). The German Sports Confederation (DSB) launched a huge marketing campaign in the 1970s and managed to convince sports clubs to open up to all sections of the population. Due to these initiatives, there has been a steady increase in

membership, particularly of female members. The proportion of female members in sports clubs rose from 10% in 1950 to about 35% in the 1980s, and it has since levelled out to about 40% (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund, 2020). Further sports for all policies have continuously targeted new sections of the population, such as elderly people and ethnic minorities. The welfare-oriented sport for all philosophy of organised sports (e.g. youth promotion, health prevention, fair play and tolerance, social integration, and gender equity) is the central reference point of financial and structural support from the public administration. However, there has been a longstanding critical reflection on to what extent organised sports meet the expectations of inclusion policy, particularly with regard to gender equity and social integration (Hartmann-Tews, 2018; Nobis & El Kayed, 2019).

In 2007, the DOSB signed the German Charter of Diversity (Charta der Vielfalt), which was initiated by multinational companies and supported by the Federal Government. Members commit to recognising, appreciating, and integrating diversity with regard to gender, race, nationality and ethnic origin, religion, physical ability, age, sexual orientation, and identity ([www.charta-der-vielfalt.de](http://www.charta-der-vielfalt.de)). Gender, age, and ethnicity have been standard reference points for anti-discrimination policy in sports organisations as part of the mission of sport for all. However, recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity as an integral part of diversity has been largely invisible when it comes to official commitment and implemented activities. A recent empirical study on the statutes of the 16 federal state associations and their anti-discrimination references revealed that only three referred to LGBTQ persons or sexual orientation and gender identity (Csonka, 2019). Accordingly, although all federal state sport associations have established a division of gender equality (and diversity), only a few of them have identified LGBTQ issues as part of their responsibility and announced a respective commissioner. As the federal state sports associations were trailblazers in the implementation of the sport for all philosophy, it can be assumed that the national and regional sports-specific federations are even less prone to adding LGBTQ people to their diversity and equality agenda.

Interviews with the gender and diversity commissioners of the DOSB and three sports organisations at national and federal-state level as part of the Outsport research confirmed this assumption and added to the quantitative findings of Csonka (2019). All of them indicate that the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity are rarely part of the diversity strategies or anti-discrimination policies of their sports organisations. Overall, the commissioners experience the reluctance of officials both within their sports organisations and across organised sports to become active against homo-/transnegativity and commit to comprehensive diversity policies.

In 2018, a legal amendment with regard to people's civil gender status drew much attention in the public discourse. Since then, individuals who were identified as non-binary may be – under specific conditions – registered as divers, the so-called third option. The interviewees reported that this external impetus,

along with the case of Caster Semenya (which peaked at the time of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) judgment of 2019) and subsequent enquiries from trans- and intersex advocacy organisations, was an inducement to reflect on the challenges that organised sports must face, particularly with respect to the traditional sex segregation of competitive sports. The external demands and activities of LGBTQ athletes and queer sports clubs (BuNT, 2018, 2019) were welcomed by the interviewed commissioners, who realised the huge responsibility of organised sports with regard to LGBTQ anti-discrimination policy and, in particular, the inclusion of transgender athletes.

In the context of LGBTQ anti-discrimination policy, football stands out as a prominent example. It is the most frequently broadcast sport in Germany, and the German Football Federation (Deutscher Fußball-Bund [DFB]) is the biggest sport federation, with a membership of around 7.2 million. Currently, two federal state football associations (Berlin and Saxony-Anhalt) are acting as trailblazers with regard to the acceptance of divers and transgender athletes. These players may choose which team they want to be part of (male or female), and transgender athletes are allowed to register and play in the respective team of their (new) gender identity (Berliner Fußball-Verband, 2019; Fußballverband Sachsen-Anhalt, 2021).

The DFB signed the German Charter of Diversity in 2011, followed by the Magnus Hirschfeld Federal Foundation's Berlin Declaration against Homophobia in 2013 (Bundesstiftung Magnus Hirschfeld, 2013). It has also published the leaflet "Football and homophobia: An information brochure of the DFB" to raise awareness (Deutscher Fußball Bund, 2013). Moreover, in 2017, Thomas Hitzlsperger, a former professional football player who came out after retiring as a player, was announced as a diversity ambassador for football. However, there has been some discussion about these actions: Are they merely front-of-stage symbolic activities? or Are they actually followed up by concrete backstage measures in the day-to-day activities of sports clubs, thus impacting the attitudes and behaviours of officials, members, and fans (Lahm, 2021)?

Unlike the strategy of sport for all in the 1970s and 1980s, the initiatives to tackle LGBTQ discrimination in organised sports have not been designed as top-down DOSB policy. Instead, expectations to commit to diversity, tackle homo- and transnegativity, and foster the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in sports have been expressed either by external actors or by LGBTQ athletes themselves. The respective external stakeholders who foster the inclusion of LGBTQ people are part of the political system (e.g. the federal states' ministries) or non-governmental LGBTQ advocacy organisations in civil society (e.g. the German Society of Trans\* and Intersex People and the Magnus Hirschfeld Federal Foundation). In addition, there have been initiatives from LGBTQ athletes themselves and from queer sports clubs, who repeatedly point to the ascribed and claimed welfare contributions of organised sports and the social responsibility the DOSB has as the biggest NGO in Germany.



## **Development of queer sports structures in Germany**

According to data from Outsport, queer sports clubs in Germany are highly relevant in terms of LGBTQ athletes' participation in sports compared to other European countries. They have increasingly played an important role in influencing sports policy and have often distinguished themselves as the link between the LGBTQ community and the sports associations.

Several empirical studies in Germany internationally have shown that people who do not conform to the accepted norms of gender or sexuality often feel discriminated against and excluded from sports (Böhlke & Müller, 2020; Denison et al., 2021; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a; Schweer et al., 2016). Against this backdrop, LGBTQ athletes often consciously avoid organised sports activities. Böhlke and Müller (2020) uncovered several motives and positive effects of being a member of an LGBTQ sports club. Besides the feeling of being part of a community of like-minded people, the members experienced sensitivity, openness, and a safe space free from discrimination. At the same time, these clubs provided access to other LGBTQ people and reflected the heterogeneity of this group.

The first queer sports clubs in Germany were founded in the 1980s for similar reasons (i.e. providing a safe space und connecting the LGBTQ community), while at the same time breaking down taboos, fighting for equal rights to club memberships, and demanding higher provision of discrimination-free spaces for LGBTQ sports activities. The oldest queer sport club in Germany is Sportclub Janus Köln (Die Geschichte des SC Janus [The history of SC Janus], n.d.), established in Cologne in 1980. Other associations followed (especially in the cities), which at that time were seeking to offer a safe space specifically for gay men. Vorspiel – Schwuler Sportverein Berlin (Foreplay: Gay sports club Berlin) was founded in 1986 and cites the AIDS crisis as one of the reasons for specifically recruiting gay men, who were being stigmatised by a society fraught with fear and suspicion of being infected by AIDS. Consequently, gays had already started to seal themselves off from participation in any sport at all (Historie [History], n.d.).

Although lesbian women were not exposed to the same kind of explicit AIDS-related discrimination, a few queer sports clubs for lesbian athletes were also founded. Their purpose was to fight for equal rights and acceptance, and clubs such as Artemis Sport Frankfurt, founded in 1984, and Seitenwechsel (Changeover), a sports club in Berlin for women, lesbian, trans\*, and intersex\* people founded in 1988, have concentrated on (queer) feminist goals and protected spaces for lesbian and other women.

However, most sports clubs have been founded specifically by and for gay men, and women-only and/or lesbian clubs are quite rare. One reason for this may be that in the 1980s, a significantly smaller proportion of women took an interest in organised sports compared to men, with women making up only 35% of the membership within the DSB. We can deduce that there were, similarly, fewer lesbians

interested in organised sports, and therefore the demand for separate lesbian clubs was correspondingly lower. Moreover, the situation for lesbian athletes differs from that of gay men in which female athletes already more often face discrimination simply on the grounds of their gender affiliation as women (Hartmann-Tews & Pfister, 2003). This corresponds to the fact that the prevailing heteronormativity operates differently in sports for women than in sports for men (Krane, 2019; Soler-Prat et al., ch. 13).

Although, from the 1990s onwards, many of these clubs opened their doors to the opposite sex, they rarely questioned the heteronormative order. The active inclusion of trans\*, inter\*, and non-binary people and the critique of a predefined two-gender system only became talking points in the 2000s, and the needs of these groups were at first mainly addressed by former women/lesbian associations. Current figures indicate that there are up to 70 queer sports clubs and groups in Germany, mainly in cities, with an estimated membership of 13,000 athletes (BuNT, 2019).

On their way to becoming integrated into the official sports system and thus gaining access not only to municipal sports facilities but also to state and federal sports funding, queer clubs had to struggle with various obstacles. Rigid traditional structures within sports have hindered their recognition, as they have the provocative names of the clubs. For example, in 1990, the Berlin club Vorspiel applied for membership of the Berlin Athletics Association (Berliner Leichtathletik Verein [BLV]). Their application was rejected on the grounds that “such people” would be harmful to youth. The presumption was that a gay sports club would not be about doing sport. This was a prejudice based on the combination of words in the club’s ambiguous name, which the courts upheld as grounds for dismissing the club’s application (BuNT, 2019). Other such puns (e.g. the Leipzig club Rosa Löwen [Pink Lions]) could also be classed as offensive. A subtler approach had been taken a decade earlier, when, in 1980, the founders of the first queer sports club in Germany, Janus Köln, deliberately chose a name with no obvious homosexual connotations. However, Janus’s head is depicted as having two faces, symbolising duality and ambivalence (Die Geschichte des SC Janus [The history of SC Janus], n.d.).

The 2000s were characterised by the growth of the existing clubs’ membership rather than the growth of new clubs, by the professionalisation of club structures and by the higher representation of the LGBTQ community’s interests in sports. Moreover, queer clubs have co-initiated campaigns and partnered with cities and sports organisations on alliance-building projects. The multinational Gay Games and EuroGames, which came into being in the 1980s, were followed by national and (supra-)regional tournaments and sporting events in Germany. Among these was the gay and lesbian volleyball league (<https://schwuleliga.de>), which is registered as a club, and the Düsseldorf Cup ([www.duessel-cup.de/en](http://www.duessel-cup.de/en)), a multisport sporting event organised by a group of four queer sports clubs in North Rhine-Westphalia. Due to these developments, the visibility and awareness of queer sports clubs as part of the German sports landscape have increased significantly in recent years (Degele, 2013).

## **The relevance of queer sports clubs as a driving force of inclusion policy**

The specific activities of the Federal networking conference of queer sport clubs (BundesNetzwerkTagung queerer Sportvereine [BuNT]) have undoubtedly contributed to the increased interest in queer issues. BuNT, initiated by two queer sports clubs in Berlin – Vorspiel and Seitenwechsel – has developed into an important and well-established platform for the promotion of queer issues in sports. From the very beginning, BuNT brought stakeholders on board from organised sports, as well as civil society and the public sector. The first-ever BuNT Conference took place in 2018 in Berlin, starting with 50 participants. Conferences have been held annually ever since: in 2019 in Hamburg and digitally due to COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. During the seven-day digital BuNT Week in 2020, more than 150 people, along with many institutions, were actively involved.

The themes of these conferences focus on the equal participation of LGBTQ people in organised sports and the fight against individual and structural discrimination. Within the framework of workshops, rounds of discussion, and lectures, participants have the opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss queer issues in sports, network, work out common goals, and introduce measures they deem necessary.

These BuNT conferences have developed an intersectional network of participants and stakeholders calling for more diversity and acceptance in sports, promoting queer issues, elaborating common (sports policy) positions, and developing new projects (BuNT, 2018, 2019). The success of the events in terms of their impacts and outcomes is primarily based on the voluntary commitment of individuals from queer sports clubs and the growing involvement of stakeholders who come with a broad range of expertise from a wide range of sectors. BuNT's outreach and appeal are significant, attracting an increasing number of people from different scientific disciplines (psychology, sociology, and gender research), various sports organisations (queer sports clubs, the DOSB, and a growing number of state sports associations), and a range of government bodies (e.g. the BMI and the Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment and Against Discrimination).

A particularly crucial milestone was reached when the 44th Conference of Sports Ministers adopted the Bremen Declaration on Sexual Diversity and Gender Identity in Sport (SMK, 2020). Based on BuNT's networking activities, the declaration appreciates the already existing inclusion activities of organised sports and expresses the expectation of an even stronger and more sustainable strategy for more diversity and more acceptance of gender and sexual diversity in organised sports. As part of the corporatist policy framework, the SMK declaration serves as a reference point for all sports-related activities of the federal states (e.g. organising antidiscrimination policy in sports and supporting LGBTQ advocacy work), and it is an appeal towards organised sport.

BuNT was initiated by queer clubs, carried forward by a huge voluntary commitment from the base, and supported by individual sports associations and institutions. The previous BuNT team is now facing the challenge of making this

successful series of conferences a sustainable event. Apart from this, two questions are under discussion. First, what kind of inclusion policy best serves the desired ends? Debate is continuing, for example, regarding to what extent safe spaces for queer people in sports are still necessary and whether queer sports clubs are explicitly segregating themselves rather than being ambassadors for diversity and respect and opening up their membership more to non-queer sports(people) (BuNT, 2019, p. 13). Second, who is responsible for the inclusion of LGBTQ people in sports? Should queer people bear sole responsibility for sharing information about their own concerns and fight in their own interests for discrimination-free sports? Or should the sports system (i.e. the DOSB with its affiliated organisations) be responsible and do more to pursue inclusivity policies for LGBTQ athletes? The possible institutionalisation of BuNT is currently under discussion. Should the DOSB and the 16 federal state sports associations adopt the role of institutional promoters of an organisational unit for BuNT's work? Or should a separate association for queer sports be set up in Germany?

## Conclusion

There is only a small amount of research on LGBTQ people's experiences in sports and on successful policy strategies for LGBTQ inclusion in sport. Evidence from the Outsport survey in Germany and Europe indicated that LGBTQ athletes experienced discrimination, harassment, and violence in sports on the grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity and that the extent of negative experiences varied with regard to the subgroups of LGBTQ individuals and the contexts of sports activities (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021a, 2021b). Against this background, various stakeholders have called for more in-depth research on LGBTQ people and sports in Germany (BuNT, 2019; Csonka, 2019), which also holds true for Europe (FRA, 2020).

The analysis of the implementation of the sport for all philosophy and the discussion of LGBTQ issues in the inclusion policies of organised sports in Germany revealed the hesitancy and reluctance of the federations and associations. Therefore, the finding that there was a comparatively high proportion (47%) of LGBTQ athletes who indicated that they did not know any organisations or individuals with whom they could get in touch if they experienced discrimination or harassment in sports, as well as the low number of sports organisations they referred to (if they knew any at all), should be a matter of concern.

Against this background, it is important to ask whether organised sports have efficient antidiscrimination policies with regard to LGBTQ athletes and to what extent responsibilities within the policy framework are taken seriously in Germany. The discussion revealed (at least) two constraints that should be considered with regard to the implementation of LGBTQ anti-discrimination policies in organised sports in Germany. The first, more general, constraint is the heteronormative gender order and the male hegemonic structures of (organised) sport.

This deeply rooted feature induces organised sports to place a low priority on addressing the issue of discrimination against LGBTQ people. The second constraint is the autonomy of organised sports in Germany. Although the legal and human rights situation of LGBTQ people in Germany has improved over the past decades, the public administration cannot instruct the DOSB or its member organisations to implement inclusion and anti-discrimination policies, as it has to adhere to organised sports' principle of autonomy. However, as state funding of sports organisations is based on their positive impact on community life and welfare, the state has a kind of influence, as well as financial leverage, in fostering the disposition and willingness of organised sports. In this sense, the Bremen Declaration has established a strong framework for the development of more inclusive LGBTQ sports policies by the public administration and the voluntary sector of organised sports.

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# LGBTQ people and the influence of gender in sports in Hungary

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### Introduction

According to a recent survey, almost 90% of the LGBTQ people involved in sports in Hungary believe that homophobia is a serious issue in the Hungarian sports world, and a strikingly high percentage of athletes stay away from organised sports (Menzel et al., 2018). The present chapter aims to give an overview of the sporting opportunities and experiences of LGBTQ people living in Hungary, a country traditionally referred to as the heart of Europe but one that has lately been in the news for its authoritarian rule and populist rhetorics (Danaj et al., 2018). The LGBTQ community has been the government's target in recent years (Háttér Társaság, 2020; Neuberger, 2020), which has made the community even more marginalised.

The unwelcoming atmosphere has had its toll on the recreational activities of LGBTQ people as well. A Europe-wide sporting survey which involved 304 Hungarian LGBTQ athletes revealed that the majority of Hungarian athletes do not feel comfortable or safe revealing their sexuality in a sporting context (Menzel et al., 2018). Women and non-cis people especially feel excluded or obstructed in sports. In countries such as Hungary, where the legal and social settings cannot provide safe environments for gender and sexual minorities, joining an LGBTQ sports club may be the best option. Hungary does have a registered LGBTQ sports association, where community members and allies can engage in recreational activities safely. As a matter of fact, Atlasz Sportegyesület (2021), Hungary's LGBTQ sports club, is one of the largest clubs in the Central Eastern European region with ten sports represented.

Nevertheless, the Hungarian sports club – like most LGBTQ sports federations across Europe – has its limitations, namely, that gay men significantly outnumber lesbian and bisexual women, which seems to reveal “intersectional” (Crenshaw, 1991) challenges in the Hungarian<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ sporting scene. The country's heteronormative and patriarchal social structures (Barát, 2005; Huszár, 2018; Szlávi, 2019; Szöllősy, 2012) have a huge impact on sports, which are viewed still as heterosexual men's privileges (Clément-Guillotin et al., 2012). The aim of the chapter, therefore, is to explore the social and structural obstacles LGBTQ people are



facing, especially women, when pursuing sports; at the same time, the chapter also wishes to offer an account of initiatives that aim to challenge the stereotypes and make sports more inclusive.

## **LGBTQ situation in Hungary**

Historically, Hungary is among the more advanced states regarding the legal recognition of people belonging to a sexual minority. It is not only because Hungary does not prosecute, imprison, or execute people for homosexuality like 76 states in the world, but it is also because the country declared it illegal to penalise homosexuality as early as in 1961. It was an exceedingly progressive step at the time, given that, in England, it only happened in 1967, in the German Federal Republic in 1969, and in the United States on a national level only in 2003 (HVG, 2011). Hungary's laws grant protection to LGBTQ people in the cases of discrimination and hate crimes, and several of the legal benefits of marriage also became available to same-sex couples through the 2009 law offering registered partnership (Háttér Társaság, 2011).

Nevertheless, a number of anti-LGBTQ measures have been introduced during the last decade, from the heteronormative definition of marriage by the new constitution (BBC, 2013), through two recent amendments to the constitution that restrict adoption to heterosexual couples (Neuberger, 2020), to a new law proposal that makes sex change impossible (Háttér Társaság, 2020). According to the International Lesbian and Gay Association's (ILGA-Europe, 2021) most recent rainbow map, Hungary ranks 27th, out of 49 European countries, regarding LGBTQ people's legal situation. Compared to last year, Hungary lost 8.46% points, which is the most drastic drop in Europe.

Regarding social recognition, there has been progress in the acceptance of Hungarian LGBTQ people, due to an increasing visibility and international pressure; however, several of Hungary's top-ranking politicians still consider and publicly label LGBTQ people to be "secondary citizens" (Dull, 2019). According to a representative survey done by Budapest Pride and Integrity Lab (2016), the Hungarian society has its reservations too. Same-sex marriage has gained more support over the years in Hungary, but there is still only a 36% approval rate within the Hungarian population. One of the most important results of the survey is that the visibility of Hungarian LGBTQ people is still low, even compared to neighbouring countries. In Hungary, 75% of the population reports that they are not aware of anybody being part of the LGBTQ community in their surroundings, which is of crucial importance, because, according to the findings, if someone personally knows an LGBTQ individual, it significantly increases their tolerance level and acceptance of LGBTQ rights (Budapest Pride & Integrity Lab, 2016).

## **Gender situation in Hungary**

In Hungary, LGBTQ rights are tightly connected to the concept of gender. In order to understand the obstacles, regarding sporting and social life, of LGBTQ

people, especially women, we need to examine Hungarian gender relations. Gender equality in Hungary is critically low. Patriarchal gender relations have a long history in Hungary, and therefore, gender inequality is not a new phenomenon (Federmayer, 1999); however, in the last decade, the gender gap has become one of the most severe within the EU. In fact, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2020), Hungary is among the 50 countries with the largest gender gap in the world and among the 10 with the worst political representation for women. It is the only European country ranked this low in these two categories.

Despite the seriousness of gender equality problems, the Hungarian political elite turns a blind eye to addressing them. In fact, in the past years, several attempts were made to silence the voices that could present scholarly evidence about Hungary's social and gender issues. The government's attack on academic freedom, especially regarding research focusing on gender or sexuality, condemned as "liberal", first targeted the Central European University which offers majors on gender and sexuality, and on other minority issues as well (Oppenheim, 2018). Then, the Center for Social Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences became the target (Mandiner, 2018). The latest development in this governmental campaign is that, just one year after its launch, Hungary's first gender studies major programme at a state university was shut down (Rekettye, 2018). Parallel to this, there have been conscious efforts to ridicule the very concept of "gender" (Huszár, 2021). In the words of Minister Zsolt Semjén, to talk about "gender", that is, the social embeddedness of one's sex is just as nonsensical as to assume the same about one's age: as if a middle-aged person could decide "by free will that they want to be 5 years old and go to kindergarten, or that they want to be 90 years old and get pension from the state" (HVG, 2018, para 1; translation by author). This demonstrates that, according to the current Hungarian government, sex is a biological and deterministic condition which has no social implications, and since, in their view, there is no such thing as gender, "gender inequality" makes no sense either.

It is clear that the situation of women and non-binary people poses serious challenges in Hungary. In order to understand what difficulties LGBTQ people, especially women and transgender people, face in Hungarian sports settings, we need to bear in mind this conservative and heteronormative discourse that imbues Hungarian culture, from language use to media and advertising (Szlávi, 2019).

## **LGBTQ and sports in Hungary**

Before examining the sporting opportunities of LGBTQ people in Hungary, it is essential that we have a brief overview of the sport system of the country. With the regime change of 1989, Hungary had to restructure its sport system from socialist state-regulation to free market economy, for which the country was not prepared (Perényi, 2013). After the new Civil Law and the Act on Sports (Republic of Hungary, 2000, 2004), the National Sport Federation, the National Leisure

Sport Federation, the Paralympic Committee, the Hungarian University Sport Federation, and the Hungarian Student Sport Federation were formed and started operating as umbrella organisations, managing funding for their respective areas (Perényi & Bodnár, 2015). The transition from central regulation posed challenges, and not even the new system could solve funding problems, which left their mark on Hungarian sports.

The Orbán government (elected for three terms so far, first in 2012) has been handling sports as a national priority, especially elite-competition sports, as a source of national pride. The 2011 Amendments of the Act on Sports appointed the Hungarian Olympic Committee as the main umbrella organisation, placing all other federations underneath (Perényi & Bodnár, 2015). Even if the sporting sector has started to receive a lot of governmental funding, leisure sports get only 1.9% of it (Hungarian Olympic Committee, 2012).

The introduction of the “social tax” (TAO), a new financial support system which provides tax reduction to companies who invest in select sports (such as football, water polo, or handball), brought fundamental changes in the Hungarian sports system. It was meant to make private funding possible, as well as bringing transparency into the field. Nevertheless, there is still a wide gap between the successfulness of Hungarian elite sports, with remarkable results at international competitions like the Olympics, and grassroots sports, with critically low numbers of people possessing sports memberships. As statistics point out, with the passing of age, Hungarian children and young adults become less likely to do sports (Kovács, 2012). Even if the number of for-profit sports facilities has grown, only 2% of the Hungarian population is a member of a fitness club, as opposed to the EU average, which is five times higher (European Commission, 2018).

To review what options and experiences LGBTQ athletes have in Hungary, we will analyse the results of a recent large-scale survey which was conducted in the EU specifically with the goal of exploring the sporting situation of LGBTQ people all over Europe (Menzel et al., 2018). Hungary was among the 28 countries participating in the Outsport project, which interviewed over 5,000 people about their experiences in doing sports as an LGBTQ person.<sup>2</sup>

In Hungary, the survey was filled out by 304 participants, whose average age was 27. According to the results, 62% of the Hungarian participants identified themselves as gay, 16% as lesbian, 13% as bisexual, and 9% as belonging to another sexual orientation, as opposed to a more balanced overall average in the survey (31%, 25%, 25%, and 5%, respectively; Menzel et al., 2018). As for gender, there was a similar imbalance among the Hungarian interviewees: 68% of the Hungarian participants were male, 24% were female, and only 4% were non-binary, contrary to a better EU average (37%, 47%, and 9%, respectively).

Besides the overrepresentation of cis and gay men, one of the main observations of the research regarding the Hungarian results was people’s resistance to join organised sports clubs, which comes as little surprise based on the history and present state of the Hungarian sporting system. Eighty percent of the Hungarian participants reported that, in the past year, they had been active at some sport,

mainly running, fitness, or strength training. That is, the majority of the athletes take part in individual sports, not team sports, unlike most countries in the survey. According to the results, those who do sports with other people reported to be members of for-profit organisations, such as gyms, more than of organised sports clubs, which is the other way around in most other countries in the research (Menzel et al., 2018).

Regarding the LGBTQ component of doing sports in Hungary, the survey concluded, on the one hand, that mainstream clubs are frequently chosen by athletes (83%) at the expense of LGBTQ sports clubs (9%). On the other hand, probably as a consequence of this, 45% of the athletes hide their sexual identity from their peers, as opposed to the 32% EU average. The large majority of the participants believe that homophobia is an issue in sports in Hungary (86%); however, transgender people and women are more often targets of atrocities, such as verbal assault, threat, or discrimination, than cis people or gay men (29% of transgender people versus 12% of cisgender people experienced physical-verbal threats, and 19% of lesbian women versus 11% of gay men, respectively; Menzel et al., 2018).

Even if most of the people are not organised in a club, having LGBTQ sporting events and sports clubs is the main ways for LGBTQ people in Hungary to do sports safely. Regarding LGBTQ sporting events, by far the biggest happening was the EuroGames in 2012, which took place in Budapest. It was an invaluable opportunity for LGBTQ people in Hungary, as well as for the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF), as this was the first time a large-scale LGBTQ sporting event was organised in Central Eastern Europe.

It took roughly three years for the organising team, primarily made up of volunteers, to prepare for the event, which was feared to attract the attention of the right wing, thus safety measures were the top priority. In the end, the six days of the event, including sporting competitions, conference talks, and cultural programmes, went by without major incidents but with a general euphoria on part of the LGBTQ community. EuroGames 2012 hosted 18 sports, such as football, handball, cycling, table tennis, wrestling, badminton, long distance running, track and field, volleyball, basketball, hiking, chess, tennis, dance, petanque, bridge, swimming, and synchronised swimming. The event, frequently called the “gay olympics” by the Hungarian press (Zsíros, 2011), attracted about 2,000 registered athletes, on top of the several hundred volunteers (Frigo, 2012). The event was supported by multiple embassies, such as the British Embassy Budapest, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Embassy of Germany Budapest, and the US Embassy Budapest, and a number of international companies, such as IBM and Morgan Stanley, as well as the local LGBTQ organisations and media, such as Háttér Társaság and Humen.

Besides EuroGames 2012, there have been few other opportunities for Hungarian LGBTQ athletes to feel the supporting presence of international sportspeople. BANG, the Budapest All Nations’ Games, is an international sporting event where LGBTQ athletes can compete in three sports: badminton, squash, and running (Atlasz Sportegyesület, 2019). It was started in 2016 and ran for 3 years,

but due to the pandemic, it had to be put to a halt in the past years. Its scale is not comparable to that of the EuroGames, as the average number of participants has been 70–80 people, almost exclusively men. In order to enhance diversity and increase its scale, it was proposed in 2019 that table tennis, targeting LGBTQ women, could be added as a new sport.

Given the scarcity of international LGBTQ sporting events in Hungary and the fact that the majority of LGBTQ athletes feel that homophobia is an obstacle in sports in this country (Menzel et al., 2018), a safe way for local LGBTQ people to do sports could be to join an LGBTQ sports club. In the next chapter, we will cover this topic.

## **Hungarian LGBTQ sport clubs**

In Hungary, there is only one officially registered LGBTQ sports club, which is volunteer-run Atlasz. Founded in 2004, Atlasz may be the sole sports club for the Hungarian LGBTQ community, but it is the biggest LGBTQ organisation in the country regarding the number of its members. In 2020, due to the pandemic, it had only 58 registered members, but in the past years, it averaged 80–90 members, with a record high of 109 in 2015.

With a yearly budget of 7.5 million HUF (roughly 21,000 EUR) gathered mainly from membership fees and occasionally from national grants,<sup>3</sup> Atlasz has 10 sports divisions: badminton, biking, fitness, hiking, running, squash, swimming, table tennis, yoga, and women's football. Apart from the usual weekly workout sessions, the association organises two annual sports camps for its members, multiple team buildings for its volunteers, and two sporting events when its athletes can do sports with other community members. BANG, as described earlier, is an international event whose aim is to bring together the athletes of Atlasz's most popular sports with other athletes from abroad. It is organised every September; unfortunately, due to the pandemic, it could not take place recently. The other yearly event of the association, the Atlasz Sports Day, is scheduled for April. Each of the sports divisions of Atlasz represents itself at the event, next to some additional sports and leisure activities. The average number of participants at this one-day event is 200 people, mainly from the local LGBTQ community and its allies. In 2020, it was planned to invite international clubs as well, but due to the pandemic, the event had to be cancelled.

In the last couple of years, Atlasz has also been involved in international collaborations, mainly to remedy one of its biggest challenges, the lack of diversity in its member base. Even if it was founded as an LGBTQ sports club, probably due to cultural norms and social relations, historically Atlasz could attract mainly gay men only. In 2015, there were only seven people out of the 109 members who were identified as female. The lack of lesbians and bisexuals, not to mention transgender people, urged the board members of the association to make conscious steps towards transforming Atlasz into a real "LGBTQ" sports club, not just a gay sports club. As a consequence, the leadership reached out to EGLSF, given that the phenomenon did not seem to be a uniquely local problem. In fact, EGLSF has been indeed dedicated to tackling the Europe-wide problem of women's and transgender people's scarcity

in sports.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, Atlasz was among the 11 sports associations from around Europe that launched CEEYOUSPORT, a two-year programme whose aim was to create a strong network among LGBTQ sports clubs, paying special attention to increasing the number of LBTQ women in sports (EGLSF, 2019).

Besides collecting good practices from international sports clubs, Atlasz's leaders made steps locally as well. At the end of 2017, István Manheim, one of the board members of Atlasz and also of EGLSF, reached out to the only two organisations that work towards the empowerment of LBTQ women in Hungary – Labrisz and qLit – proposing a cooperation, with the intention to increase gender balance and diversity at Atlasz. Founded in 1999, Labrisz is one of the oldest LGBTQ organisations in Hungary and the first one whose main aim is to promote the rights of lesbians and create safe spaces for them (Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, 2021). The organisation takes part in educational projects, creates publications and books, organises cultural events, and maintains lesbian “herstory” archives. The other organisation Atlasz reached out to is qLit, an online magazine and programme organising office specifically targeting LBTQ women (qLit Leszbikus\* Magazin és Programszervező Iroda, 2021). Established in 2017, qLit quickly gained popularity among the local community, due to their bilingual content and presence at the Europe-wide lesbian conference (EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community, 2021) and also within the international LBTQ community.

There was an immediate agreement that the underrepresentation of women in Atlasz and in sports generally was a problem and it had to be fixed. The way to go about it posed some challenges, though. Both Labrisz and qLit agreed that men's dominance in the discourse of sports is a key factor that deters women from entering, but the proposed strategies to increase the number of women were different. Labrisz wanted to establish an exclusive sports division, open only for women, while qLit argued that it was enough to promote a newly established division in specifically LBTQ channels, such as the social media sites of qLit and Labrisz, rather than in gay or general LGBTQ channels. As for which sport to pick, Labrisz proposed football, whereas qLit weighed sustainability to be most important and proposed table tennis, given that this sport requires only two players and a minimal level of athleticism as entry. Over the course of 2018, both collaborations took shape. In the spring, qLit established Atlasz's 9th sports division, table tennis, which was introduced with great success at the Atlasz Sports Day 2018. Labrisz launched “women's football” in the summer, which marked Atlasz's 10th sports division and the only one pronouncedly for women. At the end of the year, there was a marked increase in the number of women in Atlasz: in 2018, 33% of its registered members were female, which was a historic peak.

Unfortunately, women's football could not bring the change it was hoped to, as, roughly a year after its launch, it proved to be unsustainable in this form. The decline of this section was a result of both a low demand from women and a decreasing involvement of Labrisz. Atlasz still displays the team on its website and provides all help they can give, hoping that it can be revived someday.

Table tennis, however, has walked a strikingly different path due to the dedicated marketing involvement of qLit and a bigger interest of players and coaches.

By the end of 2019, it became the most popular sports division within Atlasz. Originally only one hour a week the club's timetable had to be changed repeatedly due to the overwhelming demand of the athletes. Before the pandemic, people could register and play for two hours every week, and the most enthusiastic ones could even sign up for two more hours of personalised table tennis training. What is more, the coach has proposed to start working out a plan to involve and bring together people interested in table tennis in the countryside, which received an especially warm welcome, given that most LGBTQ activities (sports and otherwise) are centred in the capital. It is not a coincidence that the club leaders of table tennis were chosen as the "division leaders of the year at Atlasz" in 2019.

Even if the table tennis division is open for women and men, LGBTQ people, and allies, due to qLit's conscious marketing, women remain in high numbers and in the majority. Table tennis has almost 150 members, about three-fourths of women, some of whom have even become registered members of the umbrella organisation, Atlasz. Next to the weekly occasions, table tennis tournaments are organised multiple times a year. Due to their success, Atlasz proposed that table tennis could be the fourth sport at the upcoming BANG sports festival. The leaders of table tennis agreed to participate in multiple international workshops of CEEYOUSPORT, in order to learn other organisations' good practices – and actually to spread their own success story about how to involve more women in sports (EGLSE, 2019).

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I attempted to give an overview of the Hungarian LGBTQ sports scene. It is a general tendency in Hungary that, due to the history and structure of the sport system, most people are reluctant to do sports in an organised way, in a club or federation. In addition, according to a recent survey, homonegativity is still a perceived experience in the sporting context for 86% of Hungarian respondents (Menzel et al., 2018). As a consequence, most Hungarian LGBTQ athletes engage in sporting activities alone, typically in sports that do not require company or the support of a club, such as running or fitness. Nevertheless, there are opportunities for the Hungarian LGBTQ community to do, individual or team, sports in a safe environment: Atlasz, the Hungarian LGBTQ sports club, is the biggest LGBTQ organisation in the country and the largest LGBTQ sports club in the region. It must be noted, though, that Atlasz has been struggling with an internal imbalance since its foundation in 2004: gay men significantly outnumber lesbians and bisexual women, not to mention transgender people. The organisation has made multiple attempts to increase its diversity, which has recently proven to be successful, at least regarding the increasing involvement of women. There is still a significant imbalance in the sexual orientation and gender identity of its athletes, but the ratio is improving.

The scarcity of transgender people, however, is a challenge yet to be addressed and successfully tackled. Their participation in Atlasz, or any sports association in the region, is particularly difficult, because they are bound to be in the minority no matter which sport division they join, which makes it harder both to enter and to

stay. The situation is even more complicated for trans women, because pronouncedly “women’s teams” may feel reluctant to welcome them to play and compete with them, due to the remaining biological differences (Finlay, 2021) which may intimidate certain athletes.

Scrutinising the aforementioned initiatives targeting the better involvement of women, the main lesson seems to be that, for the inclusion of marginalised groups, the first step might be to create a separate (but not necessarily exclusive) sports division within the umbrella association, to guarantee a safe space and an inclusive environment for them. This can only be achieved through the cooperation of dedicated leaders within the association who are willing to reach out to the underrepresented community and enthusiastic community members who are open to collaborate. Unfortunately, it is also a crucial takeaway of the previous case studies that sustainability is a serious issue in organisations that are operated by volunteers, especially in countries which are not receptive to and generous with LGBTQ issues, such as Hungary.

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to István Manheim, who has done so much for LGBTQ sports in Hungary. Without his efforts, the involvement of LGBTQ women would have been unimaginable. Secondly, I would like to say thanks to Dorka Szekeres, Eni Várhelyi, Kriszti Serfőző, and Edina Szanati for all their work done for the community. Last but not least, I could not have published this article without Amy Sotos invaluable support, for which I am immensely grateful.

## Notes

- 1 The underrepresentation of transgender people is also a serious problem in Hungary, but its thorough analysis falls outside the scope of the present paper due to lack of sufficient data.
- 2 Read more about the research and its results in Menzel et al. (2021) in the current volume.
- 3 In the last 16 years since its foundation, Atlasz won 1.44 million HUF (appr. 4,000 EUR) from governmental sources; however, none since 2017.
- 4 Read more about EGLSF in Wachter and Manheim (2021) in the current volume.

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# **Inclusion policy and the experiences of LGBTQ athletes in grassroots sports in Italy**

*Klaus Heusslein, Rosario Coco, and Ilaria Bibbiani*

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### **Introduction**

Italy has always been a country with very conservative values, which are still reflected in large parts of the population today. Indeed, there is still a large proportion of the population that either rejects all forms of non-heterosexual life or at least still harbours massive prejudices against LGBTQ people. According to the most recent Ipsos data (Ipsos, 2021), 56% of the population are still worried or scared by LGBTQ people. The last survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2020) showed that only 8% of LGBTQ people believed that their national government effectively combatted prejudice and intolerance against LGBTQ people. For the then EU-28, this figure was 33%. Also, in terms of coming out, the numbers in Italy were below the EU average: 39% of LGBTQ people were often or always open about being LGBTQ in Italy and 47% for the EU-28. Finally, 41% in Italy said that prejudice and intolerance have risen compared to 36%. These findings are reflected in the Rainbow Europe Index of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), which reveals the situation of countries in terms of LGBTQ rights and policies. In 2021, Italy had a score of 22% and was ranked 23 out of the then 28 EU members (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

### **Structure and character of the sports system in Italy**

When it comes to sport, we should consider certain historical aspects of the Italian system. Since the second part of the 19th century, the Italian model has been based on collaboration between the public and private sectors. Autonomous and voluntary-based associations, which have the role of guaranteeing the development of both grassroots and top-level sports, are a fundamental and central part of the Italian sports model.

The Italian sports system is characterised by two strands. One is related to the Italian National Olympic Committee (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano [CONI]). This public entity, which does not belong juridically to the state, has

responsibility for controlling and coordinating the Italian sports movement. Thus, it is shaped as a confederation of national sports federations and associated sports disciplines working in a synergistic relationship with the following sports organisations: 44 national sports federations and 19 associated disciplines, which organise professional sports and individual disciplines; 15 grassroots sports federations (Enti di Promozione Sportiva [EPS]), which organise amateur sports; and 19 meritorious associations (Associazioni Benemerite), which have specific goals related to social and sports-related issues (CONI, 2018). High-performance and professional sports, as well as partially competitive sporting activities, rely on CONI's affiliated national sports federations and associated disciplines, which are private and for-profit actors.

The other strand is linked to the realm of sport for all, including amateur sports activities and competitive sports. This is led by the regions, which, following the principle of subsidiarity, support multisport clubs and federations known as Sport Promotion Entities (EPS). The story of EPSs is linked to the development of political parties in Italy after World War II, when the main political forces started to extend their consensus strategy by supporting the creation of structured organisations aimed at the amateur sports sector (Borgogni et al., 2015). The EPSs created a parallel and complementary system by organising their own tournaments outside those organised by the sports federations associated with CONI. After years of campaigning for equal treatment with the high-performance system, the EPSs were finally recognised by CONI in 1986. This official recognition of the EPSs enabled them to receive public support. Until the *mani pulite* (clean hands) political scandal of 1992, the connection between the EPSs and their political origins was very strong. Subsequently, they gradually started to become independent, albeit remaining connected to their cultural heritage. Evidently, there is an important connection in Italy between grassroots sports and the religious and cultural background of the political parties.

In addition, we should consider that every political force in Italy has always had – with different levels – a background influenced by religious culture, even though some of them have publicly declared their secularity. Furthermore, during the 1990s, while conservative and Christian parties in Europe continued to be shaped in clear and defined organisations from which progressive forces were able to establish a clear difference, the Catholic political culture in Italy continued to be present in different forms among all the political forces, from the left- to right-wing parties, especially after 1992, following the disaggregation of the Christian Democracy party into several groups and think tanks. Sport has been one of the main social spaces affecting – and at the same time being affected by – this common and latent background.

Today, EPSs are private and membership-based entities associated with CONI and, at the same time, recognised by the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs as national associations promoting social activities. Indeed, the role of EPSs in providing sport for all and related social opportunities is fundamental within the Italian sports system. In general, EPSs, the national federations, and the

associated disciplines cannot be seen as completely separated systems, as they carry out – with different forms and priorities – sport for all, including social and educational initiatives and competitive activities. Moreover, it is clear that the Italian model is highly fragmented and decentralised from the state. In 2018, more than 7 million people were associated with EPSs (Osservatorio Permanente sulla Promozione Sportiva, 2018), while the number of athletes associated with the national federations and associated disciplines was around 4.5 million. In addition, sports clubs have a crucial role within the Italian sports system, and they are affiliated either to CONI's sports federations or to EPSs. In general, 57.3% of sports clubs in Italy are affiliated with EPSs (CONI, 2018). Generally, grassroots sports clubs are not-for-profit organisations that rely on volunteers. Throughout the years, the passion and commitment of thousands of volunteers have ensured the survival of sports clubs despite the continuous crises that these have faced, including loss of members due to the rise of informal and lifestyle sports, commercial sports competitors, and lack of funding from CONI and local authorities.

As already mentioned, football plays the biggest role in the Italian sporting landscape. The first LGBTQ sports clubs that were founded were in this sport. At least 20 gay and lesbian football teams are located in different Italian cities (mainly in the north and central parts of Italy, with only one team in the southern part [in Naples]). These teams are still not well integrated into the Italian mainstream football environment, as none of them plays in a local mainstream league. They often face discriminatory language towards their players and supporters. As a consequence, LGBTQ teams prefer in general to participate in LGBTQ-friendly competitions, such as regional LGBTQ football tournaments and European tournaments, such as the Barcelona, Frankfurt, and Paris tournaments that are organised each year.

Beyond football, since the beginning of the 2000s, further LGBTQ sports clubs in other disciplines have been founded, predominantly in amateur sports. The spread of these clubs has the same geographical imbalance as that of LGBTQ football clubs. Arcigay ([www.arcigay.it/en](http://www.arcigay.it/en)) reports more than 40 LGBTQ sports clubs in Italy, although other estimations consider that there could effectively be 60–70. Only very few of these participate in mainstream sports leagues or events. Positive examples in this regard include the swimming team Gruppo Pesce, the volleyball team Roman Volley, and the rugby club Libera Rugby Club. Gruppo Pesce and Roman Volley, in particular, have organised international amateur tournaments in their own disciplines, with hundreds of participants.

### **The situation and experiences of LGBTQ people in sports in Italy: Outsport**

Although homo- and transnegative incidents are worrying daily phenomena in Italian sports environments, the situation of LGBTQ persons in sports has not previously been systematically documented. Empirical evidence was obtained

from the international online survey conducted as part of the Erasmus+ -funded project Outsport, in which more than 5,500 LGBTQ persons from EU member states participated (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021). The Italian sample consisted of 625 self-identified LGBTQ persons with an average age of 26 years, of whom 89% were cisgender persons and 11% non-cisgender persons.

Of the Italian respondents, 59% reported that they had been active in sports in the year prior to the study, mostly in fitness sports (23%), swimming (16%), and soccer (15%). In Italy, the activity level was lower than the EU average (63%), and, accordingly, the proportion of Italian LGBTQ persons who had been active more than a year ago but were not currently active was higher (35%). Among the active respondents, individual sports (66%) were more common than team sports (32%). Of the active Italian respondents, 53% engaged in recreational sports, while 19% took part in competitive sport and an unexpectedly high proportion (29%) in high-performance sports. Almost half of the active Italian LGBTQ respondents were members of sports clubs, and a quarter of these were active in commercial sports environments.

With regard to homo- and transnegativity, some important findings of the Italian sample should be pointed out as follows:

- In Italy, less than one-third of the LGBTQ people surveyed reported coming out to almost everyone in their main sport (29%), while 41% remained completely closeted in their sports contexts. These findings indicated a more cautious way of dealing with one's own sexual orientation among Italian respondents compared to the total EU sample (36% open, 32% closeted).
- Independent of their own sports activity, 14% of the LGBTQ respondents felt excluded from certain sports of interest or refrained from doing them due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Among a number of sports, soccer (30%), boxing (23%), and dancing (17%) were mentioned most often in this context in Italy.
- An important indicator of homo- and transnegativity is the use of derogatory and discriminatory language. For the vast majority of Italian respondents, witnessing homo- and transnegative language is part of everyday life, whether in leisure activities (93%), in work/education (88%), or in sports in general (87%). With reference to the main sports activities of the respondents, the proportion was lower. Nonetheless, six out of ten active LGBTQ respondents said that they had experienced homo-/transnegative language in their specific sports contexts, and the vast majority of these (87%) felt offended and discriminated against as a result. Both findings were above the EU average, as 49% of the EU sample had witnessed homo-/transnegative language and 82% felt offended.
- Twelve percent of the Italian LGBTQ persons compared to 16% in the EU sample reported having personally experienced negative incidents in the year prior to the study. By far the most frequent were verbal insults (81%) and structural discrimination (77%), while other forms of discrimination, such as

e-bullying (15%) and physical violence (4%), were clearly below the EU average (cf. Hartmann-Tews et al., ch. 2).

- As in the case of forms of discrimination, the Italian findings differed from the EU sample with regard to the perpetrators. Most often, and above the EU average, team members (ITA: 60%; EU: 49%) appeared as perpetrators, while other sports participants (ITA: 44%; EU: 53%), particularly opposing team members (ITA: 8%; EU: 36%), were less often responsible for the discrimination experiences of LGBTQ athletes in Italy compared to the EU sample.
- A high proportion of the Italian LGBTQ persons (72%, compared to 46% in the EU sample) reacted in some way when they experienced discrimination: 43% left the situation, while 29% confronted the perpetrating person. While more than half of the EU-wide respondents did not react at all in cases of being harassed or discriminated against, this applied to only 28% of the respondents in Italy.
- When asked what would improve the situation for LGBTQ persons, the vast majority of the Italian LGBTQ respondents stated the need for more diversity training (84%; EU: 63%), while EU-wide, more open LGBTQ sports stars, as well as anti-homo- and transnegativity campaigns, were demanded far more often.
- Furthermore, there were also some differences in how homo-/transnegativity impacted gay men and women, as we will see when discussing differences regarding coming out in Italian male and female football. What emerged from the overall Outsport experience is that women face a more general stereotype in sport, namely, the idea that a woman who practises sport should necessarily be lesbian. This is a prejudice that also affects heterosexual women.

While the proportion of LGBTQ respondents who witnessed homo- and transnegative language was among the highest in the EU, the proportion of LGBTQ athletes who personally experienced negative incidents was among the lowest. Furthermore, the forms of discrimination differed significantly from the European data, as only verbal insults and structural discrimination occurred with a similar frequency, while all other forms were much less frequent. These differences may be related to the lower proportion of Italian LGBTQ athletes who were open about their sexual orientation and gender identity, which could lead to fewer personal negative experiences but a high awareness of homo- and transnegative language.

### **Policies and strategies of inclusion within the sports system**

The first important step of CONI towards LGBTQ inclusion was achieved in 2016. Following the change made by the International Olympic Committee to the Olympic Charter, CONI's statute was amended to address discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, this amendment has still not been adopted by the national federations and EPSs, except for the Italian Rugby Federation.

Regardless, there is still no legislation in Italy condemning hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity, although respective laws have been approved in all the other EU-27 countries (with the exception of Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, and the Czech Republic).

An interesting anecdote regarding the origins of LGBTQ activism in Italian sports was provided by Franco Grillini, historical leader of the Italian LGBTQ movement, during the international webinar *Sport and Equality in Europe*, promoted by Outsport staff in the Italian Association for Sport and Culture (Associazione Italiana Cultura Sport [AICS]) in November 2020 (Coco & Giuliano, 2020):

The Gay Games in San Francisco in 1982 are definitely a milestone in this regard, especially due to the fact that the IOC prohibited the association of the name “Olympics” with the word “Gay.” This is a striking example of institutional homonegativity, and it was absurd because the Olympics were born with a very strong homoerotic aura – athletes competed naked, and women could not participate. We reacted with irony: in 1984, in Bologna, we organized the “Sodomiadi,” proposing new, ironic and provoking sports disciplines such as the run on stilettos or the handbag throw.

During the 1990s and the 2000s, very few athletes decided to come out, and prominent stakeholders, such as Luciano Moggi, one of the most successful Italian football managers, claimed that LGBTQ people in sports did not exist, especially not in football. Against this backdrop, the first gay sporting experience in football began in the late 1990s with the founding of a team in Milan. The team participated in local mainstream league competitions without making public that the majority of its players were gay. In 1998, the team participated in the Amsterdam Gay Games football tournament. Although the team was dissolved some years later due to a lack of players, a new team, ICONS Milano, was founded in 2004. The name is an acronym for *Iniziativa Contro l’Omofobia Nello Sport* (initiative against homophobia in sport). ICONS Milano participated, together with players from Rome (who later founded a gay team in Rome), in the EuroGames in Munich in 2004. In January 2005, this team was the first to come out as gay team in a TV show on Sky Sport, one of the main TV sports channels in Italy.

### **Events that supported LGBTQ sports in Italy**

An important event, which boosted the development of the LGBTQ football network in Italy, took place in September 2012. This was the visit of Cesare Prandelli, at the time the coach of the Italian national football team, to the Finocchiona Cup, one of the first LGBTQ tournaments in Italy (Pasqua, 2012). After a few months, the association Gaynet launched its first short film on the topic, named *Fuorigioco*, taking inspiration from Prandelli’s declaration (Paone & Pagano, 2012) by the Italian TV journalist Alessandro Cecchi Paone that “also homophobia is racism”.



In the same year, activists in Bologna founded the Bugs Bologna club. In 2018, the Revolution Soccer Team from Florence, organiser of the Finocchiona Cup, promoted the first documentary about gay football players, named *Il calciatore invisibile* (the invisible player; Valente & Tortora, 2018). The Finocchiona Cup is one of a number of tournaments that have become regular in the last 10 years, starting to attract participants from other countries. These tournaments include *Un calcio all'omofobia* (Torre del Lago, Tuscany), *Copa Adelante* (Naples, Campania), *Toret Cup* (Turin, Piedmont), *Phoenix Cup* (Rome, Lazio), and, since 2018, the *OSN cup* (Lombardy; based on the names of three football teams in the city of Milan: Outsiders, Soccer, and Numb).

Another relevant practice in terms of intersectionality was launched in 2019 by the club *Lupi Roma Outsport* (inspired by the *Outsport* project). This was the organisation of *Colpi di Tacco*, a local tournament involving LGBTQ players and the refugee team *Liberi Nantes*.

An important event for LGBTQ sports in Italy occurred in 2015, when the weekly sports magazine *SportWeek* published on its cover a kiss by two male rugby players from *Libera Rugby Club*, which is cooperating with the Italian Rugby Federation. The impact was very high, as this is the most widespread sports magazine in Italy. Moreover, in July 2019, Rome hosted the *EuroGames*, which had a considerable resonance in terms of national media and endorsements by national institutions.

In terms of strategies, a special mention should be given to the municipality of Turin, which decided in 2021 to introduce in all sports centres managed by the public authority a poster with the *Rainbow Tips* (for athletes, teams, and trainers) published on the *Outsport* website ([www.out-sport.eu/rainbow-tips/](http://www.out-sport.eu/rainbow-tips/)).

Despite this, Italy had only four openly LGBTQ athletes at Tokyo 2020 (two of these came out during the event), which was the most rainbow Olympics of all time, with at least 185 LGBTQ athletes (*Outsports*, 2021a) and 34 LGBTQ Paralympic athletes (*Outsports*, 2021b). Furthermore, in the most popular sport, male football, still not a single Italian professional player has come out during his career. The situation in women's football is different, as the rise of the women's national football team in the 2019 World Cup gave much visibility to lesbian athletes. As a result, the number of well-known athletes who have done their coming out has increased significantly.

### **Initiatives by the main Italian sporting bodies**

In 2018, the *Outsport* project staff in Italy contacted representatives of EPS and national sports federations for interviews on the topic. Only the representatives agreed to be interviewed: AICS president Bruno Molea (lead partner of the *Outsport* project), Manuela Clayset, responsible for gender policy at Italian Union of Sports for All (*Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti [UISP]*), and Daniela De Angelis, Head of the Social Responsibility Department of the Italian Rugby Federation

(Federazione Italiana Rugby [FIR]). However, there was no response at all from CONI and other sports federations.

UISP and AICS were founded, respectively, in 1948 and 1962. They both count more than one million members. Similar to EPSs, they organise more than 20 amateur sports competitions at the national level. Talking about AICS's commitment to this field, Bruno Molea explained that his entity was the first EPS in Italy to create a specific department for LGBTQ issues:

We created a sector with specific tasks, for example, assisting those people – who maybe belonged to that “world” and did not have the courage to come out. The creation of this sector was fundamental for several people coming out in our association and was at the same time the result of the real propulsion of so many of our people, who at that point found themselves at home and said, well at this point we can freely declare ourselves, talk and continue doing the things we did before in a much more peaceful and quiet way. This was a step-up in quality, a step-up that allowed the coming out and the start-up of a new activity within the association.

In 2021, for the international day against homophobia (which nowadays also includes transphobia), AICS organised the first training course addressing coaches and local sports managers, based on the education through sport (ETS) methodology and the pedagogical manual developed during the Outsport project (Földi, 2019).

Manuela Claysset explained UISP's experimental policy recognising the alias careers of transgender athletes and underlined the role of CONI:

We set up the *Alias membership path* within our activities. I believe we are one of the few associations that have done this and our commitment be that of getting further stakeholders involved, starting with CONI. The fact that there are athletes who come out is very important. We should keep in mind that there are more and more situations where individuals and institutions have to deal with LGBTQ issues. We must really do more to create the conditions for coming out: if people come out, they must be free to do it. We have to prompt an environment that is welcoming and does not make a difference. This is still difficult.

She also referred to the necessity of a broader cultural change and the importance of language, as the results of the Outsport survey show the broad spread of homo- and transnegative language and the harmful impact it has on LGBTQ people.

With regard to specific sports, rugby has been the only professional federation in Italy that is continually cooperating with an LGBTQ sports club. It was the Libera Rugby Club that asked for cooperation, referring to the statutory changes

of CONI. From here, there were many follow-ups and several initiatives to fight against LGBTQ discrimination. As a consequence of this, the statutes of the Italian Rugby Federation have been adapted to CONI's statutory changes with regard to anti-discrimination policy based on sexual orientation.

The inclusion of LGBTQ people in sports is often linked to the existence of LGBTQ sports clubs and their advocacy activities. According to Massimo Rebelato, coordinator of Milano Pride Sport since 2018, LGBTQ people prefer to play in a dedicated sports club because they can be themselves. Milano Pride Sport encompasses 12 sports teams and 12 different disciplines and counts around 800 members. In July 2021, for Milano Pride week, they promoted a special event dedicated to coming out and sport, featuring the only sports and TV journalist in Italy who has come out as a gay, Paolo Colombo:

The huge problem is the lack of consideration we experience at the local level by sports institutions. We are considered just like a common multi-sport-organisation, and it's very hard to explain our political value. Even in a city like Milan, it's not easy to find partners and sponsors: despite having one of the most advanced Prides from this perspective, sport activities are still seen just as sport, and not like advocacy. We are trying to carry out joint actions with the Milano Pride committee and working to create a working group with regional EPSs and federations. Our goal is to make all the relevant stakeholders aware of our existence.

Alessio Patti, a 28-year-old local manager for the youth sector of the Italian Football Federation (Federazione Italiana Gioco Calcio [FIGC]) in Lombardy, who came out as a player, as a trainer, and finally as a sport manager, offered a further perspective on the topic:

Unfortunately, I'm aware that I'm really an exception. The main difficulty you must face is the fear of dealing with lack of consideration and marginalisation. But if you can break that wall, people are then forced to speak and deal with you. Once you are a trainer, the greatest fear is regarding the reaction of the parents. In my short experience as a trainer in the youth sector, I didn't have problems in this sense, but I ran a considerable risk. As a manager, the problem becomes even more sneaky. You can be able to create a "respect circle" around you – but it's not easy. However, if you are intending to make a career or get promoted, you will find for sure someone ready to use that kind of information against you. I came out also because I'm not interested in any career.

Although the Italian Football Federation provides training courses on inclusion and sport with reference to discrimination in general and racism, there are only few experts when it comes to sexual orientation, a topic that has been marginalised in the inclusion agenda.

## **Governmental activities to support diversity, inclusion, and anti-LGBTQ discrimination**

Over the past years, there has been a great debate in Italy about the reform of sport. This was set aside after the change in government in early 2021. However, in a webinar on the outcomes of the Outsport project, the former head of the Italian Department of Sport within the Ministry of Education, Giuseppe Pierro, declared that the government is ready to introduce “new codes of conduct to prevent harassment, gender violence, discrimination due to ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and personal beliefs” (Coco & Giuliano, 2020). The intention is that all sports organisations should formally adopt such a code of conduct. Apart from this, the Ministry of sport has put together a pool of experts from the fields of child protection and sport to develop a new policy for the protection of minors, with a particular focus on mistreatment and abuse. This pool of experts is still working under the new government, and in 2021, AICS was invited to contribute to the implementation of the new policy on child protection and sport based on its know-how in the field of LGBTQ issues developed during the Outsport project. Concerning the sport reform, Antonello Sannino, former president of Arcigay Napoli and co-founder of the LGBTQ sports club Pochos, the only LGBTQ sports association in the south of Italy, critically assessed the sport in Italy (Coco & Giuliano, 2020):

Sectors of society such as the military orders, the church, the school system and professional sport are all highly misogynistic environments. Sport in Italy has not had a real reform since the days of fascism. An effective sport reform must provide training and information to central agents such as board members of sports organisations but also trainers and teachers who can change the world of sport. We hope that this reform will meet these expectations.

## **Conclusion**

LGBTQ sports people in Italy are still facing a concerning high level of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While there has undoubtedly been progress in recognising the human rights of LGBTQ persons, it is common for LGBTQ athletes to frequently experience a variety of discrimination and harassment already at school, which hampers their self-confidence and athletic performance. Since homo- and transnegative attitudes in Italy are combined with a lack of adequate legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, it is even more important that sports organisations such as grassroots clubs and sports federations actively promote the fight against such forms of discrimination.

The example of rugby documents the important role of LGBTQ sports associations in activating change in traditional sports organisations. These associations

should, at this point, not only serve their own members but also seek more intensive collaborations with non-LGBTQ sports clubs, sports federations, and the National Olympic Committee. Organisations such as the European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF) as well as LGBTQ sports clubs in Italy have the necessary expertise in the field and can give meaningful and important support to sports organisations that do not operate in the field of LGBTQ sports as well as to individual athletes and sports clubs.

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# **Policies of inclusion and experiences of LGBTQ people in sports in the UK**

*Hugh Torrance*

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### **Introduction**

In little over 25 years, the landscape of equality (in sport) has shifted enormously in the UK. In 2021, the UK ranks ninth out of the EU-27 plus UK countries in the Rainbow Index of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA-Europe, 2021). Equality policies in sports bodies were scarce in the mid-1990s, yet it would be difficult to now find a prominent sport organisation which does not have some form of commitment to basic principles of equality and diversity in sport (Lusted, 2014); while, in excess of 250 sports governing bodies (Equality Standard in Sport, n.d.) have achieved the UK Equality Standard in Sport since it was launched in 2004. But to what extent does this apparent progress correlate with improved experiences for those who have been historically excluded and underrepresented within sport? And how much of this progress is applicable to LGBTQ people? This chapter will consider these questions through an examination of policy, practice, and experiences in a UK-wide context, and with a particular focus on Scotland, owing to the relevant expertise of the author as an LGBTIQ+ equality in sport practitioner in Scotland.

Assessing progress and the impact of equality policies in the UK, Spracklen et al. (2006) found evidence of little change beyond the surface with sport organisations particularly stubborn and resistant to structural or cultural change. More recently, international evidence suggests that significant barriers remain (Denison et al., 2021) while successive inquiries point towards abusive and damaging cultures within sport which support and reinforce prejudice towards equality groups such as in the form of homonegativity (Scottish FA, 2021).

### **Sport structures in the UK**

The organisation and governance of sport within the UK are complex with each of the nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, known as the “Home Countries”, having their own strategies and policies – and in some instances sports – and operating within differing legal and political jurisdictions. The unique constitutional arrangements of the Home Countries make it rather

difficult to offer a comprehensive picture of the sport system and the relationship between the state and sport in the UK, so this section will focus on more general aspects of sport policy in the UK.

The governance of the UK sport system is grounded in the principles of independence, partnerships, and collaboration between stakeholders at all levels, in particular between government, NGOs, and the wider voluntary sector of organised sport.

Overall, the sport policy framework is often described as entrepreneurial (Henry, 2009), which focuses on outputs. There have been various sport policy phases in the UK, as the government developed a growing and sustained interest in sport (Collins, 2008). The central concepts of UK sport policy have been to promote social welfare in the form of better health, education, and economic development, to use sport as a tool for social change, and, last but not least, national prestige by supporting elite sports. While these concepts have remained relatively unchanged, the priority between them has shifted with a consistent prioritisation of elite success and school/youth sport over community sport (Houlihan & Lindsey, 2013). More recent strategy suggests an attempt to rebalance these priorities again with the new Sport England strategy (Uniting the Movement) focusing on “transforming lives and communities through sport and physical activity” (Sport England, 2021, p. 1), and sportscotland Sport for Life pursuing a vision of “an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport” (Sportscotland, 2019, p. 3).

The development of sport in the last decades has seen a steady expansion in the role of the state in sport. The period from the mid-1990s onwards has also been characterised by the professionalisation of national governing bodies (Girginov, 2017) with a tendency of delegating public service responsibilities to the National Governing Bodies (NGBs).

The public responsibility for sport in the UK and England in particular lies with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport within the UK Government. However, each of the Home Countries has an established Sports Council in order to implement their individual strategies (Sport England, sportscotland, Sport Northern Ireland, and sportwales/chwaraeocymru), as well as a more recent UK-wide Sports Council (UK Sport). The Sports Councils are quasi-non-governmental organisations, which implies a degree of independence from the government, albeit they are predominantly funded by respective governments and accountable to them.

The non-governmental sport structures in the UK are characterised by national federations of individual sports (NGBs) and umbrella and cross-sectoral bodies such as the British Olympic and Paralympic Associations (BOA & BPA), and the Sport and Recreation Alliance. The Sport and Recreation Alliance is an independent umbrella organisation which represent about 320 sport and recreation bodies, comprising about 150,000 clubs and about 8 million memberships on the UK level (Girginov, 2017).

Governance of individual sports in the UK is not always straightforward. Some sports have National Governing Bodies in the Home Countries with no UK-level



federation such as in the cases of football or badminton. Other sports have federations in the Home Countries which are part of a UK-level federation such as in the case of cycling where Scottish and Welsh federations are part of the British federation. A distinction is made in Scotland where governing bodies are known as Scottish Governing Bodies (SGBs).

Funded NGBs and SGBs set up performance targets in consultation with the Sports Councils and have to undergo evaluation with regard to the fulfilment of these targets. Although all national sports federations in the UK are fairly independent from the state, the majority of their funding is derived from government funding, which in turn creates a kind of power-dependence relationship. In addition to state funding, the National Lottery is a significant funder of various projects of the individual Sports Councils.

In 2001, the Sports Council Equality Group (SCEG; About Sports Council Equality Group, n.d.) was established to bring the five Sports Councils together on matters of equality which are pertinent across the UK. The group agrees priority projects that enhance the equality work being carried out by individual Sports Councils, and they enable the sharing of expertise and good practice across the UK.

It is SCEG that leads the strategic development and implementation of the aforementioned Equality Standard for Sport. The Equality Standard is a framework for assisting Governing Bodies of sport to widen access and reduce inequalities in sport and physical activity from underrepresented individuals, groups, and communities. It is based around two broad themes of organisation development and services/sport development, and bodies can achieve one of four levels: foundation, preliminary, intermediate, and advanced. The framework helps Governing Bodies to develop action plans to tackle inequalities in their organisation and membership and educates them in their equality responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Standard was first launched in 2004, was updated in 2012, and has recently undergone a significant review, the results of which are yet unpublished.

Of the 250+ organisations that have achieved the Standard, less than 20% have achieved the intermediate level, with only eight having achieved the advanced level (Achievements, n.d.). Although it could certainly be said that the Standard has been a significant driver of the sports sector's engagement with equality organisations, community intermediaries, and minority communities, the difference it is making to equality, diversity, and inclusion practices and experiences within sports organisations is less clear (Dwight & Biscomb, 2018).

Equality advocacy and campaigning groups in the UK also argue that the pace of change in equality has not been experienced evenly across different minority groups. There is evidence to support this. The Equality in Sport Research (sports-scotland, 2020) from the Scottish Sports Council, sports-scotland, shows substantial disparity between different groups in most areas that the research measured. One such example is sports practitioner's self-rated level of understanding of different equality characteristics with only 12% rating their understanding of gender

reassignment strongly. The next lowest characteristic was deafness at 20%, religion and belief at 22%, care experienced young people at 24%, and then sexual orientation at 27%. The other end of this spectrum has age at 60% and gender at 54% (sportsotland, 2020). This could be viewed as what was described by Smith et al. (2012, p. 6) as a “hierarchy of equalities”, where there was a tendency among authorities and sports bodies to focus on other equality strands such as disability, gender, or ethnicity while taking no specific action on sexual orientation or gender identity (Smith et al., 2012).

## **LGBTQ people and sport in Scotland**

The lead department within The Scottish Government responsible for national sports policy is Active Scotland. They co-fund and work with the national sports agency, sportsotland. Since 2015, both have changed their strategies, and both have made significant changes to national approaches to equality. Both bodies include explicit equality commitments within their strategies: The Active Scotland strategy “A More Active Scotland” states “our commitment to equality underpins everything we do” (The Scottish Government, 2018, p. 11); while the sportsotland strategy “Sport for Life” states “our commitment to inclusion underpins everything we do” (sportsotland, 2019, p. 5).

The Scottish Government has also introduced an Equality Evidence Finder, while sportsotland has produced updated equality outcomes, which focus on improving the understanding and awareness of the needs of equality groups and the need to embed equality and inclusion. Research from sportsotland (2020) acknowledges that it is a challenge to sports bodies to understand how the different equality ambitions should be realised and the connections between them such as the Equality Standard for Sport, Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, and the Sport for Life strategy.

Having LGBTQ people included in national priorities is a relatively recent shift. Out for Sport (Smith et al., 2012) was Scotland’s first research into LGBT people’s experiences in Scottish Sport, with over 1,700 participants. Headline findings were that 79% of people thought that there was a problem with homonegativity in sport, 66% thought that there was a problem with transnegativity in sport, 62% of people had witnessed either homonegativity or transnegativity takes place in sport; and only 5% of people felt that enough was being done to tackle it. The research found that little was being done specifically to increase participation among LGBT people or indeed to tackle homonegativity or transnegativity; that LGBT people continue to face barriers to participating in sport which has a negative impact on the numbers of LGBT people taking part in sport; and that little or no specific action was being taken by the Scottish Government and Scottish sports bodies to address this.

At the point where the research was launched, LEAP Sports Scotland (<https://leapsports.org/>) had existed for two years, having been established as an umbrella body for LGBT sports clubs. A number of the recommendations especially community engagement and development, and development of events to increase

sports participation, were areas that could be accelerated quickly and therefore Scottish Government agreed to provide funding for LEAP Sports to develop and lead some of the work.

Two of the notable recommendations to have been implemented from the Out for Sport research (Smith et al., 2012) were establishing a National Coordinating Group and developing a national action plan to address LGBT-sport. The group was first established in 2013 and it published its first action plan a year later. This was an important step to actually raise the importance of the topic and the agenda with sports stakeholders. Nowadays, it is the regular opportunity for Scottish Government/Active Scotland to come together with the national sports agency, some of the sports-governing bodies, and also equality NGOs. Now known as the National LGBTI Sports Group, it is chaired by LEAP Sports Scotland, and it has a framework for action rather than an action plan.

Across this period, there has also been a significant growth in voluntary sports clubs for LGBTQ people in Scotland from six identifiable clubs in 2010 to 41 in 2020. While the majority of these clubs are sport-specific, such as running, football, and rugby, also included within this number are multi-sport clubs or initiatives where groups come together by virtue of their shared identity but then may participate in any number of different sports or physical activities. Examples of this include OutdoorLads for gay, bisexual, and trans men who get together to enjoy adventures and activities, and Trans Active, a sociable sports and exercise group in Glasgow for trans people.

## **Experiences of LGBTQ people and athletes in UK**

The relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport in Europe (Menzel et al., 2019) was the first ever research study of its kind to be conducted at European level, forming the significant and central part of the Erasmus+ -funded project Out-sport ([www.out-sport.eu/](http://www.out-sport.eu/)). The survey focused on the experiences of LGBTQ people. The total sample was 5,524 persons and the share of each country's respondents of the total sample approximately corresponds to the share of each country's inhabitants of the total EU population. With regard to the UK, the sample comprises 502 LGBTQ persons (England: 258, Scotland: 233, Northern Ireland: 34, and Wales: 34). Within the UK sample, 14% of the respondents were transgender people, a proportion which is significantly higher than in the EU sample (8%). Sixty-four percent of the respondents were active in sports in the 12 months prior to the survey. They were predominantly active in recreational sport (52%) followed by competitive sport (38%) and high-performance sport (10%) – compared to the EU sample, there are significantly more LGBTQ respondents involved in competitive sports.

Some of the important findings from the survey with regard to UK data were as follows:

- The dominant setting of sport involvement in the EU was organised sport clubs (40%) – a proportion which was even higher in the UK (UK: 46%,

England: 44%, and Scotland 51%). Twenty-six percent of UK athletes who practiced their sports in an organised setting (e.g. voluntary sport club and commercial venue) chose a specific or explicitly LGBTQ-friendly setting. This proportion is higher compared to the EU as a whole (18%) and it is a particularly preferred setting in Scotland (31%).

- Perceptions of homonegativity as a problem in sport were higher in Scotland (94%) than in England (90%) and the UK (92%) as a whole, which in turn was higher than the EU average (88%). The same holds true with regard to the perception of transnegativity being a problem in sport: these were higher in Scotland (94%) than in England (86%) and the UK (89%) as a whole, which in turn was the same as the EU average (89%).
- Participants were asked about the frequency of witnessing homo- and/or transnegative language in sport, in leisure activities apart from sport, and in work/education settings. The data indicate that they were witnessed in all three settings to more or less the same degree, with a slight bias to a higher prevalence in other leisure activities than sport. In contrast, in Scotland, there is a tendency of homo-/transnegative language being witnessed more often in sport than in other leisure or work activities – the opposite of the EU as a whole.
- Participants were asked about their general openness with regard to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Forty percent of the respondents in the EU as a whole answered that they don't care if people know compared to 58% in Scotland and 52% in the UK as a whole. Those trying to hide it in most contexts were lowest in Scotland at 5% (UK 6%) compared to 14% in the EU. Similar patterns of openness were found when asking about their most important sports contexts with 65% of Scottish participants and 53% of English participants being out to almost everyone, compared to the EU average of 36%.
- When asked whether they felt excluded from some sports or which they stopped participating as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity, 31% of Scottish participants and 29% of English indicated "they do", both notably higher than the EU total of 19%. Scottish respondents were most likely to feel excluded from football (41.2%), rugby (17.6%), and swimming (13.7%).
- In the EU, 12% of LGBTQ athletes reported personal negative experiences within their main sport in the previous 12 months. In the UK as a whole, the proportion is higher (16%).
- With regard to awareness of organisations or individuals to get in touch to in cases of discrimination or harassment, LGBTQ athletes in UK and in particular in Scotland report more contact points than the EU average. In contrast to the EU average, they name far more often local sports organisations (UK: 29%, Scotland: 30%, England: 34%, and EU: 18%) and regional or national sport organisations (UK: 28%, Scotland: 34%, England: 26%, and EU: 13%).

- When asked what they would consider to constitute appropriate measures to tackle discrimination and/or harassment in sport, based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, Scottish respondents chose high-profile anti-homonegativity/anti-transnegativity campaigns as their top answer (74%), closely followed by encouraging more sports stars to come out (72%), while based on the average from the EU, both measures were equally preferred.

The Outsport findings show that the average Scottish LGBTQ person is more likely to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in and out of sport, is more likely to feel excluded from particular sports, and is more likely to have had negative experiences in sport, than the average EU LGBTQ athlete. Scottish LGBTQ people are also more likely to be playing sport in an organised club (51%) than either the average UK (46%) or EU (40%) athlete.

The general Outsport findings (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021) clearly highlight that the experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ people are not the same, which holds true for the UK sample as well. Homogenising their experiences or identifying interventions, which group all of these communities together, is also problematic, supporting the findings of other researchers such as Caudwell (2014).

Experiences of trans people in particular from the Outsport data are especially concerning with trans people more likely to witness and experience negativity across all the measures. Trans people have been facing increasing hostility in the UK with Stonewall (2021), documenting an especially worrying increase in transphobic violence, and Trans Actual (2021) highlights the impact of trans-negative mainstream and social media being felt by over 90% of trans people. It is within this societal context that SCEG has published their long-awaited review into Transgender Inclusion in Domestic Sport in the UK (SCEG, 2021). The guidance gives sports bodies an opportunity to introduce blanket exclusions for trans people from the female category in a move that leading equality and sports advocacy groups across the UK have widely condemned as regressive and believe it could lead to reductions in participation and inclusion of trans people (LEAP Sports, 2021a).

## **Now and next in Scotland for LGBTQ issues in sport**

The data from the Outsport survey taken in conjunction with Smith et al. (2012) and the practice data that we have available give us a consistent picture of LGBTQ discrimination and exclusion in sport in Scotland. Despite this, there still appear to be barriers when it comes to accepting the need to address issues of equality, when prioritising action for LGBTQ people specifically, and collaborating on solutions.

While some Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport were positive about the focus on equality, some felt that there was now too much focus on equality and

some felt that the focus was driven by other organisations. There was also a concern that for some clubs, being “open to all” was seen to be enough.  
(sportsScotland, 2016, p. 5)

This finding is supported by the experience of LEAP Sports Scotland, which found, in an analysis of training provided to sports bodies, that a barrier to addressing this disconnect was that many trainees felt that their sport or organisation was already equal, non-discriminatory, and/or accessible to all. Thus, training often represented an implicit criticism or accusation of exclusionary or discriminatory practice to this group. Similar barriers were identified by Phipps (2020) when examining student sport settings in the UK.

Equality charters in sport can be useful tools to support sports bodies through change processes, and Scotland currently has two such specific examples for LGBTQ equality in sport. The Scottish LGBT Sports Charter (Equality Network, 2015) was developed in consultation with sports-governing bodies, and those who sign it are asked to commit to five principles for working together to take visible steps to remove barriers to LGBT people taking part, enjoying, and succeeding in sport. The Charter was developed following a recommendation of the Out for Sport research (Smith et al., 2012), and it was very well received among the sports sector following its launch. The Manifesto for Inclusive Physical Education (LEAP Sports Scotland, 2017) is a similar commitment-based framework co-produced by young people and asking schools to commit to the young people’s requests to ensure more LGBTI-inclusive physical education. The Manifesto has been very well used in school settings around the country. Both tools now exist as static frameworks with no ongoing resource to support their implementation, mainly used to symbolise intent or as a self-directed audit tool. Investment would be required to utilise the implementation potential of either tool, but also to develop them as whole transformation programmes rather than simple audits, which Lusted (2014) cautions against.

Successive studies highlight the significance of LGBTQ sports and physical activity groups in the provision of sports and physical activity to LGBTQ participants (Mock et al., 2019) and to their impact of health and well-being outcomes (Hunter & Boyle, 2020), and there are currently 41 of these groups in Scotland. This is more acutely observed through the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (LEAP Sports, 2021b). The relevance of these groups and organisations for LGBTQ involvement in sport is reflected in the Outsport survey as well – compared to the EU average, a high number of athletes participated in specific or LGBTQ-friendly settings.

A health-needs assessment in the two largest health boards in Scotland found that LGBTQ people frequently cited these sports clubs – most being seen as explicitly inclusive of all LGBTQ identities – as examples of good practice. For those interested in the sports, these clubs can offer a much sought-after opportunity to connect and socialise with other LGBTQ people away from commercial LGBTQ spaces such as bars and clubs (Leven, 2020). The development of community

sports clubs and initiatives in Scotland has increasingly diversified along specific identity lines to take account of the differing needs among the broader community such as the aforementioned Trans Active, a physical activity and multisport group specifically for transgender people.

As a whole, the findings of the Outsport project highlight a picture of LGBTQ inclusion in sport in Scotland, which is one of both community and sports sector-led efforts to tackle exclusion. At the same time, the findings indicate the persistence of individual, cultural, and systemic barriers to LGBTQ inclusion in sport, thus further evidencing the recognisable disconnect between national level policy and sport experience, as well as the limited impact return of current equality initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

Equality priorities within sports bodies need to shift away from individual targets and outputs towards strategic and integrated work. Spaaij et al. (2020) highlight sport policies that focus exclusively on increasing participation among diverse and underrepresented groups, for example, rarely lead organisations to alter discriminatory practice. As knowledge and awareness levels have improved and the social justice case has been more strongly recognised, our efforts need to shift towards programmes of attitudinal and behaviour change, and look towards programmes of work that deepen our understanding of how change can be achieved, such as engaging with debates about power relations and equality (Turconi & Shaw, 2021).

Increased self-organising among LGBTQ athletes, fans and communities are driving positive changes within sports bodies and clubs, strongly speaking to both the business case and social justice case for embracing equality. This can most strongly be seen in the examples of the growth in industry groups (examples include Athletics Pride Network and Pride in Water), and in the case of the rapid expansion of football fan groups supported by advocacy and campaign groups, Pride in Football and Football v Homophobia. These are supported by increased collaboration and strengthened work of the not-for-profit LGBTQ sports advocacy organisations across the UK. LEAP Sports (Scotland), Pride Sports (England), and LGBT Sport Cymru (Wales) regularly collaborate in regard to policy and advocacy work and, in recent years, have held their first joint conferences and workshops at UK level.

There are also some areas where we need to do further research, such as in the following two examples. First, despite the shift towards more professionalised governance of sport within the UK, it is volunteers who continue to be responsible for organising and leading much of the grassroots community sport that is enjoyed across the country. Relatively little attention has been given to how equality priorities are embraced and implemented at this level, and to the role which volunteer leaders play in resisting shifts in diversity (Spaaij et al., 2020). Second, there are especially worrying findings from the Outsport report detailing the nature and

extent of negative experiences in sport settings. More in-depth work is required to better understand LGBTQ people's experiences of physical violence within sport and where behaviour has physically crossed the line (Menzel et al., 2019).

This chapter has drawn attention to the gap between apparent and suggested progress versus continued experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. Storr et al. (2021, p. 2) highlight a similar situation in Australian practice, as they present this gap as an illusion of inclusion and “challenge the suggestion that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia have significantly and meaningfully reduced”.

Finally, we need to push our sports bodies towards action to address gaps and findings, which already exist (Denison et al., 2021). Equality and Sport Research (sportscotland, 2016) found that while there is some evidence around sexual orientation and sports participation, there is a need to develop further knowledge and understanding around transgender persons' participation in sport. Equality in Sport Research (sportscotland, 2020, p. 91) notes some evidence relating to sexual orientation but highlights a lack of “substantial quantitative national data on gender reassignment and sport”. This interesting comparison provides us with an example that helps us to identify that rather than continuing to ask ourselves where the gaps and the issues are, we ought to start taking more concrete action to address them.

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# **LGBTQ people in physical activity and sport in Spain**

Research, sport policy, and inclusion

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## **Introduction**

Physical activity and sport (PAS) improve people's quality of life and reduce many negative health outcomes. Its benefits are especially important for populations at high risk of social exclusion, since the health of these people tends to be worse than the rest of the population (Morgan et al., 2007; Van Bergen et al., 2019). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) persons are a socially excluded group that suffer discrimination and harassment (Devís-Devís et al., 2017). For these people, PAS can be a way to improve their well-being and quality of life in physical, psychological, and social aspects. Some studies suggest that PAS and especially queer or LGBTI sports teams can create supportive environments for this population (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012).

Although PAS can be an important part of many LGBTQ people's lifestyle and provide personal satisfaction, the international literature has identified several barriers to LGBTQ people's engagement in PAS, homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity, the most pervasive (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). Negative experiences, discrimination, verbal harassment, social isolation, loss of support, and negative attention from the mass media are some of the situations that LGBTQ people suffer in these contexts (Barber & Krane, 2007; NUS, 2012; Symons et al., 2017).

There is a scarcity of studies exploring LGBTQ people's PAS participation and experiences. The objective of this chapter is to present the PAS panorama for LGBTQ people in Spain. To do so, in this chapter, we first introduce the Spanish legal framework and some initiatives and measures adopted to improve LGBTQ people's inclusion and participation in PAS. Second, relevant Spanish studies on this topic are introduced to contextualise the situation of this population, and we finish off with some partial results of our current research and the future lines of actions necessary to promote their access and engagement in PAS.

## **The Spanish sports system**

Spain has been a democratic member state of the European Union since 1986. The country has 46 million inhabitants in 19 Autonomous Communities (Regional

Governments) which have their own political representatives and a variable degree of autonomy, and legislative, executive, and administrative powers, also regarding sport (Llopis-Goig, 2017).

National sport policy reflects the decentralised political structure of Spain. Some sports competences are managed at a national level by the High Council for Sports (Consejo Superior de Deportes [CSD]), which is an autonomous institution attached to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and exercises the powers of the national government in sport and the functions granted by the National Sports Act (Organic Law, 10/1990). These functions include regulating national and international competitions, ensuring national sports associations, and recognising types of sport or national sport federations, especially in high-level sport. Other sports competences belong to the Regional governments, such as regulation and organisation of sports at different levels, management of sports services, or recognition of regional sport federations and local clubs (Lera-López & Lizalde-Gil, 2013). Lastly, local administrations are responsible for other competences such as the promotion of sporting leisure activities for citizens, the creation, management, and maintenance of sports facilities or the support of local sports clubs.

The consolidation of the Spanish sport system in the last decades has increased sports participation from 22% in 1975 to 46.2% in 2015 (CSD, 2019; Llopis-Goig, 2015), and now PAS is widely practiced in Spain for its social and health benefits. According to the latest sports survey carried out by the High Council for Sports (CSD, 2019), 53.5% of the population has a high level of training and 79% practice various specific sports. There are a total of 3,866,867 sport-federated licenses and 67,512 sports clubs.

## **Sports policy and initiatives with regard to inclusion of LGBTQ people in Spain**

Spain was one of the first countries in the world to legislate on the protection of LGBTQ rights, the third country to legalise same-sex marriages in 2005, and the first to give equal adoption rights to same-sex couples (Organic Law, 13/2005). Spain also regulated the rectification of the registration of sex and name in the Civil Registry of adult trans people in 2007 (Organic Law, 3/2007), and trans children and adolescents in 2018 (Instruction October, 23/2018).

According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) 2021 Report, Spain holds one of the first positions (the seventh) in Europe in equal human rights in the promotion of laws for the elimination of all forms of LGBTI discrimination (ILGA-Europe, 2021). This is closely linked to one of the objectives of the United Nations (UN), which is to eradicate discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Despite these legislative advances, Spain does not yet have national laws to protect the rights of the LGBTQ community. However, draft laws for trans and LGBTQ people are actually in the process of being debated, and several autonomous communities offer legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

In the realm of sport, there has recently been increased interest in fighting hate crimes against LGBTQ negativity. On June 6, 2020, the Spanish Government added the eradication of LGBTQphobia in sport to Organic Law 19/2007 (Organic Law, 19/2007), which underlines protection against any kind of violence, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance in PAS. This modification was an important step in recognising the existence of homonegativity, binegativity, and transnegativity in these contexts and aimed to create an inclusive and respectful environment in PAS. In order to eliminate situations of discrimination, intimidations, and hostility towards LGBTQ people and guarantee the principle of equal treatment in sport, this law prohibits the introduction, display, or production of banners, symbols, or other signs with messages that incite violence against this population. It also promotes the use of inclusive language and good awareness-raising practices in sports clubs and federations with respect to sexual orientation, sexual identity, or gender expression. Apart from the previously mentioned legislation, many activists have contributed individually or collectively for decades in favour of the visibility of LGBTQ people in sport and have created associations and sports clubs for this population.

In order to improve tolerance towards sexual minorities and defend their rights in sport, some sports institutions have started offering programmes and guidelines to athletes, coaches, sports entities, and society in general. The CSD and the General Council of Physical Education and Sport (Consejo General de la Educación Física y Deportiva [Consejo COLEF]) (CSD & COLEF, 2019) have published a guideline especially for sports entities, professionals, coaches, and PE teachers to facilitate the inclusion of these groups and raise awareness. In addition, there have been some initiatives on the International Day against LGBTQphobia in sports. The non-sporting association Colegas (2017) launched a campaign for the visibility of LGBTI athletes in which different Spanish sports institutions (CSD, Spanish Olympic Committee, Spanish Paralympic Committee, and the Association of Spanish Footballers) joined for the first time. In February 2021, the CSD published a video in which the president and several elite athletes from all over the country talk about the need to promote equality and inclusive sport free from discrimination. Additionally, some city councils have developed initiatives to show their commitment to diversity. For instance, the City Council of Valencia presented its candidacy to host the Gay Games, the largest LGBTQ sporting event in the world that host around 12,000 athletes. The city of Valencia will host this competition in 2026.

The most important Spanish institution in LGBTI sport is the Iberian Sports Association LGBTI (Agrupación Deportiva Ibérica LGTBI+ [ADI]) founded in 2009 and composed of Spanish and Portuguese LGBTI sports entities. ADI is an independent entity from the CSD and from the Spanish-federated sports system. Its work focuses especially on LGBTQ athletes' visibility, the eradication of homonegativity, and the promotion of affective-sexual diversity in sport. Currently, there are 18 LGBTQ Spanish sports clubs linked to ADI in eight Autonomous Communities. Some of these are members of the European Gay and Lesbian Sports

Federation (EGLSF) and one of them, Samarucs, in the International Federation of Gay Games. A relevant club is the Panteres Grogues in Barcelona, which has more than 1,000 athletes and has an activist trajectory of almost 30 years.

The ADI LGBTQ clubs prepare numerous activities against discrimination, offer more than 30 different sports to be practiced recreationally and competitively in safe contexts, perform actions for equality between women and men, and instruct sports federations on diversity. The clubs also hold sports competitions such as the Madpoint Club and its Madrid Tennis Open, recognised as one of the 100 most important events in the Spanish capital and named as the best LGBTQ tennis tournament event in the world for four years.

In 2018, the ADI proposed a guideline to create inclusive sports for LGBTQ people. This is an important tool that shows the steps to take to create, organise, and consolidate LGBTQ sports groups (ADI, 2018). A recent important achievement was the agreement of the ADI with leading Spanish First Division Soccer clubs, such as the Fundación Cádiz C.F., to adopt the aim of eradicating discrimination in this sport.

The ADI has also promoted the creation of the National Sports Observatory for Diversity (NSOD), inaugurated in November 2020, to improve the safety of LGBTQ persons in PAS. It collects complaints on sports discrimination and violence that people submit through an accessible online questionnaire. The aim of this institution is to reflect a more faithful image of the reality of situations of discrimination, abuse, harassment, or violence that a person may suffer due to their gender identity or expression and/or sexual orientation in sport.

Another important organisation, Deporte y Diversidad (Sport and Diversity), was set up in 2017. This entity integrates all LGBTQ sports clubs in the Autonomous Community of Madrid with the aim of contributing to the creation of a sports model that promotes LGBTQ visibility and education of the general population to raise awareness of social inclusion. This association has organised two congresses with leading LGBTQ people from the world of sports at national and international levels.

## **Literature and research regarding LGBTQ persons engaged in PAS in Spain**

There is little empirical data about LGBTQ and their participation and experiences in PAS in Spain. A very recent and useful study is part of a larger Outsport project on LGBTQ athletes (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Menzel et al., 2021). This project raises awareness about discrimination in sport based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity in 28 European countries, including Spain. The study has a sample of 233 LGB Spanish women (62.7%) and men (37.3%). Related with participants' sports habits, the analysis reveals that more than half of them (52.8%) were physically active. Many participants practiced sport in sport clubs (47.2%) and for-profit organisations, such as fitness centres (20.3%), while a minority of them preferred non-organised contexts and practiced sport

individually (13%) or in informal groups (8.9%); 59.8% of the sample performed recreational sports compared to 31.8% of participants who compete and 8.4% who practice high-performance sport. Regarding the degree of participants' openness and experiences of discrimination in PAS, it is noteworthy that almost half of the sample (49.3%) tried to hide their sexual orientation in some life contexts, 42.7% was only visible in sport to some people, and 31.1% was visible to no one. This study also evidences that 86.9% have not suffered bad experiences in sport and 78% have not witnessed the use of any homophobic or transphobic language in this context. However, participants consider that there is a big or quite a big problem of homophobia (69.5%) and especially transphobia (89.7%) in sport.

Apart from this study, some researchers from Spain have made great efforts to contribute to this topic with several publications over the last ten years. Two stages can be distinguished in this area of Spanish research: the first was characterised by publications focused on knowing attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of non-LGBTQ people regarding sexual diversity. Recently, research on the levels of tolerance towards sexual and gender diversity in sport among those Spanish people who actively participated in or followed sport of some kind was published by a research group from Seville University (Piedra et al., 2017). According to this study, tolerance and inclusivity are not deeply rooted in Spanish society, and a pseudo-inclusive stage still prevails in Spain in which there is no full recognition of sexual and gender minority groups in sport. This result is consistent with findings from another study on the attitudes of tolerance of a group of Spanish soccer players in which the results showed that they have medium levels of rejection towards sexual diversity (Velez & Piedra, 2020).

Recently, two studies were published on beliefs of PE teachers on homophobia and masculinities (Piedra et al., 2014, 2016) and homonegativity in PE (Piedra et al., 2013). The findings of these studies suggest that while most teachers define themselves as inclusive and are quite aware of the existing heterosexist discrimination in their classes, very few of them take action to change this discrimination and also unconsciously reproduce stereotypes and traditional images of masculinity and femininity. In contrast, students state the lack of consciousness of teachers regarding homophobic behaviour in classes and recognise experiencing or perceiving this behaviour in a generalised way.

The outcomes generated by these studies can help sport managers and politicians to create effective measures to reduce homonegativity and heterosexism in the field of PAS. It is equally relevant to solve these structural problems in education and physical education, since some studies show the importance of positive and quality early learning experiences for lifelong engagement in PAS (see Kirk, 2005).

In the second stage, researchers focused on approaching LGBTQ people's experiences in PAS. In the field of team sports, Vilanova and Soler, researchers from the University of Barcelona, examined the experiences of the first-ever

openly gay elite athlete in Spain, a water polo professional and his coming out process (Vilanova et al., 2020). His story has similar aspects to other athletes who are “out” abroad such as Martina Navratilova, Rosie Jones, Megan Ripanoe, Gareth Thomas, Orlando Cruz, or Thomas Beattie, among others and other stories reported in the literature (Anderson, 2002, 2011). In college, he felt very confused about his identity due to an absence of an affirming environment and gay colleagues or role models. After meeting other gay people with a more positive perspective of their homosexuality, he felt confident enough to come out to his family and friends. Before coming out to the rest of society, he lived through a period of living his homosexuality naturally without either hiding or explicitly telling other people about his sexuality. In the sports context, his experiences of coming out were more positive than he expected, receiving even more respect from his teammates than before. However, though he did not suffer physical aggression or harassment, he is frequently exposed to antigay language from heterosexual companions and opponents that he had not perceived as homophobic.

Some scholars of the “Physical Activity, Education and Society” (Grup d’investigació Activitat Física, Educació i Societat; AFES) research group of the University of Valencia, headed by Professor Devís-Devís, have published a set of papers on trans persons’ experiences in PAS that explored their PAS participation through the socio-ecological perspective and analysed their experiences before and after gender disclosure (see Devís-Devís et al., ch. 15; López-Canada et al., 2020, 2021). These studies revealed that many trans persons negatively experience gender segregation of places and activities, such as changing rooms and traditional team sports that reinforce hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity. Some participants stopped the activity, and especially after gender disclosure, many of them preferred to be involved in nonorganised PAS and individual activities instead of organised PAS and team sports.

Understanding the experiences of LGBTQ people, particularly in relation with their coming out and transition processes, is essential to designing more appropriate policies from an LGBTQ person-centred perspective. Considering the voices of LGBTQ people when creating and implementing programmes and actions is paramount to responding to their needs and attending their difficulties in PAS.

In order to promote the literature and research regarding LGBTQ and PAS in Spain and to resolve the historical omission of this topic in the field of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences, the main Spanish centres that began the research, education, and raising public awareness of LGBTQ and sports in this country, including all the researchers mentioned earlier, created a research network with an international project entitled “Homosexuality, Physical Education and Sport” in 2020. Both have contributed to strengthening the existing ties between the different teams and generate synergies for planning future academic actions and research on a national and international level on the participation, education, and dissemination of the social inclusion of LGBTQ persons in PAS.



## A new survey for the study of LGBTQ engagement in PAS in Spain

The previously mentioned AFES research group focuses on the study of PAS from a social and educational perspective and investigates vulnerable populations, including prison inmates, people with disabilities, and trans people, among others. This research group has organised different conferences, meetings, and symposiums to publicise the needs and problems of these vulnerable groups when doing PAS.

AFES created the first national survey to determine the situation of Spanish LGBTQ people in PAS, taking into account several scales for its compilation (Diener et al., 1985; FRA, 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Menzel et al., 2019). The survey includes 40 questions on topics such as sociodemographic data, life satisfaction, frequency and intensity of PAS, perceived barriers to non-participation, organisational characteristics of the practice of PAS, childhood experiences in school PE, or experiences of bullying in sport.

The data were collected between November 2018 and April 2019. In this period, the survey was disseminated among Spanish LGBTQ associations to get access to LGBTQ people. The questionnaire was also distributed in social media. One thousand four hundred forty-seven participants ( $M$  age = 32.62;  $SD$  = 11.08) finally completed the survey, and their sociodemographic characteristics are shown in Table 10.1.

One of the most important aims of the project is to investigate the barriers preventing LGBTQ people from PAS engagement. This topic has been addressed in several studies, and different barriers, such as discrimination, negative experiences in PAS settings, or lack of confidence, have been identified (e.g. Denison &

*Table 10.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 1,447)*

|                           | <i>N</i> | <i>% Total</i> |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| <b>Gender identity</b>    |          |                |
| Women                     | 609      | 42.1           |
| Men                       | 759      | 52.5           |
| Other                     | 79       | 5.5            |
| <b>Sexual orientation</b> |          |                |
| Lesbian                   | 329      | 22.7           |
| Gay                       | 628      | 43.4           |
| Bisexual                  | 328      | 22.7           |
| Heterosexual              | 34       | 2.3            |
| I do not know             | 41       | 2.8            |
| Other                     | 87       | 6.0            |
| <b>Transgender</b>        |          |                |
| Yes                       | 182      | 12.6           |
| No                        | 1,265    | 87.4           |

Kitchen, 2015; Smith et al., 2012; Symons et al., 2017). Although this information is the first valuable step in PAS promotion in this population, there is still a lack of research adopting multi-level approaches that give full consideration to the relations and interactions between the different barriers and these barriers' levels of influence. In order to contribute to filling this gap, the research project included the development and validation of a new instrument to study barriers to PAS experienced by LGBTQ people from a socio-ecological approach entitled Barriers to Physical Activity and Sport Questionnaire for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning Persons (BPASQ-LGBTQ+). Full details of the development process can be found in Úbeda-Colomer et al. (2020). The validation process was conducted after the first wave of data collection (N = 709), and BPASQ-LGBTQ+ was shown to be a valid and reliable instrument for measuring barriers to PAS experienced by LGBTQ people across the different socio-ecological levels. The levels of the barriers included in the questionnaire are (1) intrapersonal barriers; (2) interpersonal barriers; (3) relational-environmental barriers; and (4) organisational-environmental barriers.

As mentioned earlier, this first study of the project was conducted with a preliminary dataset focused on validating the instrument rather than on an in-depth analysis of the associations between PAS and the different levels of barriers. Nevertheless, some initial and interesting findings can be offered. First, it was found that LGBTQ people engaging in regular PAS reported fewer barriers than those who were not engaging in regular PAS on the four socio-ecological levels. Second, the most frequently reported barriers were: lack of motivation and lack of confidence at the intrapersonal level, the inactivity of friends and family at the interpersonal level, lack of sensitivity in addressing diversity by PAS professionals at the relational-environmental level, and the economic cost and lack of LGBTQ associations at the organisational-environmental level. In the next few months, further exploration of the associations between the socio-ecological levels of barriers and time devoted to PAS will be conducted, paying due attention to the interactions between the levels and the potential influence of different sociodemographic variables such as gender identity or socioeconomic status.

## **Future perspectives and final comments**

Spain has recently made progress in creating laws that promote tolerance, respect, and equality for LGBTQ people in PAS. However, the literature shows that there are still forms of rejection towards this population and a certain hostile climate towards sexual and gender diversity in these contexts.

The literature has also brought to light the need to go deeper into the experiences of this group in PAS. Within the framework of the "Homosexuality, physical education and sport" project, different researchers are exploiting the data obtained from the AFES questionnaire and others are currently working on this topic. The researchers are particularly interested in knowing the experiences of LGBTQ coaches, high-performance athletes, physical education teachers, and students

of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences as well as analysing public policies on diversity and against LGBTQ negativity in sport. With these studies, the research teams aim to fill an existing gap in the Spanish literature and promote well-oriented interventions to improve LGBTQ safety and inclusion in PAS. Given the novel approach introduced in some parts of the project, such as the study of barriers using a socio-ecological model, the findings could be of great importance for researchers, activists, sports institutions, health and PAS professionals, educators, and policy makers in order to increase and improve PAS participation among LGBTQ people. In fact, one of the main intentions of the research team is to design guidelines and implement interventions addressed to encouraging physically active lifestyles in this population. These interventions should be addressed to include all the people involved in the sector to assume the responsibility of eliminating any type of barrier towards PAS practice by LGBTQ people.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the “Agencia Estatal de Investigación” (Grant Number: PID2019-108630RA-I00/AEI/10.13039/50110001103) and the Research network “LGTBIQ+, educación física y deporte” (Grant Number: CSD-36/UPB/211).

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Part III

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## Diversity Matters

Policy of Inclusion and  
Experiences of Gender and  
Sexual Minorities

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# Sexual diversity in the eyes of sport managers

## Are we building inclusive physical activity and sport contexts?

*Juan Aldaz Arregui, Nagore Martinez-Merino, Oidui Usabiaga Arruabarrena, and Uxue Fernandez-Lasa*

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### Introduction

The present essay presents information relative to the LGBTQ community in Gipuzkoa with the aim to analyse sport managers' meanings related to their workplace equity practices. Public sport managers, who work in public sport organisations, take responsibility for promoting physical activity and sport (PAS) policies in their municipality. The research project Gipuzkoa EquitActive (EkitAktiboa), a neologism created by Aldaz et al. (2018), merges the concepts of equity and activity. The Department of Sports of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa considers these two concepts fundamental to promote PAS policies. Gipuzkoa EquitActive is based on a request made by aforementioned institution, which focuses on understanding the state of equity within sports policies on a local level. The study addressed different aspects of equity.

Gipuzkoa is a small province in the north of the Spanish state and part of the Autonomous Community of Euskadi. It is made up of 88 municipalities, where diversity ranges from the cosmopolitan capital of Donostia/San Sebastian to a variety of rural municipalities in the interior of Gipuzkoa. It is within this diverse context that the Department of Sports of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa performs its political activities within the framework of competencies concerning the promotion of PAS.

### **The promotion of PAS and equity: EquitActive, an inseparable couple**

The European Sports Charter (Council of Europe, 1992) manifests that PAS should not be seen as a luxury product, but rather as a right of citizens to lead a full life. Therefore, it is a right that state institutions should guarantee, setting out principles to ensure participation in sport and physical recreation in a safe and healthy environment. Although the approach to PAS promotion policies can be seen from varied explanatory frameworks, as Piggin (2019) posits, one debate

stands out in relation to health promotion. This explanatory framework, which necessarily ties the promotion of PAS to equity, is the guiding principle in the promotion policies of PAS within the Department of Sports of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa. The concept of EquitActive was created as a result of this guiding principle (Aldaz et al., 2018), and it involves transforming reality through a process of co-creation (Esposito & Murphy, 2000), with the direct participation of the people involved. This highlights the firm conviction that the approach to the promotion of PAS cannot take place without becoming involved in the conflicts on equity that arise from its management.

Social inequalities persist in the existing relation between promotion policies of PAS and equity in this context as well as in society (Donnelly, 1996). This results in dynamics of exclusion and inclusion (Aldaz, 2010, 2014) within the context of socio-cultural change, from more common structured traditional sports practices within the framework of sports clubs to other individualised, streamlined, and deregulated sports (Wheaton, 2004, 2013). Far from eradicating exclusion–inclusion dynamics, this change seems to have exposed them to a new source of exclusion: the constant influx of sports on offer seems to hold a direct relation to purchasing power (Coalter, 2010; Hylton & Totten, 2007). Similarly, more traditional forms of sport, particularly those within the context of sports clubs (Elling & Claringbould, 2005) and federations, seem to continue to “attract” the dominant sectors of society, excluding those who find themselves in a more vulnerable position (Spaaij et al., 2014).

Indeed, the arena of PAS, far from being a mere passive reflection of the inequalities within a population, should be seen as an actively involved agent in the production, reproduction, and preservation of these social inequalities. However, it should also be seen as an agent for change and resistance (Fletcher & Dashper, 2014), a sort of Trojan Horse (Eitzen, 2016, p. 169) that, having penetrated our lives so clearly, can be used for social transformation.

Spaaij et al. (2014) developed, in their view, key questions to delve into a deeper understanding of the relationship between PAS promotion policies and the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion that are tied to the challenges posed by equity, in relation to challenging social exclusion in and through sport: the effect of social exclusion in sport participation; the (re)production, resistance, and challenges of social exclusion in sport contexts; and the use of sport to fight social exclusion and promote social inclusion in other areas of society.

The aim of this study was to analyse the awareness of public sport managers in the promotion of PAS with respect to the LGBTQ community.

### **The EquitActive perspective in the LGBTQ community in PAS promotion policies**

These questions are of crucial importance not only in relation to a general outlook towards equity but also in understanding LGBTQ people in relation to promotion policies of PAS. In this sense, Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020) highlight the

fact that certain sport contexts are much more inclusive than others. Furthermore, despite the progress made over the last decades concerning general social change, heterosexism and its consequences are deeply rooted in the sports context (Anderson, 2011; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012), and they seem to continue to be a challenge in the battle against LGBTphobia in Gipuzkoa, according to a study published in 2018 by the Basque Association of Gays, Lesbians, Transexuals, and Bisexuals Gehitu (Asociación de gays, lesbianas, transexuales y bisexuales del País Vasco) and the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (García & Exposito, 2018).

A prominent feature in the literature in this field of study is the invisibilisation of sexual minorities in the policies of different sports actors, resulting in discrimination and prejudice, even if involuntary (Fynes & Fisher, 2016; Melton & Cunningham, 2014). All in all, homonegativity continues to be a serious problem that hinders the integration and acceptance within sports of the LGBTQ community (Symons et al., 2017). The prevalence of gender stereotypes and rigid perceptions of hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity among different agents of the sports system must be underlined. In accordance with Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020), the LGBTQ community continues to suffer homonegativity in sports despite the progress made in the inclusion of LGBTQ people within the context of PAS. Therefore, in alignment with a multilevel viewpoint that allows us to understand the experiences of the LGBTQ within the context of PAS, we cannot ignore, as Cunningham (2019) warns, the influence of elements on a social level (macro), an organisational level (meso), and an individual level (micro) on prejudice and on the opportunity for LGBTQ to have positive experiences in PAS.

The changes that are taking place within the organisations involved in the administration of sport are slow and oftentimes inconsistent and superficial. It is therefore necessary to establish proactive policies against discrimination, abuse, and bullying that also include sexual orientation on all institutional levels (Griffin, 2014). It is along these lines that we have adopted the focus of Spaaij et al. (2014, p. 33), whereby the “relational, multidimensional, and multilevel characteristics of social exclusion” are brought to the fore, emphasising and forcing our attention towards the agents and/or institutions (including us) that, voluntarily or not, generate it. It is from this perspective of social exclusion as a dynamic and relational process (according to Spaaij et al., 2014, p. 34) that the emphasis turns towards the agents involved, granting them the potential to influence change or its reproduction.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative methods were used in this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Ruiz Olabuénaga & Ispizua, 1989; Valles, 2009) and the document analysis technique (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) were conducted to analyse the status quo of implementation of sport for all sexual minorities. In 2018, 43 interviews were carried out with people holding positions of responsibility at an administrative or political level within the public management of sports policies across 37

municipalities in the province of Gipuzkoa. The interviews covered questions on key issues of sport for all policies (e.g. the [non-]existence of a diagnosis and assessment of sports practices in their municipality, municipal actions to foster sport for all for different communities, and an assessment of these) and were complemented by a small-scale questionnaire. The document analysis process was based on analysing the websites of the 37 municipalities and every type of document related to the Planning in the Municipal Sports Area, such as municipal ordinances or equality plans. In terms of the ethics of this research, participants were informed that their collaboration was voluntary and signed an informed consent form before the interviews. Their anonymity was guaranteed by a pseudonym, and no personal data were collected.

## Results and discussion

### *Sport for all = equitable sports policies?*

“Our aim is to promote access to sports activities for all” was one of the interviewees’ (Arkaitz) statements. However, although those interviewed may have referred to “all”, we did not observe any specific policies or plans for promotion of, or access to, sports arenas for certain vulnerable populations, such as the LGBTQ population in the document analysis. In this respect, Melton and Cunningham (2014) note the need to create safe spaces with positive attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. It is known that institutional inaction to develop inclusive sport policies occurs especially when LGBTQ people challenge the inherent logic of the sport system, such as the sex binary, and this leads to different challenges and stressors that influence their participation (Braumüller et al., 2020).

No existing specific diagnosis was drawn from the documents referring to the reality of the LGBTQ community within the PAS context. Among all the eligible research literature, only García and Exposito’s (2018) study on the battle against homophobia in the sports context was identified. As Spaaij et al. (2014) concluded, it seems that reference to “all” merely implies hegemonic groups, keeping the non-normative population on the sideline.

When asked about the work they were doing with respect to equity, many of the participants asked what was meant by the term equity, what it included, or towards whom it was directed. Thus, most interviewees showed difficulties in understanding the term:

When you say equity, what do you mean exactly? Because I’m not at all sure.  
(Urko)

We have specific programmes that are aimed at certain age groups, another one for women . . . not necessarily because of equity, if you’re talking in economic terms. So my first question would be, what do you mean by equity?  
(Arrate)

## **Sport managers and LGBTQ people: (In)Experience, conflicts, and challenges for the future**

### ***Lack of experience and lack of sensitivity***

Asked about experiences surrounding the LGBTQ community, sport managers responded with an awkward silence. Out of the 43 managers who were interviewed, only a few were able to mention something about it. With this information in mind, we agree with Kavoura and Kokkonen's (2020) idea that emphasises the fact that sports contexts reinforce gender stereotypes and reiterate the invisibilisation of sexual minorities (Fynes & Fisher, 2016).

Thus, most interviewees confirmed having no experience or information about the LGBTQ community. A lack of knowledge and involvement in this respect was observed. In fact, on one occasion, having had no experience with "those things" was a relief for the sport manager.

No, we haven't had any for now. We haven't had any experience with those things, and I've been here for 30 years, and I haven't met any . . . transsexual [person]; those things haven't happened. So much the better for me. I'm very sentimental and those things . . . they hurt me, they hurt me a lot.

(Aratz)

No, I haven't had any of that. I don't even know what it is. Well, I know what being transsexual is, but . . . I haven't seen any of that here.

(Enaitz)

The thoughts expressed by the sport managers reflect the lack of sensitivity found in the document analysis. Furthermore, a binary and heteronormative perspective appeared in the tools for intervention, such as grants, regulations, or agreements that the sport managers had access to, in which funding and fostering seem to be more guided by established social categories and inequalities, such as gender and people with handicap, and neglect other categories like sexual or gender minorities. It seems that creating inclusive spaces for "others" becomes more of a personal option rather than a goal that becomes part of their work as sport managers. In line with conclusions by Anderson (2011) and Sartore-Baldwin (2012), heterosexism is deeply rooted within the sports system and seems to go unnoticed by the sport managers.

### ***Changing room conflicts: Binary outlooks and binary sports centres***

There were several conflicts around the binary structure of changing rooms that came up in more than one interview. Just as Sartore-Baldwin (2012) observed, the issue of changing rooms was delicate. Most of the comments related to sexual

diversity were linked to the management of changing rooms. In this sense, among public sports spaces, the locker room is perceived as an unsafe and vulnerable space by the LGBTQ community, especially by transgender people (López-Cañada et al., 2021). These are spaces in which users show their naked bodies, causing trans people embarrassment, stress, lack of privacy, and even feelings of fear of the reactions of others (Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017a). This discriminatory predominance that occurs in the contexts of PAS (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019) leads trans people to opt for individual and unorganised practices that do not require body exposure (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2017).

Many participants stated that the issue was around the lack of funds when dealing with situations involving people of the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, many sport managers coincided in their affirmation that they had not invested any time in this until the issue arose. Our study confirmed the idea put forward by Spaaij et al. (2018) that any work in diversity within the sports community is usually done on a case-by-case basis and rarely based on a strategy. In fact, the solution that was offered in the face of the traditional binary structure within the changing rooms was a momentary substitution with another form of space, generally isolated from other people:

We've had problems with people who were transitioning. Obviously, we have common changing rooms, so there were problems with certain people. The truth is that there are certain cabins that are usually independent, the ones that are meant for the disabled, so it was suggested they could use those cabins. There was no problem with that. What's more, we have no issues if someone with a psychological problem uses them.

(Arkaitz)

There was an employee at the sports centre who went through a sex change, but I don't know if we responded the right way. He was a boy who had been a girl, but he used the changing rooms normally, so in this case he went to the boy's. We haven't had any other experiences like that, although these kinds of cases do happen in all the towns, and we haven't tended to them in a specific manner. We adapt, I guess, using some general privacy measurements in the bathrooms and changing rooms. I don't know if we're doing the right thing or not, but well.

(Orhi)

Some of the sport managers talked about how the binary organisational system of the changing rooms can create conflicts with the people involved and those surrounding them. That is why they thought it was alright to assign the referee's changing room or a separate one for transsexuals or intersexuals, even if it was just another solution based on circumstance (Spaaij et al., 2018).

We are still trying to figure out the solution to the changing room issue. As you can see, we have family changing rooms for the pool, or genderless changing rooms that are separate.

(Leire)

The issue with the changing rooms is that there comes a moment when they separate, and that is where the problems come up. In those cases, we have made available a separate cabin in the changing rooms so that that person (transsexual) can, to a certain extent, share the changing room with people of the sex they identify with.

(Alaitz)

Nevertheless, if the concept of Sport for All really does include the whole population, specifically sexual minorities, then the starting point should be different and go beyond binary changing rooms. With regard to this, the responses received from the sport managers display a simplistic point of view with hardly any afterthought, classifying every citizen in the binary system:

I was told [by a transsexual person] that society is organised in a binary way and we already always accepted it as it is, but what about those of us who are in between? With that in mind, where do we start?

(Aiala)

In line with what Cunningham and Hussain (2020) concluded, it is necessary for sport managers to become active agents in the promotion of inclusive and equitable policies, because otherwise they will continue to be accomplices in the perpetuation of the normative system. However, according to Cunningham (2007), there appears to be significant resistance to change among sport managers, which is indicative of the barriers that exist at the institutional and political levels (Jones et al., 2017b). Based on this study, it seems that the idea that sport managers should be proactive and generators of change (Spaij et al., 2014) is still utopian.

### ***Funding, difficulties, and challenges for the future***

Several sport managers expressed hardship in carrying out their job. Generally, the problems were rooted in a lack of financial resources, as well as a lack of facilities. In this sense, each municipality had its own reality, no matter the size of the territory:

From the point of view of leisure, health, prevention . . . in order for there to be a promotion of physical activities, the job needs to be done properly, and in fact, you only have the funding that you have. . . . So we have done things, but they were one-offs, and really, we do what we can with what we've got.

(Joar)

It seems that the lack of certain resources that might be considered primary may affect other aspects of social interest when it comes to a more in-depth consideration. Apart from the lack of funds, there was also a significant deficiency in sport managers' training and in how to take on public policy from the perspective of



equity, as expressed by Urko: “Well, in that case [that of equity], I don’t have those lenses. I think we lack training”.

Even though sport managers worked on some issues related to social justice and equal opportunities for all citizens such as language, gender equity, or inclusion, there was no specific training programme, and a void was noted in how the LGBTQ community was viewed. Indeed, one agent shared the experience she had in a course that was specifically related to gender equality where the lecturer did not have the security to answer a question about sex binary and gender identity.

These results confirm that, even though training in issues of diversity and other educational activities is common in many work atmospheres, it is less frequent in sports organisations (Cunningham & Hussain, 2020). The need to collaborate and share more in between departments within different town halls was highlighted, from the sports sector to social services or equity. Most town halls had no collaboration with other departments, except in some occasional cases. Many administrative agents said that there was not much coordination and that it would be necessary in order to create synergy and therefore communication and collaboration between the different departments. Saioa, for example, said, “I know what type of society we want, and something that is essential is coordination between departments. So we can all head in the same direction”.

## Conclusions

One of the main conclusions drawn from our study is that public sport managers only see what they want to see, much as we do. They create a “normalising” perspective, or, we might even dare to call a “naturalising” one, which, like any other perspective, builds an always partial image of the reality, including some realities and excluding others.

First, obstacles and silence emerged from the results, making invisible the LGBTQ community, already discriminated and ignored by sport managers who are responsible for promoting sport for all. Even though some small initiatives or experiences did arise in the arena of sexual diversity, the invisibility of sexual minorities was significant. In addition, this study has shown how sexual minorities continue to suffer discrimination in the sports context. No awareness was detected regarding the issue of strategic planning by the municipal institutions and sport managers.

Second, the existing binarism in the sport system is perpetuated by the organisers. As observed in our study, sport managers make decisions at specific moments to manage changing room conflicts, instead of setting established strategies to challenge the difficulties related to LGBTQ people, such as the changing rooms’ design and use.

Third, given the need to create and maintain inclusive and significant sports cultures, it would be important to promote inclusive policies for the LGBTQ community. Such policies include training courses on sexual diversity, promotion campaigns, awareness raising, and/or strategic plans towards equity in sports and

physical activity contexts. If we are not aware of equity issues, we will be, for sure, inequitable in our praxis.

All in all, the LGBTQ community was left out of the spotlight of public policy. In accordance with Phipps (2020), it is necessary to continue the promotion of sport for all, with inclusive policies being of vital importance to combat discrimination of the LGBTQ community. This is why it is particularly relevant to involve different sports agents in the design, implementation, and assessment of sports programmes and policies of which they are, or could be, beneficiaries. Indeed, the key is to establish a dialogical relationship (Habermas, 2001) that will allow construction and reconstruction of PAS habits that will make our life a better life for all.

## Acknowledgements

This work was funded by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (reference 2020.0662) and the Ministry of Science and Innovation R&D&I Projects (code PID2019-108630RA-I00).

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# Monitoring “inclusive masculinity” in sport in the Netherlands 2008–2021

No problems with gay men, but no gay-inclusive cultures

*Agnes Elling and Rens Cremers*

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## Introduction

The Netherlands is generally recognised as a gay-friendly country and has been a frontrunner in the legislation for equal rights for gay and lesbian people. In 1971, homosexuality was decriminalised in the Netherlands. Although “sexual orientation” is still not explicitly mentioned in Article 1 of the constitution that forbids discrimination, “heterosexual or homosexual orientation” is explicitly mentioned in the Equal Treatment Act from 1994 to protect people against discrimination in public areas like employment and housing. Furthermore, the Netherlands was the first to open up civil marriage for same-sex couples in 2001. Moreover, compared to other European countries, the Dutch rank among the highest regarding the acceptance of homosexuality among its citizens (e.g. Government of the Netherlands, 2018; Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007; Kuyper et al., 2013). Disregarding the relative accepting Dutch society, explicit homonegativity and more subtle “enlightened” forms of homonegativity do occur (Van Lisdonk, 2018). And some practices are regarded as more or less gay friendly or gay inclusive than others. As in many other countries, sport is considered as a less tolerant societal practice, which often implicitly refers to men’s popular team sports like football. Indeed, also in the Netherlands, male team sports have long been recognised as one of the “last bastions” of hegemonic masculinity and persisting homonegativity (e.g. Elling & Janssens, 2009; Hekma, 1998; Messner, 1990; Pronger, 1990). Since gay men are associated with unmanliness or femininity and mainstream competitive sports with hegemonic masculinity, gay men are regarded as generally unsuited to sports, and to team contact sports like football in particular (cf. Connell, 1995; Plummer, 2006). National team sports like football have played an important role in the construction and reproduction of the culturally most valued and dominant characteristics of masculinity in a society, traditionally including (physical) dominance, competition, assertiveness, and “compulsory heterosexuality” or heteronormativity.

However, especially in the last decade, several scholars argued that the idea of men’s sport as extreme homonegative does no longer hold true and has become

a “widely held but false belief” (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011, p. 4) and therefore a prejudice itself (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Magrath et al., 2020). Based on empirical research (mainly in the UK and the USA), these scholars have argued that there has been a decrease in homonegativity and an increase in the degree of acceptance of gay athletes in men’s team sport, for example, by applying positive “gay talk”, which has been conceptualised as a development towards “inclusive masculinity” (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Such a development towards inclusive masculinity assumes a process of the destabilisation or undermining of “hegemonic masculinity” as a central constituting concept of mainstream men’s competitive (team) sport that have dominated social critical research into mainstream men’s sport (see also MacDonald, 2018). With shifting societal norms and power balances regarding gender and sexual orientation in many western societies, for example, women and openly gay men being more present in many social domains, it can be expected that traditional male-defined sports have also “opened up” and have become less homonegative. According to advocates of signs of inclusive masculinity, positive experiences of openly gay athletes contest traditional discourses on hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, also male team sport players often know gay people in their surroundings, and current “gay talk” among young men, including athletes, is context dependent and can no longer automatically be interpreted as homonegative (Magrath et al., 2020).

Such developments towards a more gay-inclusive climate in society, including grass root team sports, can also be witnessed in the Netherlands. However, in a country with openly male and female gay politicians, mayors and celebrities, and many out lesbian elite athletes in national teams of sports such as handball, field hockey, and football in the last two centuries, Dutch men’s elite team sport still stands out as a subculture by the absence of out gay athletes. The non-existence of openly gay men in Dutch professional football has also led famous former players, elite level coaches, and football analysts in mainstream television broadcasts in the last decade to suggest that “gay men are less athletic in their locomotion” (Frank de Boer in BNN in 2012), that “football just is not a sport for gay men” (Rene van der Gijp in Voetbal International in 2013), and that “it is nonsense that coming out in professional football could be problematic” (Johan Derksen in Veronica Inside in 2018).

Even though such stereotypical homonegative statements or the denial thereof are currently publicly strongly criticised by other influential people – in and outside football, gay and non-gay – they are also indicative of a seemingly ongoing disqualification of gay men in men’s team sport.

In this chapter, we will show that in the Netherlands, men’s team sport indeed shows signs of decreasing homonegativity and developments towards “inclusive masculinity”. However, we simultaneously argue that the fear of homonegativity among gay men to join or come out in men’s team sports is still realistic and not only a “widely held but false belief perpetuated by an assembly of governing organizations, clubs, publicists, agents and scholars”, as stated by Cashmore and

Cleland (2011, p. 4). We give an overview of policy directed towards increasing acceptance of nonheterosexuality in men's team sports and research into monitoring (expected) developments towards and better understanding of gay-inclusive culture or inclusive masculinity.

### **Dutch policy and research on LGBT+ acceptance in sport**

In the early 1990s, the national government commissioned a first study on the experiences of gay men and lesbian women in sport, as part of a larger sport policy programme to tackle different forms of discrimination in sport by means of a societal campaign and the presentation of a (guiding) anti-discrimination code for sport federations and clubs. The results of the study on the acceptance of homosexual athletes showed that mainstream club sport is relatively intolerant towards gay men and more welcoming to lesbians due to self-fulfilling prophecies of dominant stereotypical images (Hekma, 1998). Although Hekma's study showed some very relevant insights, due to the convenience sample of his study, still little was known about structural differences in sports participation related to sexuality, let alone developments in time, as was the main focus of public sports policy. Different compared to other social status positions like gender, age, or educational level, sexual orientation was not a standard sociodemographic "variable" in large representative and longitudinal inquiries on societal participation (including sports) or general attitudes. Therefore, in 2002, the Ministry of Sport commissioned a large quantitative study on experiences of self-identified non-heterosexual men and women, based on a screening of a large representative online research panel. The findings showed that general sport participation did not largely differ between the groups of homo-/bisexual men and women compared to a "matched" group by gender and age of self-identified heterosexual respondents. However, findings also affirmed a lower representation of gay men in voluntary sport associations and especially in traditional men's (team) sports (Elling & Janssens, 2009). Moreover, results indicated that such structural differences in sport participation patterns in relation to sexual orientation are not only a matter of "taste". Especially gay men relatively often explicitly mentioned having avoided team and contact sports like football and other "macho" sports due to fear of homonegativity (cf. Plummer, 2006) and/or had to deal with homonegative comments, jokes, and/or discrimination. Nonetheless, results of this study were at first used to refrain from policy on increasing gay acceptance in sport, since findings showed no differences in general sport participation. This decision fitted a larger phasing out of "target group" sport policy at the beginning of the 20th century.

However, since 2008, the ministries of Health, Welfare and Sport and the ministry of Education, Culture and Science have been funding a programme to increase acceptance of homosexuality in mainstream sport, resulting from a larger governmental policy (Interdepartemental working group public policy and homosexuality, 2007). The Breakeven Alliance (Alliantie Gelijkspelen) is a network

of relevant sport and LGBT+ advocacy organisations, executing activities to enhance LGBT+ acceptance in sport. The number and kind of organisations varied over different periods as did the secretary of the Alliance. The activities of the Alliance have been targeted towards continuous agenda setting of the necessity of increasing homo-acceptance among sport federations, sport clubs, and the sport media. Apart from commissioning research, the partners mainly organised meetings, ranging from national symposia with sport federations and municipalities to workshops both at grassroots level sport clubs and at professional football clubs.

In the first period (2008–2011), the Dutch umbrella organisation of Gay sport clubs and LGBT+ advocacy organisation Homosport Nederland was secretary of the Alliance. It commissioned several studies to gain more insights into sport participation by and experiences of gay men and lesbian women, and perceptions and experiences of acceptance of homosexuality among board members of sport clubs and among club sport participants. These studies further empirically supported with quantitative and qualitative data that specific policy is especially necessary in traditional men’s (team) sports (e.g. Elling-Machartzki & Smits, 2012; see also Smits et al., 2021). In 2012, supported by Breakeven Alliance partners, the Dutch Football Federation (Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond [KNVB]) launched an ambitious action plan with 11 goals – aimed at educating, informing, supporting, maintaining, and evaluating – to increase the acceptance of homosexuality (KNVB, 2012). However, apart from an impressive delegation ranging from famous (former) professional players, coaches, and other officials that joined the KNVB boat participating in the annual Canal Parade of the Amsterdam Pride event in 2013, most actions were slow in receiving follow-up. However, in 2014, a first survey about homonegativity and homo-acceptance was held among professional football players by the Association of Contract Players (Vereniging van Contractspelers [VVCS]) together with the John Blankenstein Foundation (JBF) (VVCS/JBF, 2014), which showed that professional football payers valued the climate for openly gay players as very negative. In 2017, the JBF initiated the first #All Together Challenge and became the secretary of the Breakeven Alliance in 2018. The #All Together Challenge is a campaign for LGBT+ acceptance in sport, organised in the week(end) of the International Coming out Day October 11th: captains of all teams at highest competition levels in football and hockey wear a rainbow armband. In 2020, the #All Together Challenge was combined with online guest lessons from (former) elite athletes and others for primary school classes during Purple Friday, where Gender & Sexuality Alliances at primary and secondary schools ask attention for solidarity with LGBT+ students and teachers.

The last decennium also saw a development towards mainstreaming of research on LGB(T) acceptance in other monitoring instruments. Most notably, this meant that sexual orientation has been included as a sociodemographic characteristic in several large-scale representative and repetitive data collection instruments. For example, data on sport participation in relation to sexual orientation are “automatically” collected in the yearly Health survey/Lifestyle monitor by Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau van Statistiek [CBS]) in cooperation with



the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu [RIVM]). To specifically study, the acceptance of homosexuality in sport, however, still requires additional research.

Similar to earlier studies (e.g. Janssens et al., 2003), results from a recent study among self-identified homosexual and bisexual men and women indicated some clear gender differences in sport participation and experienced acceptance (Elling et al., 2020). In particular, the sporting behaviour of homo- and bisexual men is more often influenced by their sexual orientation and they are looking more often for a safe sport environment (e.g. LGBT+ sport groups), compared to lesbian and bisexual women. Compared to gay men, bisexual men show a more similar sporting pattern to straight men and participate more often in mainstream club sport and in traditional men's sport like football. However, they also more often consciously conceal their sexual preference in sport. In line with inclusive masculinity theory, such patterns and perceptions may be falsely justified as indicating larger degrees of homonegativity in men's team sport. The ongoing fear of homonegativity may also be (partly) misperceptions among gay and bisexual men themselves. The studies presented in the following, among club sport participants, board members, and elite male football and hockey players, have broadened our understanding on the ambiguities in interpreting (developments towards) inclusive masculinity in men's team sport.

Our findings of monitoring data since 2008 and cross-sectional studies among specific sub-populations give answers to the question whether (developments in) the acceptance of homosexuality in men's team sport substantiates the theory of inclusive masculinity.

## **Methods**

Since 2008, five studies have been conducted among representative samples ( $n = 1.500$ ) of the online adult Dutch population from 15 to 79 years old (in 2008, 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2020), including club sport participants. Data were collected among the market research panel – GfK panel. These data are relevant to analyse both to what extent men's team sport shows higher degrees of homonegativity compared to other club sport participants and the Dutch population and to what extent a positive development can be witnessed towards larger homo acceptance in men's team sport, as aimed by policy. Respondents were asked to answer several statements about homosexuality in their own sport group using a 5-point Likert scale (e.g. showering with a same-gender homo- or bisexual person/team mate would not bother me; jokes or negative comments about homo- or bisexuality are made in my team/sports group on a regular basis) and to what extent they agreed sanctioning was necessary when homonegative speech acts occur in sport (e.g. referees should intervene when athletes use “gay” or “sissy” as swear words).

Furthermore, in 2010 and 2017, data were collected by questioning board members of sports clubs of a representative sports clubs panel by means of an online survey. Board members were asked if any of the club's board members and/

or trainer’s staff is homo/bisexual; whether their club has any antidiscrimination policy regarding homosexuality and to what extent they agreed to several statements on the prevalence of homonegative speech acts like jokes or comments.

Finally, two studies (in 2014 and 2021) focused on the acceptance of homosexuality among professional male football players and one (in 2020) on the acceptance of homosexuality among elite male hockey players. Data were collected by means of online questionnaires that were distributed among players by what’s app messages via team captains and team managers with help of the Association of professional football players and the Dutch Hockey Federation (Koninklijke Nederlandse Hockey Bond [KNHB]), respectively.

### **No problems with homosexuality, but “gay jokes” often habitual to men’s team sport cultures**

In all five conducted studies among the Dutch population in the past decade, a large majority claimed that it wouldn’t bother them if a sports group member would indicate to be gay (83–87%) and about seven out of ten respondents wouldn’t have a problem to take a shower with a gay teammate. Regarding such general statements on the acceptance of homosexuality, the attitude of men and of male team sport participants doesn’t differ significantly from the general population (see Table 12.1). Interestingly, especially among young people (16–19 years old) disregarding team sport membership, relatively few (55%) agreed to the statement that showering with a gay person would not bother them and nearly two out of ten expressed a more homonegative sentiment that it would bother them (not in figure).

Moreover, as shown in Table 12.1, similar results were found on these statements regarding the acceptance of homosexuality in their sport group by elite male football players and field hockey players in the Netherlands. Interestingly, nearly all elite male hockey players (95%) indicated that it would be fine if one of their teammates would be gay and eight out of ten wouldn’t have a problem to take a shower with a gay teammate. This relatively high acceptance of homosexuality within their sport group among elite hockey players may be explained by their relative high educational level, which is positively related to the acceptance of homosexuality (see also, e.g. Kuyper et al., 2013). These statistics indicate that there is a high degree of acceptance of homosexuality in men’s (team)sports, reflecting the large acceptance of homosexuality in society at large.

However, further data suggest that men’s football and other men’s team sport environment cannot yet be regarded as (equally) “inclusive” environments, due to a relatively high degree of homonegative speech acts or occurring microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2020). Homonegative language or microaggressions refer to often ambiguous jokes or speech acts that enact heteronormativity and devalue and/or ridicule femininity and male homosexuality, by mainly referring to less athletic, low performance, weakness, affectation, and/or mistakes. In contrast to the degree of general acceptance of homosexuality,

**Table 12.1** Statement “Showering with a same-gender homo- or bisexual person/teammate would not bother me”, according to the total Dutch population 15–79 years (2020; n = 1,509) and subgroups of men (n = 742) and male team players (n = 131), elite male hockey players (2020; n = 130) and professional football players (2021; n = 99). In percentage

|                               | <i>(Strongly)<br/>agree</i> | <i>Neutral</i> | <i>(Strongly)<br/>disagree</i> | <i>Do not know/<br/>does not apply</i> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Dutch population              | 72                          | 13             | 7                              | 7                                      |
| Dutch male population         | 73                          | 13             | 9                              | 6                                      |
| Dutch male team sport players | 68                          | 16             | 14                             | 2                                      |
| Elite male hockey players     | 78                          | 12             | 10                             | -                                      |
| Professional football players | 67                          | 18             | 11                             | 4                                      |

we found that the extent of occurrences of microaggressions are affected by both gender and sporting context (individual- versus team sport and professional versus amateur sport).

Among the Dutch sport club members, 16% of the perceived homonegative speech acts are made on a regular basis in their sport group (see Figure 12.1). Percentages among the male club team players (28%), professional football players (29%), and especially among elite hockey players (38%) are clearly higher. Interestingly, half of the professional male football players indicated that jokes or negative comments about homo- or bisexuality are not made on a regular basis in their team, similar to all sport club members. Since these relative positive findings do not match with the ongoing mainstream discourse of men’s football as non-acceptance of homosexuality, (some) professional football team sport cultures may have changed and become less homonegative, as a result of policy and actions to increase homo-acceptance.

Almost half of the elite male hockey players stated that “gay” and “sissy” are used as swear words within the hockey sport for less performing athletes and a quarter stated that they themselves have made some negative comments in the past (not in figure, Cremers & Elling, 2020). In reality, the number of players making ambiguous and potential insulting remarks or jokes may be even higher, since not all players may be aware of doing so. Moreover, three-quarters of homo- and bisexual men have witnessed jokes and/or comments about homosexuality in their sports environment (not in figure, Elling et al., 2020).

A stronger indication of men’s team sport environments as being less inclusive towards homosexuality can be witnessed in Figure 12.2, showing that male team sport players and especially elite male hockey and football players are most reluctant towards intervention by referees when athletes use homonegative language like “gay” or “sissy” as swear words.

A quarter of elite men hockey and professional football players agree that referees should intervene compared to more than half of male team sport players and

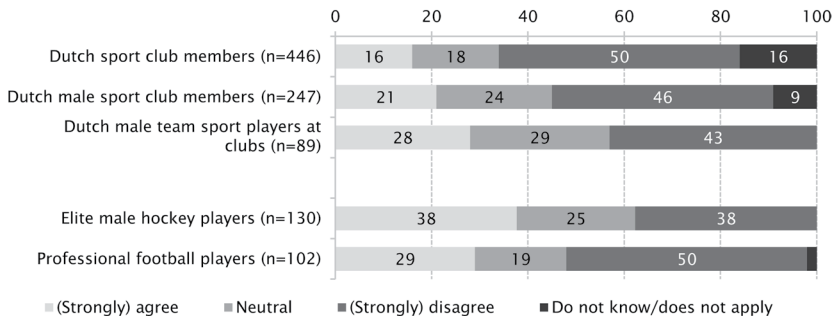


Figure 12.1 Statement: “Jokes or negative comments about homo- or bisexuality are made in my team on a regular basis” among Dutch sport club members 15–79 years (n = 446) and subgroups of men (n = 247) and male club team players (n = 89); elite male hockey players (n = 130) and professional football players (n = 102). In percentage

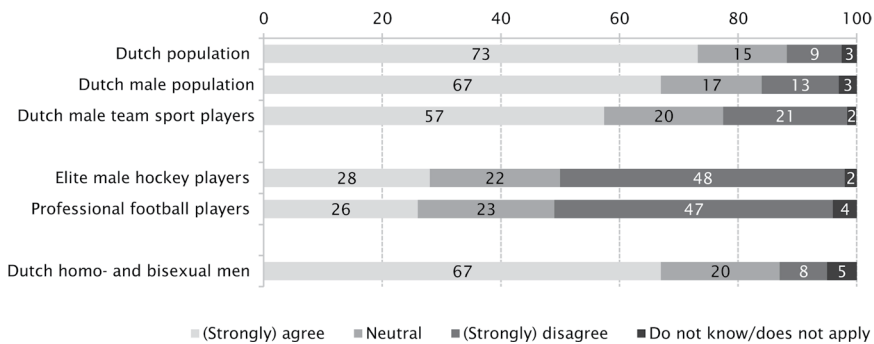


Figure 12.2 Statement: “Referees should intervene when athletes use ‘gay’ or ‘sissy’ as swear words”, among total Dutch population 15–79 years (n = 1.509) and subpopulations of men (n = 742) and male team sport players (n = 131); elite male hockey players (n = 130); professional football players (n = 98); and Dutch homo-/bisexual men and women (n = 716). In percentage

three-quarters of the adult Dutch population. Interestingly, a comparable number of seven among ten homo- and bisexual men consider it a necessity that referees should intervene when homosexual microaggressions occur.

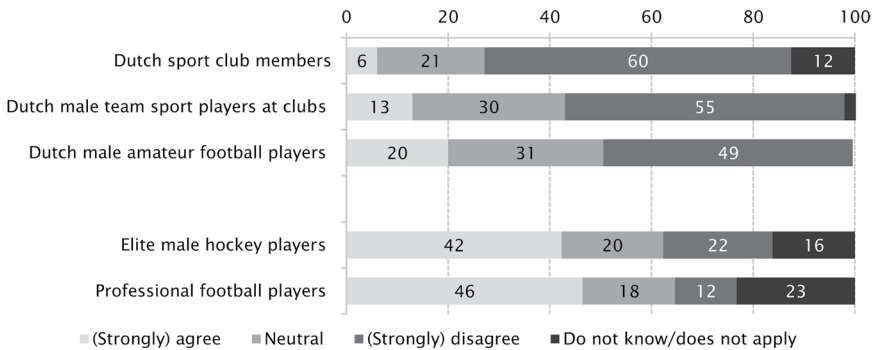
The finding that homonegativity is more strongly expressed in (professional) men sports teams does not mean that there is no awareness about the (possible) issues homosexual men may experience when they would be “out” regarding their homosexual preference in sport.

### (Non)inclusive sport environments and perceived causes of homonegativity

Regarding the statement that it is difficult to be openly homosexual in the respective sports club/professional sports environment in the Netherlands, we also found large differences among respondents. Where 6% among Dutch sport club members believe that it would be problematic to be openly homosexual at their sport club, among amateur football players, this is 20%, and highest numbers are found again among elite hockey players (42%) and professional football players (46%).

In all groups, a (large) majority knows a gay man in private, but much fewer respondents know a gay man at their club or in their professional sport environment. For example, among professional football players, half of the respondents indicated to know a gay man among family/friends/acquaintances, but not a single player knows a homosexual professional football player (not in figure). Similarly, among amateur club football players, only 7% knows a gay man at the club. However, whereas elite field hockey players don't know homosexual players in men's elite hockey either, two-thirds of the players indicate to know a homo/bisexual man at their own club, which includes amateur levels.

Since the data about amateur sport club members are related to club level and cannot be specified to teammates, we cannot make conclusions about possible relations between the presence of gay men in a certain sport setting and the extent to which jokes and negative comments are part of the sport culture.



**Figure 12.3** Statement: “It is difficult for men to be openly homosexual at my sports club”/“It is difficult to be an openly homosexual professional soccer/elite hockey player in the Netherlands”, among Dutch amateur sport club members ( $n = 446$ ) and subpopulations of male team sport players ( $n = 89$ ) and football players ( $n = 62$ ); elite male hockey players ( $n = 130$ ) and professional football players ( $n = 99$ ). In percentage

### Perceived causes of (experienced) homo-negativity

In general, people don’t think that they themselves are part of the problem concerning the (experienced) lack of homo-acceptance in sport. In line with this, elite field hockey and professional football players mentioned a “macho culture”, negative reactions from fans and the public opinion as the most influential hindering factors for LGBT+ acceptance (see Figure 12.4). (The acceptance of) gay jokes seem to be a characteristic feature of these cultures in both hockey and football.

It is remarkable that many players distance themselves (and to a lesser extent their own club and teammates) from being part of the cause of the lack of acceptance of homosexuality. Almost none of the football players consider the clubs, trainers, board members, and/or agents have any influence on this. Hockey players asses their own level of acceptance at the highest level, followed up by the acceptance at the club, by teammates, the hockey association, and fans.

Only one out of five players thinks that the hockey clubs contribute to the existing culture regarding acceptance of homosexuality. So, despite the (partial) acknowledgement that male team sport culture can be very masculine and include jokes and negative comments about homosexuality, individuals think that they (and their teammates and club) are not responsible for this culture and being openly homosexual would not be a problem in their team. As a consequence,

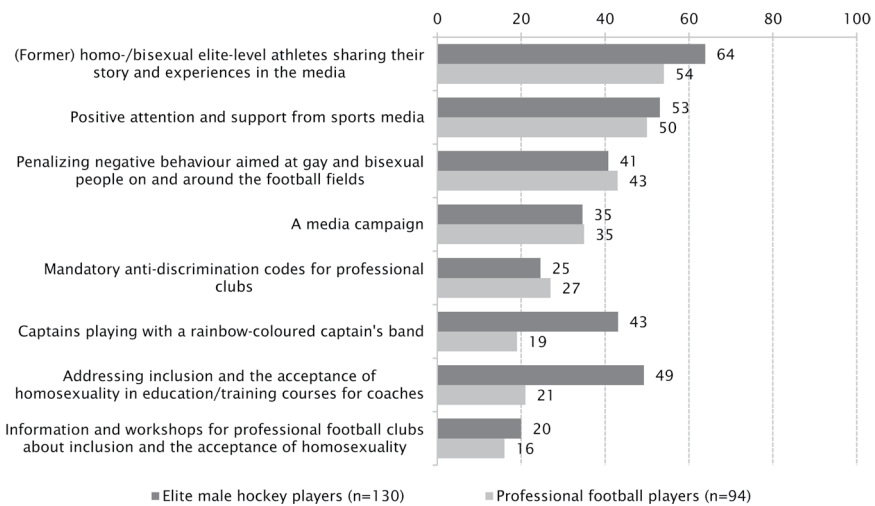


Figure 12.4 Degree of support for measures that contribute to the acceptance of homo- and bisexuality, among elite male hockey players (2020) and professional football players (2021). In percentage

there is less support for measures taken to increase the acceptance of homosexuality at club level. Since external factors like the public opinion, social norms and (negative) response of supporters are assessed as more influential on homonegativity, there is more support among both hockey and football players for more general measures like increased attention for the issue by sport journalists and in coach education (see Figure 12.4).

However, the extent to which board members of amateur clubs pay attention to homo-acceptance seems to increase, especially among football clubs. The number of amateur clubs that were equipped with explicit policy to counteract discrimination (including discrimination with respect to sexual orientation) increased from 15% in 2010 to 33% in 2018 and among football clubs from 34 to 70%, respectively (not in figure; Hoeijmakers & Elling, 2018). Moreover, no decrease could be signalled between 2010 and 2018 in the extent to which board members of football clubs agreed that homonegativity occurred in their club (49% and 46%, respectively). In 2018, also 17% of football club board members agreed to the statement that, in the past year, positive attention was paid to homo-acceptance. This increase in attention for homo-acceptance in club (team) sport seems to continue, since the number of men's team sport participants that indicated that their club paid policy attention to homo-acceptance rose from 15% in 2017 to 21% in 2020 (not in figure). Although there is still a long way to go for all sport clubs (in traditional men's sport) to explicitly pay attention to "inclusive masculinity" and to take action against homonegativity, these results are indicative of continuous national policy regarding homo-acceptance having indeed a positive impact on club sport policy (and culture).

## Conclusion

Similar to MacDonald's (2018) findings on men's Canadian ice hockey, our empirical findings on the extent to which a development towards a more "inclusive masculinity" (Magrath et al., 2020) in men's team sport in the Netherlands has taken place are somewhat ambivalent. Regarding the general acceptance of homosexuality in men's team sport, figures showed only small differences among male (team sport) athletes – disregarding type of sport or playing level – compared to the general Dutch population. Indeed, even the majority of professional football players indicated being accepting towards potential gay team members, with the relatively high educated group of elite men's field hockey players showing highest "gay tolerance".

Such findings seem to affirm hypotheses about achieved "inclusive masculinity" in men's team sport and suggest that men's football and other men's team sports do no longer stand out as (more) homonegative and that (gay) people who think that this is still the case have an unjust perception of a changed reality. To what extent these outcomes are the result of ongoing policy measures since 2008 cannot be deducted from the data. However, it can be expected that the increased attention over the years from policy level to grass root and elite sport clubs at least raised

more awareness and maybe also influenced a norm of homo-acceptance and/or social desirability in questionnaires.

However, in contrast to the degree of general acceptance of homosexuality, we found that the extent of occurrences of homonegative speech acts or micro-aggressions is still affected by both gender and sporting context (individual- vs. team sport, and professional vs. amateur sport) and are far less supportive of an arrived “inclusive masculinity” culture in (young) men’s team sort cultures (cf. MacDonald, 2018; Smith et al., 2020). We found some evidence that homonegative expressions are more prevalent in men’s team sport. Moreover, male team sport athletes, especially at highest playing levels, also stood out as being most reluctant towards intervention by referees when homonegative language is used and by their recognition that it would be difficult to come out as a gay man in either elite field hockey or professional football. Nonetheless, our empirical data clearly substantiate that not all male team sporting cultures are homonegative and that (some) change towards more awareness and towards more (support for) policy actions can be witnessed. Most athletes do not disapprove homosexuality and they are aware that cultural factors (“macho culture”) and the societal environment (fans’ and public opinion) may be hindering factors for homo-acceptance. Most players are also in support of actions contributing to more inclusion. Still, there seems to be less sensitivity and reflection about their own and their club’s potential roles in realising such a change.

Since it took years to raise awareness about this topic, it may not come as a surprise that we have not yet witnessed concrete changes in our monitoring data regarding club (team) sport participation among homosexual men or regarding the prevalence of homonegative speech acts. Creating awareness among sport board members and athletes is a good start. But more time and continuing transformative actions are needed to realise more vigorous reflection and deeper cultural and structural changes to achieve a gay-/queer-inclusive masculinity being normative in Dutch mainstream men’s team sport.

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# Lesbianism in sport

## The heteronormative challenge

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### Introduction

Research on gender and sexuality in sport has identified that, while there are many similarities between LGBTIQ+ groups, the experiences of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans, intersexuals and queer people also vary considerably. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge that LGBTIQ+ people in sport are not “a” homogeneous group, as well as “women” and “lesbian” in sport are diverse (Brackenridge et al., 2008).

By focusing on lesbian women, we attempt to recognise the differences that exist among the experiences of lesbian and gay people, so that the experiences of lesbians are not a mirror of their gay counterparts. According to Squires and Sparkes (1996), it is necessary to use specific language to avoid the invisibility of lesbian women and the sexism they experience. Concerning the terminology in this writing on sexuality, the terms “lesbians” and “lesbianism” are used for analytic and dissemination purposes. This way, despite of using the mainstream concept, we are aware of a more fluid, changeable, hybrid, multiple, and contextual notion of gender and sexual orientation, and its social constructionist character instead of expressions of essentialist identities (Brackenridge et al., 2008; Caudwell, 2006; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Squires & Sparkes, 1996).

This chapter is divided into the following sections. The first section gives an overview of the research on lesbianism and sport in Europe published in English. The second section examines the main international studies on lesbianism, focusing on the incidence of heteronormativity and homonegativism in women’s sport. The third section presents the role of sport as a “safe” zone for the construction of lesbian women’s identities, and the last section explores significant data related to sport participation and the experiences of lesbian women.

### **An overview of the research on lesbianism and sport in Europe**

According to Brackenridge et al. (2008), Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020), and Landi et al. (2020), lesbian women are the most commonly studied population

among the LGBTBIQ+ group in PE and sport worldwide. To illustrate this, Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020) conducted a scoping review including 56 empirical articles focusing on organised sport contexts in peer-reviewed journal articles written in English published between 1997 and October 2018. Specifically, of the 56 research studies, 16 were in Europe, and of these, 13 included women (8 studies included only women, and 5 studies included women among other groups). Elsewhere, Landi et al. (2020) conducted a systematic analysis of LGBTQ scholarship, including 26 studies which examined the experiences of LGBTQ people in PE in 2018 in English language. Of these 26 studies, 19 included lesbian women (73.08%), 7 gay men (26.92%), 6 participants who were identified as queer (23.08%), 4 as bisexual individuals (15.38%), and 1 as a transgender person (3.85%). Moreover, since sexual diversity in sport was first addressed by feminism, it is not surprising that the research literature in this field was mainly on women (Brackenridge et al., 2008) and done by women.

According to the previously cited reviews, there are more than 30 documents published in English from the 1990s onwards that address the situation of lesbian women in sport and PE in Europe. The first English paper focusing on lesbianism in sport and PE was a study conducted in Germany by Birgit Palzkill (1990) on professional female athletes. Since this first study, a growing number of authors have increasingly published studies in several countries as Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and UK (including studies with other English-speaking countries) (see Table 13.1). We are aware that some relevant material in other languages will have been missed and new sources are available or in press. Nonetheless, we hope that the sources provided are a good representation of the field, and the collection provides the platform to have an idea about the research in Europe on lesbianism and sport.

The majority of studies are qualitative, except the studies from Elling and Janssens (2009) and Denison and Kitchen (2015), and the research published from the Erasmus+ Outsport project (Braumüller et al., 2020; Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Menzel et al., 2019). On the one hand, quantitative studies specifically analyse lesbian women's sport participation and experiences of homophobia in different contexts including traditional and organised sports, leisure activities, or LGBTQ sport contexts. On the other hand, qualitative studies enable researchers to obtain deeper insight by understanding the experiences of women in different contexts, such as PE teachers or PETE (Physical Education Teachers Education), coaches, or elite athletes of several sports, among which football stands out.

## **Heteronormativity and homonegativity in women's sport**

The literature describes widespread heteronormativity, homonegativity, and homophobia<sup>1</sup> in the western sporting cultures of female and male from the 1980s to the present day. However, they operate differently for women and men (Brackenridge et al., 2008; Griffin, 1992, 1998; Kokkonen, 2019; Lenskyj, 1990, 2013). As Helen

**Table 13.1** Research on PE and sport in Europe including lesbian women as part of LGBTQ persons (in English)

| <i>Country</i>             | <i>Publications</i>   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Finland                    | On sport participants in competitive and recreational sports: Kokkonen (2019)   |
| France                     | On women football players: Mennesson and Clement (2003)   |
| Germany                    | On professional lesbian athletes in various sports: Palzkill (1990)   |
| Italy                      | On athletes in various sports: Pistella et al. (2020)   |
| Netherlands                | On recreational athletes: Elling et al. (2003), Elling and Janssens (2009), Hekma (1998)  |
| Norway                     | On athletes in several sports: Eng (2006, 2008), Kolnes (1995)<br>On football players and coaches: Skogvang and Fasting (2013)  |
| Spain                      | On lesbian football players: Ribalta and Pujadas (2020)   |
| UK                         | On lesbian PE teachers or PETE students: Clarke (1996, 1998), Edwards et al. (2016), Flintoff (1994, 2000), Sparkes (1994), Squires and Sparkes (1996)<br>On athletes in several sports: Anderson and Bullingham (2015), Caudwell (1999, 2003, 2007), Denison and Kitchen (2015), in UK and Ireland among other non-European countries); Drury (2011), Shire et al. (2000)<br>On lesbian sport coaches: Norman (2012, 2013) |
| Various European countries | On LGTBQ (non)sport participants: Menzel et al. (2019), Braumüller et al. (2020), Hartmann-Tews et al. (2021)   |

Lenskyj states “it is inappropriate to treat gay male athletes and lesbian athletes as two sides of the same coin” (2013, p. 141).

Elsewhere, as revealed by Pronger (1990, p. xi), heteronormativity in sport implies different frames for lesbian or bisexual women and gay or bisexual men: “women athletes are often expected to be lesbians; men athletes are seldom expected to be gay”. As a result, according to the heterosexual canons, women are suspected of being lesbian simply by participating in sport regardless of their sexual orientation (Caudwell, 1999; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 1997; Lenskyj, 2013). Furthermore, this is especially present in sports considered masculine, like football in Europe (Anderson et al., 2016; Caudwell, 1999, 2003, 2007; Cox & Thompson, 2001; Eng, 2006, 2008; Griffin, 1992, 1998; Kolnes, 1995; Larsson et al., 2011; Lenskyj, 2013; Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Scraton et al., 1999; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013).

Despite the changes in western society at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, research shows that negative stereotypes associated with the lesbian identity are a concern for lesbian and straight women. In the same way as the label of gay for men is taken as an insult, the lesbian label is taken as an insult and maintains its power to intimidate (Griffin, 1998, p. 87).

This way, heteronormativity<sup>2</sup>, homonegativity, and homophobia are clearly used to control women's behaviour (Lenskyj, 2013), and "the lesbian stigma contributes to the gendered nature of sport and the continued marginalization of women" (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009, p. 290). Consequently, the lesbian label is feared by women participating in sport (Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Caudwell, 1999; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Lenskyj, 2013; Scraton et al., 1999; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013). As a result, whereas lesbian women in sport and PE might try to pass as heterosexual, heterosexual women might try to disassociate themselves from lesbian teammates and the lesbian stereotype (Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Caudwell, 1999, 2003; Clarke, 1996, 1998; Cox & Thompson, 2001; Krane, 1997; Scraton et al., 1999; Squires & Sparkes, 1996).

Therefore, in order to limit controversy about their participation, to get public support, and to distance themselves from being socially perceived as lesbian, women in sport often hyperfeminise themselves and try to "prove" their heterosexuality (Eng, 2006; Griffin, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Kolnes, 1995; Lenskyj, 1990, 2003). Elsewhere, the evasion of lesbian stigma through the promotion of femininity and heterosexuality has been articulated by Griffin (1998) as "apologetic", and it works to maintain the traditional gender roles.

Another key point is that despite the great gains achieved by female athletes in sport since the final decade of the 20th century, and the increasing acceptance of women's bodies being muscular, the apologetic behaviour is still present by presenting femininity, appearing heterosexual and apologising for aggressive sporting related behaviour (Kolnes, 1995; Lenskyj, 2013). Female elite athletes, for example, receive the message "that they may participate in elite sport, but only as long as it does not weaken their heterosexual attractiveness" (Kolnes, 1995, p. 73).

Furthermore, female athletes who challenge the norms of femininity by playing competitive team sport not only tend to hyperfeminise themselves, but they can also expose homonegativity as a way to avoid suspicion regarding their sexuality (Anderson et al., 2016; Cox & Thompson, 2001; Lenskyj, 2003; Shire et al., 2000). In this context, lesbian women in sport and PE experience double discrimination based on their gender in a male privilege environment and for being lesbians (Lenskyj, 2003; Norman, 2012, 2013). In this case, there is an intersection of discrimination based on two social categories: gender and sexual orientation. Thus, they face systematic oppression when participating in sport and experience overt and covert forms of discrimination including silence, denial, apology, promotion of heterosexual image, attacks on lesbians, and preference for a male coach (Griffin, 1998).

Considering the negative stereotypes associated with the lesbian label and the fear of being discriminated (against) if they came out, lesbian athletes keep silent and conceal their sexual orientation. This was echoed in most studies about lesbians in organised sports within which lesbian athletes are silent about their sexual orientation to avoid prejudice (Caudwell, 1999; Eng, 2006, 2008; Hekma, 1998; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Krane, 1997; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009) and

in PE contexts (Fitzpatrick & Enright, 2017; Flintoff, 1994, 2000; Sparkes, 1994; Squires & Sparkes, 1996).

Meanwhile, Anderson et al. (2016) suggest that “the lack of openly lesbian athletes in England is because the assumed prevalence of lesbians in team sports adds an extra burden to them . . . this extra burden comes in the form of guilt by association” (p. 56), which led to some female athletes experiencing homophobia, that is, the fear of being perceived as lesbian. In turn “athletes may stay closeted to protect their teammates being labelled a lesbian” (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 56). Elsewhere, this has also been related to the lack of openly lesbian women in professional sport. In addition, lesbian athletes fear that the sport will lose its social value, or that they might miss sponsorship opportunities because of the lesbian label in sport.

In addition, Eng (2006) in Norway highlights the fact that the coming out of some female elite soccer players pressures other lesbians in soccer not to come out to avoid to “pollute” (p. 22) this sport.

This can either be understood as a form of denial, or it might also be viewed as a survival strategy to compete without homosexual suspicion and the discrimination that comes with it (Lenskyj, 1990). Either way, on a social level, the silence and denial of lesbianism in sport allow stereotypes and discrimination to continue unopposed (Krane & Barber, 2003). On the organisational level, the negative environment for lesbians can also have a negative impact on the sports organisation (Brackenridge et al., 2008). On the personal level, lesbian stigma and homophobia in women’s sport has potential negative repercussions to nearly all women in sport and PE, within which they experience excessive burden and negative psychological, physical, and professional outcomes (Brackenridge et al., 2008).

The internalisation of the stigma may discourage the coming out process, and can implicate the concealing of their sexual orientation by being unable to affirm their identities, and may represent one of the main factors contributing to the “don’t ask, don’t tell culture” (Pistella et al., 2020). Furthermore, this can negatively impact one’s performance (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009) as well as the professional development of coaches (Norman, 2012, 2013) or PE teachers (Clarke, 1996, 1998; Edwards et al., 2016; Flintoff, 1994, 2000; Sparkes, 1994; Squires & Sparkes, 1996).

Taking the complexity of heteronormativity and sport context into consideration, Griffin’s (1998) taxonomy of climates for lesbian women is especially useful. Griffin indicates that lesbian women can find three types of climate: hostile, conditionally tolerant, and open and inclusive (see Table 13.2).

According to Brackenridge et al. (2008), responding strategies of LGBTQ people to the different climates of homonegativity include: resistance through personal challenge; accommodation through denial (“passing” and adopting “apologetics”) or compartmentalising one’s life; and appropriation by “deliberately celebrating their minority status” (p. 36), although it is not always successful and places women in an oppressive framework.

Table 13.2 Characteristics of the different types of climate for lesbian women

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Hostile                | In this context, lesbian sport participation is prohibited and lesbian women have numerous problems to express their sexuality, so that the silence is the survival strategy (Griffin, 1998; Lenskyj, 2003; Mennesson & Clement, 2003).  |
| Conditionally tolerant | In this context, we can talk about the “glass closet”, in which women “keep their identities ‘secret’ but everyone knows who they are” (Griffin, 1998, p. 100). This is the form of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate. Lesbian players can be seen by those to whom they have come “out”. Nevertheless, lesbians are allowed to participate according to a set of rules which involve silencing their sexuality. Consequently, they are not allowed to speak as freely about their personal life as heterosexual women. In fact, this also reflects a covert institutional and cultural heterosexual hegemony. |
| Open and inclusive     | In this context, women are able to express their identity freely, and in some cases, they can perceive the sporting environment as a safe zone (Ribalta & Pujadas, 2020; Scraton et al., 1999). There is scientific evidence that certain contexts are far more inclusive than others, and therefore, the experiences of LGBTQ people in sport can differ substantially (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020).  |

### Sport as a “safe” zone for lesbian women?

In this challenging environment, scholars have examined the factors that facilitate the coming out process of lesbian women in PE and sport. Sport can notably play a crucial role in the coming out process, and some sports spaces are rather inclusive towards lesbians where they can be “out”, socialise with other lesbians and transgress traditional gender boundaries (Elling & Janssens, 2009; Ribalta & Pujadas, 2020). In fact, finding other lesbian women allows the creation of lesbian communities and supporting networks within sport, as well as the development of queer alternative spaces within mainstream sport contexts (Griffin, 1998; Kokkonen, 2019; Ribalta & Pujadas, 2020). Similarly, Elling and Janssen’s (2009) study in the Netherlands on homo/bisexual men and women found that contrary to gay men, lesbian women find “a sort of refuge in mainstream competitive (team) sports” (p. 73), where they create alternative spaces within the sport.

Elsewhere, several scholars have also explored the role of sport as a facilitator in the construction of lesbian identity (Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Ribalta & Pujadas, 2020; Riemer, 1997; Shire et al., 2000). In the case of Barcelona (Spain), football played a key role in developing lesbians’ sexual identities during Franco’s regime, where homosexuality was considered to be a socially dangerous practice. In this setting, lesbian women were able to form strong informal social networks and share their sexual affinity, participate in other activities than sports, and normalise homosexuality within the group. Significantly, sport became a safe space



where lesbian women felt invisible to the world, and could express themselves freely (Ribalta & Pujadas, 2020). Likewise, Eng (2006, 2008) found that creating queer alternative spaces was a strategy often used by female sexual minority athletes in Norway.

Meanwhile, Anderson and Bullingham (2015) found that collegiate lesbian athletes in the UK experienced little resistance coming out in sport, and felt supported by most of their teammates, yet a few reported experiencing hostility after coming out to their teammates. In the same way, lesbian athletes find it relatively easy to disrupt with traditional gender roles and be open about their sexuality (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013). Moreover, Anderson et al. (2016) indicate that while earlier studies only describe recreational sports climates as hostile or conditionally tolerant, they have found open and inclusive environments across a range of sports contexts throughout England. According to the authors, the number of lesbians on a team does not influence the inclusivity towards lesbian athletes, and the athletic capital is not related to one's coming out. Furthermore, they conclude that "being out of the closet was deemed being easier than being in" (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 83).

Nevertheless, the lesbian or butch image of women's football in several West European countries might be a facilitator for non-heterosexual women (Hekma, 1998), and it can also be exclusionary for many women irrespective of their sexuality (Elling & Janssens, 2009). Furthermore, LGBTQ groups use inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms that may be contradictory. According to Elling and Janssens (2009), "safe" LGBTQ sport spaces may not be perceived as such by all, and therefore not suitable for non-heterosexual men and women to thrive.

Overall, lesbian women in sport and PE often have to navigate between different types of climates. For instance, while Ribalta and Pujadas's (2020) study in Spain shows the importance of the football setting in allowing women to express themselves as lesbians and to create strong social networks, Boronat's (2021) study describes the homophobic attitude of the women's national football-team coach for nearly three decades. As stated by Anderson et al. (2016), while the acceptance among teammates may have increased, the sporting administrators and organisations are steadily changing. Along similar lines, Caudwell (1999) argues that the sports context does not offer that kind of "refugee" for all women. As Eng (2006) stated "neither all female athletes, nor all lesbian athletes would be able to (or would want to) enter such a counter-site of deviation based on masculine discourses within the sports context" (p. 17). Therefore, the inclusion of lesbian women in sport is still an illusion in many sporting contexts (Mann & Krane, 2018).

In the light of the diversity of situations and environments, we have gathered the results of the main studies analysing the sports participation and the prevalence of homonegativity on lesbian women in Europe.

## **Sport participation and experiences of lesbian women**

As previously noted, as a result of the different demands for heteronormativity in male and female sporting contexts, the sport participation levels and the experiences of lesbian women and gay men in sport are different and strongly gendered (Brackenridge et al., 2008; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Kokkonen, 2019). This can be seen in quantitative studies about LGBTQ people in Europe (Elling & Janssens, 2009; Menzel et al., 2019), and internationally (Denison & Kitchen, 2015), which have found remarkable differences in participation rates between gay/bisexual men and lesbian/bisexual women. As it is described in this book, gay men are more hesitant to participate than lesbian women.

Moreover, no significant differences were found among heterosexual and homo/bisexual women regarding sport participation or motivations for engaging in sport in the study of Elling and Janssens (2009) in the Netherlands. Thus, as opposed to men, the sport participation patterns among women were not structured by their sexual orientation.

However, the study in the Netherlands found remarkable differences between homo/bisexual identified men and women with regard to their experiences with hostile comments, jokes, and/or discrimination related to homosexuality: 15% of gay athletes and 6% of lesbian athletes experienced this kind of homonegativity. In contrast, the European Outssport study indicates that there are no significant differences between gay men and lesbian women with regard to witnessing homo-/transnegative language in their sports, nor to feeling offended by it or negative experiences made in their sports 12 months prior to the survey (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021).

In addition, Kokkonen (2019) in Finland stated that the relationship between harassment and psychological ill-being was not statistically significant for the female sport participants of the study unlike male. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that lesbian women – as athletes, coaches, administrators, physical educators, or fans – live and play without any difficulties. As we have already indicated, heteronormativity and the gender norm operate as a constraint in women's and men's sport differently.

## **Concluding comments**

The overview on studies carried out on lesbians in sports and PE shows that in the LGBTIQ+ and sport research in Europe, lesbian women are the most commonly studied population with more than 30 documents published in English from the 1990s.

According to the research, the different groups included in the LGBTIQ+ acronym share certain common aspects, such as that these groups have a historical experience of social repression because of homo- and transnegativity. However, the prevailing heteronormativity operates differently for women and men, as men who participate in sports are assumed to be heterosexual, while women are assumed

to be lesbian. Then, while lesbian women share certain commonalities with other LGBTIQ+ groups, they also have unique needs, which should be put at the heart of research studies and the design of policy and practice, in order to ensure safe and inclusive sporting environments. The lesbian stigma is a concern for lesbian and straight women and it contributes to the control of women and the gendered nature of sport. As a result, lesbian women face systematic discrimination and oppression when participating in sport and PE, and they may experience different levels of overt and covert forms of discrimination, depending on the type of climate they found. Then, as women and as lesbian, they face double discrimination in sport and PE: sexism and homonegativity (Caudwell, 2006; Griffin, 1998; Lenskyj, 2003).

However, there is a multiplicity of situations, and sport can operate as a reliable space in which they can be “out”, socialise with other lesbian women, and transgress traditional gender boundaries as well. Sport can be a sort of refuge or a safe zone where lesbian women felt that they can express themselves freely.

Finally, the data suggested that lesbian women’s participation in sport and their experiences differ with regard to diverse contexts, climates, and lesbian identities.

With all this, this topic requires more research that explores how cultural, social, and economic differences influence their experiences. An intersectional analysis is required to further consider social class, race/ethnicity, or cultural background among other identities (Griffin, 1998; Lenskyj, 2003). Regarding PE, there are only few studies and more research is needed in describing and interpreting the day-to-day experiences of lesbian teachers (Clarke, 1998; Edwards et al., 2016; Squires & Sparks, 1996).

Given that the number of “out” athletes and coaches are now higher than ever before (Krane, 2018), this comprehensive review draws attention to the importance of policymakers and all actors (coaches and coach educators, athletes, sport administrators, sport-leaders, referees, sport psychology consultants, physicians, etc.) in making a commitment to promoting gender equality, reducing heteronormativity and homonegativity in women’s sport, and creating a more inclusive sporting environment.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the “Agencia Estatal de Investigación” (Grant Number: PID2019-108630RA-I00/AEI/10.13039/50110001103) and the Research network “LGTBIQ+, educación física y deporte” (Grant Number: CSD-36/UPB/211).

## Notes

- 1 The literature reviewed uses different concepts. In this chapter, the concepts used by the authors are maintained.
- 2 According to Lenskyj (2013), this concept “encompasses both homophobia and heterosexism, that is, active prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities, as well as the implicit ideological assumptions that shape societal attitudes and practices” (p. 139).

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# Gay athletes at the 2017 World Outgames

## A qualitative analysis

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### Introduction

In spite of the social change experienced in advanced societies, sport is still one of the most pronounced pillars of androcentric domination, showing enormous hostility to the presence of gay men and lesbians in their places for practice, and thus determining the sports institution both structurally and symbolically.

On the academic level, interest in homosexuality in the sports context as an object of research arose at the end of the 1980s, although only in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. In general, the investigations that analyse the situation of the LGBTQ population in the practice of sport coincide in pointing out that sport has traditionally developed within the framework of what is called “hegemonic masculinity” (courageous, physically tough, etc.) (Connell, 1995; Wetherell & Edley, 1999), where gender and sexual diversity have been clearly marginalised (O’Brien et al., 2013) in a hierarchical system. The studies have presented a varied repertory of forms of discrimination (Barber & Krane, 2007), meaning that those people who do not conform to the dominant discourses are forced to remain invisibilised and silenced by the heteronormativity (Krane & Barber, 2003), whose consequence is homonegativity. The term “homonegativity” describes anti-gay sentiments and actions, and encompasses an active repudiation to homosexuality (MacDonald, 2018).

Some studies highlight the detection of social prejudices against the LGBTQ population practising sport in traditional organisations (Cunningham & Melton, 2012), with a considerable number of authors confirming the existence of a hostile climate, a homonegative atmosphere, and an irrational fear of this population (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; O’Brien et al., 2013). However, notion of inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2009) argues a change in some advanced societies, also respectfully accommodating the LGBTQ community in sport. These premises are highlighted in recent studies where athletes (White et al., 2021), fans (Cashmore & Cleland, 2012), or the media (Magrath, 2020) show more open and tolerant attitudes than before.



## **Profiling a research object: LGBTQ sport in the context of competition**

Since the first international LGBTQ sporting events were held in 1982 (Gay Olympics in San Francisco), various equivalent competitions have proliferated (such as World Outgames or EuroGames), hosting thousands of athletes at each meet. The last international event was celebrated in Paris in 2018 (X Gay Games) and the next one will be hosted by Hong Kong in 2023 (XI Gay Games). For Tom Waddell, the founder of this type of sports competitions, the Gay Games (or World Outgames in our case) was a “of a festive nature, open to all, and sought to promote both gay pride and the Olympic ideals” (Waddell & Schaap, 1996, p. 5). It is with good reason that this event like the Gay Games (Symons, 2014) organise a parallel cultural and human rights programme. Due to their popularity and influence, these events have attracted the interest of academics and researchers who have studied them from the historical (Symons, 2010), economic (Book & Eskilson, 2010), and political (Washington & McKay, 2011) angle.

Some authors (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011) underline the importance of making sexual diversity visible in sports practice among outstanding athletes. In this respect, in the case of Spain, the lack of LGBTQ sports models may have influenced the fact that sexual diversity has not been fully accepted (Piedra, 2015; Piedra et al., 2017), in spite of there being sports organisations devoted to this end. In fact, the LGBTQ Iberian Sports Association (Asociación Deportiva Ibérica LGTB) has been active in Spain since 2009, and brings together the 12 gay-friendly clubs from the whole country. Some of these clubs have a history of more than 25 years and participate in the regular competitions held in this country. Some of them have their origin in the need that arose on the part of LGBTQ athletes to practise sport in a climate of respect and tolerance for gender and sexual diversity (Place & Beggs, 2011); although new studies point out to a search for social capital, for example, meeting new people would be among the most relevant motivations today (Muir et al., 2020).

Literature indicates that both LGBTQ clubs and international events aim to transform normalised social models of sexuality (Camargo, 2016). In these contexts, the athletes experience a feeling of greater freedom, with no prejudice or discrimination (Jarvis, 2006). Other studies point out that social relationships, such as make contacts and have new friends, are important for joining LGBTQ clubs or events (Elling et al., 2003). By contrast, the criticism is that this can easily lead to the creation of ghettos (Symons, 2007), where LGBTQ athletes compete and practice together but apart from straight athletes, making difficult the social acceptance they seek (Lefèvre, 1998). From the perspective under the analysis of the Inclusive Masculinity Theory, such sporting contexts are criticised. Thus, some scholars (Anderson, 2002; Willis, 2015) suggest openly competing within “straight” leagues, because it offers the best opportunity for challenging stereotypes and opening up spaces for gay players at all levels of the sport.

Although there has been a recent study that analysed the (positive) experience of high-competitive level gay athlete who compete in traditional clubs in Spain

(Vilanova et al., 2020), no specific research has yet been carried out in this country on gay athletes who compete in LGBTQ clubs and events. In contrast, different studies from abroad have been found that analyse the lived experiences of gay men and lesbian athletes in LGBTQ sports events (Camargo, 2012; Krane & Romont, 1997; Rowe et al., 2006). Thus, the present chapter aims to increase our in-depth understanding of this reality and throw light on this aspect among gay Spanish athletes.

## Methodology

This study is the result of an exploratory investigation that aimed at ascertaining and analysing the experience of LGBTQ athletes in Spanish sport. We wanted to answer two questions. In the first place, the intention was to reconstruct the way in which the possible social and cultural factors had influenced the trajectories of a group of LGBTQ athletes during their sports career. Second, it was also a question of knowing what social factors fomented competitive sports events among this population and to describe the narratives of the participants' experiences.

To answer these questions, it was decided to study the vision of the athletes coming from LGBTQ sports clubs in Spain that have the support of a wide network of historic sports clubs, as well as recognised social and political acceptance in this population. We established a case study based on qualitative methodology. The aim was not to transfer the results of the study to other realities but to demonstrate a reality using a concrete case, from which to extract general key points. We considered that this approach would allow us to obtain meaningful in-depth descriptions of the motivations and emotions of the individuals and their behaviours in a natural social environment (Creswell, 2007). Getting a deeper understanding of the narratives that arose from this context could provide clues to so-called “dissonant” or “disruptive” sports practices (Camargo, 2016). These practices can be considered as manifestations or expressions that do not fit into the heteronormative gender order.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the participants during the sports event as a main source of data collection. Informal conversations made it possible to obtain complementary data, generated in different contexts. In turn, the first author's attendance in the event served to note down the daily experiences of the group, related with the competition, the activities, the meals, etc. These annotations of their behaviour and interactions made it possible to fine tune contextual understanding of actions, interactions, and emotions in this microculture.

The narratives were produced during the fourth World Outgames, held between May 26 and June 4, 2017, in Miami, USA, which was one of the most important LGBTQ sports competitions at the international level. Through the Asociación Deportiva Ibérica LGTB, five athletes, of different ages and different lengths of time associated with Spanish LGBTQ clubs, who were participating in

this event, were contacted. The age of the five male athletes ranged between 32 and 52 and their duration of membership varied between 2 and 17 years. Three of them were Spanish and the other two were foreigners who were resident in Spain. They all participated voluntarily in the investigation and signed their informed consent once they had been explained the nature of the study. The Committee for Research Ethics in Andalusia gave its approval.

The interviewees were invited to participate following a script designed to discover their life experiences in different ambits and in different phases of their sporting lives. The interviews were recorded and the narratives produced were subsequently transcribed. An open and axial codification system was used to thematic analysis, that in an inductive manner made it possible to produce descriptions and explanations, establishing relations among categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

## Results

### ***The LGBTQ sports clubs a refuge in a heteronormative society***

In general terms, the sports experiences of these athletes were very similar. The majority did not practise sport or abandoned it in their childhood and adolescence, among other reasons because of something that seemed to have marked them enormously. The athletes interviewed underlined the predominance of a heteronormative homophobic culture in society as the main variable that influenced their exclusion from the normalised or regular sports environment, so some gay athletes feel obliged to do sport in LGBTQ sports clubs.

I think it's not for ourselves but for the rest of the people, I mean, that they stare at you or maybe any comment, you know? That you don't . . . that it doesn't care, but that it's not necessary either

(Participant n. 1, 32 years old, 9 years of association with the club)

We are a sector of the population that often feels marginalised in the world of sport – because it's like “the men are very manly”, in the case of men at least, and here you can relax and be yourself.

(Participant n. 2, 41 years old, 2 years of association with the club)

I believe that they [LGBTQ clubs] are still necessary to create an environment for LGBTQ people to practise sport . . . and to meet people who have the same interests and perhaps feel more comfortable with people with the same sexual orientation

(Participant n. 3, 37 years old, 4 years of association with the club)

Underlying this background is the idea that sport is an environment which is deeply marked by heteronormative values, which make it difficult for people with a homosexual orientation to practise freely (Symons et al., 2017). The heterosexual orientation plays an evident role of power and social control in sports institutions, attempting to dissuade the participation of those who are suspected of any sexual orientation which disrupts the mindset of heterosexual hegemony, which is taken as granted. To this end, society takes as references cultural stereotypes associated with appearance and bodily practices, establishing mechanisms for stigmatisation or social rejection of those cultural images that contradict this ideal of natural heterosexuality. A situation that is particularly evident in specific sports like football or American football, where hegemonic masculinity is still flourishing without contestation (Kian et al., 2011; Llopis-Goig, 2008).

We know of footballers who have tried to come out and they have received answers from the clubs saying: there are no fags here! . . . So, the typical player from the first division, who scores goals, is one of the best, he is the “macho man” of them all, you can’t expect this player to come out. . . . The moment that football changes, the rest of sport will change, because it is the sport that moves more people and the most macho . . . the moment that changes there will be a domino effect.

(Participant n. 1, 32 years old, 9 years of association with the club)

The athletes we interviewed said that they joined the LGBTQ sports clubs, like in other studies (Muir et al., 2020) looking for more than safe and calm spaces to practise sports and compete; they also found in them a place to establish relationships and mutual recognition (Gaston & Dixon, 2020). In general, they all shared a feeling of seeking a “refuge”, an environment of identity safety, marked by freedom and respect towards the homosexual population. In conclusion, these types of clubs develop an essential integrating function for the LGBTQ population.

The sports system has the ability to act to change the field of sport, because it is a highly normativised system. In this respect, the gay athletes we interviewed consider that the federations should also become more involved policies of inclusion with regard to LGBTQ people. In their opinion, there is a lack of social commitment on this topic in the sports federations, in spite of the fact that some clubs and federations make some symbolic gestures, they are still very few. This situation of passiveness or lack of involvement regarding the climate of rejection and persecution of homosexuality in sport, on the part of the sports institutions, has been confirmed in cases like the Winter Olympics Games in Sochi (Russia) in 2014 (Lenskyj, 2014). But there are many other examples.

there is not definite rejection [on the part of the federations]. But no positive support either. . . . There is in fact a need for more awareness campaigns, specifically in the world of sport.

(Participant n.3, 37 years old, 4 years of association with the club)

Against this backdrop, they argue that the existence of the LGBTQ clubs and the establishment of competitive sports events for this group are the result of a social failure, in not achieving integration of sexual diversity in our model of prevailing social values but reproducing heteronormativity.

What happens is that education takes time. . . . That's why we exist, that's why the clubs [LGBTQ] have been established, and the LGBTQ sports events exist. And, that's why, for example, there is still a Woman's Day, and a Gay Pride Day. . . . The day we are [socially accepted] we won't need to celebrate any of these days.

(Participant n.1, 32 years old, 9 years of association with the club)

### **Recognition, visibility, and competition**

In this described setting, the motives that these athletes present for participating in the LGBTQ international competitions, even for returning year after year, continue to be the same as those identified in other studies (Krane & Romont, 1997): "pride", "competition", "community", and "socialisation".

Well, I think it's another form of pride, a lot of people keep saying why is Gay Pride still happening? Well, there are still problems. The day it becomes totally normal, maybe it will no longer be necessary, but today I think it is still necessary for people to see what there is . . . there is also the gay athletes who like to meet people, do sport, compete, just like anyone else. It's another. . . . I see it as another way of vindicating the gay man.

(Participant n. 1, 32 years old, 9 years of association with the club)

I believe that this type of events is still necessary, to be able to measure yourself against other athletes who are also LGBTI . . . the barriers for competing and participating in this type of events are much lower for people whose sexual orientation is perhaps still not well accepted.

(Participant n.5, 37 years old, 2 years of association with the club)

In many cases, when asked, the gay athletes established the parallelism with the celebration of LGBTQ Pride Day. In both the cases, the aim is to make visible a situation and a reality that is far from being ideal with respect to diversity. And it makes it possible, even though only temporarily, to give visibility to an LGBTQ community established through sport (Rowe et al., 2006).

This is a bit like the part of the floats, the part of the parade that there is after the Gay Pride demonstration. Isn't it? It gives it colour, it's what attracts the people, it also helps integration.

(Participant n.2, 41 years old, 2 years of association with the club)

However, in spite of recognising the utility of this type of sports events, especially for athletes from countries and cultures that are more hostile to sexual diversity, some of those interviewed are critical of the system (Litchfield & Osborne, 2018). Some interviewed gay athletes recognise the fact that, in future, these competitions or clubs will come to an end, as they could become a ghetto, if they are not directed towards greater social integration, and establishing links with other sectors of society. Even some previous studies point out that gay athletes are reluctant to join these “counter spaces” (Elling & Janssens, 2009), because, furthermore, that it can even cause LGBTQ sport to become a ghetto in which, far from achieving visibility and normalisation, there is greater self-exclusion and invisibility (Symons, 2007).

One of my best female friends always tells me this, that we are always in ghettos.  
(Participant n.1, 32 years old, 9 years  
of association with the club)

I believe we should work more for integration and visibility in the world of sport, that we should participate in the league events, in the Open championships . . . where we should participate with the rest of the clubs because really that is where . . . it is what really lets you achieve normalisation.  
(Participant n. 2, 41 years old, 2 years of  
association with the club)

If this is not the case, according to Eng (2006), LGBTQ sports spaces will generate more problems of marginalisation and rejection, becoming a “deviant” sport with respect to heteronormativity. Furthermore, as stated by Drury (2014), although the LGBTQ sports spaces (like these international events) subvert the heteronormative, they are rooted in the binary order, limiting their transforming potential for other groups.

In spite of the narratives on the vindicatory role of this type of events among the LGBTQ community, the competitive component is of course present in all the participants; although in some to a greater degree than in others, competing is part of the attraction of the event. To be able to measure oneself against one’s peers, exceed oneself, win, as occurs in the rest of the traditional competitions, is a main reason for their participation.

In this type of international events there is also a high level, sports level, that is if you have a good level you can measure yourself against people of your level. And in LGBTQ competitions at the national level there is usually a lower level. I also like this aspect.

(Participant n.4, 52 years old, 17 years of  
association with the club)

### ***The festive nature as the basis for conviviality and the exaltation of diversity***

In spite of some of the motivations mentioned earlier which reside at the origin of these sports events, the athletes also recognise the festive nature of this

competition. It is for a good reason that “the festivities are an integral part of the programme and the very essence of the competition” (Camargo, 2012, p. 109). A festivity in which the athletes voluntarily are protagonists, is a type of closing ceremony in the swimming pool. Music, choreographies, humour, and, of course, water characterise this ceremony which they call The Pink Flamingo and which is also organised in other international events.

What makes them different from the traditional ones? Well, there are good vibes, you meet a lot of people, they have parties, everybody goes together. . . . There are different moments for contacting people, you go to talk, you give your opinion, you meet people from all over, and that is the cool part of competing abroad.

(Participant n.1, 32 years old, 9 years of association with the club)

For Allison (2014), in spite of the fact that initially this type of displays does not coincide with the spirit of the first organisers, The Pink Flamingo ended up by prevailing as a way of subverting genders – for some, having to go much further in its subversive and radical nature (Rowe et al., 2006). This could be considered as dissonant practices (Camargo, 2016) where some athletic manifestations that do not fit with normative bodies, and where some gestures of the conventional sportive universe are shown. De Castro and Siqueira (2020) state that new discursive practices operate in these sportive contexts, such as jokes or even resignifying the homophobic insult itself. This festivity is not limited just to the event itself, but goes even further, with organised festivities in the evening in different parts of the city.

But this construction of relations and common identities also occurs in an individual manner among the athletes from different nations. In some cases, they are reunions which are repeated in the successive events, as many of the participants repeat the experience, establishing strong links of friendship. Athletes share a lot of time in the stands, festivities, on the beach and at the dinners. . . . As other studies point out (Muir et al., 2020), they are no longer just rivals in the competition, they are friends who take advantage of the competitions to meet again and share experiences of personal and social conviviality.

## Conclusions

The study underlines the important influence of the heteronormative culture as the hegemony of our society, and the homonegativity as a direct consequence of it, in the abandoning of sports practice among LGBTQ people. Precisely, this reality leads people with a homosexual orientation to opt for joining LGBTQ sports clubs and practising sport there. They find in them the opportunity to practise sport without being the object of social questioning in the face of stereotypes of appearance or “inappropriate” mannerisms in the light – for the of the dominant

heteronormative culture. Also they provide them with the opportunity to integrate this space-refuge that the LGBTQ sports clubs represent in other contexts of social relations, organising activities.

In this line of thought, the study presents the double nature that LGBTQ competitions acquire, and, in particular, the fourth World Outgames. On the one hand, the strong vindicative character of the event, which seeks to expose and, at the same time, shows the LGBTQ population in the context of competitive sport; and on the other hand, the festive and social spirit of the event which serves to provide the athletes with a space for socialising. In spite of the foregoing, the danger and fragility of this type of clubs and sports events are recognised, as they can run the risk of becoming small strongholds of freedom in a world which is eminently hostile to sexual diversity.

Given the results obtained from this research, we consider that it is essential for the public institutions to acquire a greater commitment and adopt measures aimed at transmitting positive values on sexual diversity. The sport and the educational system should implement awareness actions and training for coaches and physical education teachers, to enforce this perspective in a transversal manner. In the same way, the sports federations and clubs should implement measures that contemplate sexual diversity as an inseparable part of human nature. In both institutions, strong measures must be adopted to combat homonegativity.

We cannot but mention some of the limitations of this study. The first limitation is represented by the small number of participants in the study. Distance and expense meant that the Spanish participation at this event was limited. The second restriction is the participation of only gay men in this study, not giving a voice to other communities that could have enriched the findings. In spite of these limitations, given the scarcity of studies which tackle the LGBTQ reality in sport ally in Spain, we wanted to share this exploratory work with the scientific community, and take advantage of it to express the need for further research into this topic in the field of sociology.

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# Physical activity and sport among Spanish trans persons

## Participation data and personal and sociocultural factors

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### Introduction

The potential benefits of physical activity and sport (PAS) for health are widely recognised, both in their biological and psychosocial dimensions, and in the short and long terms (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008; World Health Organization, 2010). All persons and groups of people can benefit from regular PAS activities, but the social distribution of access and satisfactory PAS practice is far from being egalitarian. This is especially unsatisfactory among the sexual and gender minority groups such as trans persons (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2017; Muchicko et al., 2014). Beyond the recognised general biological effects of PAS, trans persons can benefit from the psychological wellness these practices can provide. This is especially important because these persons often experience different mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and addictions (Dhejne et al., 2016; Millet et al., 2017) due to the stress produced by marginalisation, stigmatisation, and discrimination (HSE LGBT Health Sub Committee, 2009). Moreover, PAS can complement or accelerate the effects of hormone treatments, alleviate their possible side effects (e.g. cardiovascular risk factors, osteoporosis, or osteopenia), and contribute to maintaining an appropriate weight for their health (Coleman et al., 2012; Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Wierckx et al., 2012). The benefits can also be social, since participating in PAS may help them to develop a physique according to their desired identity and favour recognition and social justice in this vulnerable social group (Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, Fuentes-Miguel et al., 2018; Klein et al., 2018; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019).

The term trans, or transgender, is used to refer to persons whose gender identities do not match the sex they were assigned at birth based on their anatomy. According to Stryker (1994), it is used as an umbrella term that covers a variety of identities related to gender non-conformity. These would include a person (self)identified as transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, two

spirits, genderless, or gender questioner, among others. Within this diversity, some trans persons undergo surgery or hormone treatments to align their bodies with their gender identities, while others refuse to take any sort of far-reaching medical procedures to accommodate their bodies to gender normative standards or social expectations. Mirroring the rationale of the term “trans”, the rest of the people who are not considered transgender are labelled as “cisgender”. Thus, and according to Serano (2007), we use “trans persons” to refer to people whose gender identities do not coincide with the sex they were assigned at birth based on their anatomy, and “cisgender people” to refer to those persons (non-trans) whose gender identities are in line with their gender assigned at birth based on their anatomy.

In the words of Butler (1990), gender is not something fixed that we have, but something that is performed and, consequently, we are constantly making gender. Since gender is (re)created in everyday life, most trans people participate in gender transition processes to achieve a gender expression aligned with their gender identities. Although these processes often refer to binary gender transitions (from male to female -or vice versa-), the term “transition” is also used for any individual who takes steps towards a different gender expression (Coolhart et al., 2013). A common characteristic of all transition processes is that they affect the social (re)presentation of the body. During transitions, trans people present their gender expression publicly and recognisable by others through different strategies applied “ad hoc”, at particular moments and contexts, to their bodies (see Ekins & King, 2006). It is a complex interactive social process between the bodies of trans people and their environments, which struggle in dialectical negotiations that can allow and restrict the social recognition of trans people (Elling-Machartzki, 2017).

Conversely, far from representing a compact and monolithic discourse, the increasingly popular trans movement entails its own tensions (Travers, 2006). Some trans people challenge and confront bigenderism – upholding “radical gender” or “revolutionary gender” identities (Namaste, 2005, p. 6) – while others conform to it. For the latter, the transit is achieved once they are “men” or “women”, in the hope to become invisible in a gender binary society. These tensions suggest that the trans movement is still defining itself and that, according to Devor (2014), “trans” means different things to different people.

This comprehensive conception of the trans movement is influenced by several close theoretical domains such as feminist studies, queer studies, and transsexual studies which share many conceptual stances, although they also differ in some others, namely those related to gender identity. In this particular aspect, queer studies emphasise that gender identity is a fluid notion, since it is historically and socially constructed thus not stable and changeable (e.g. Giffney, 2009), while transsexual and feminist studies problematise the idea of gender fluidity, and are aligned with a gender identity continuity (e.g. O’Hartigan, 1993; Prosser, 2013). Altogether, despite these different positions on gender identities, they coincide in

their commitment to working with trans persons for their empowerment in coalition with groups and communities, including PAS contexts.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits of PAS for trans people, there is a lack of participation data on these issues and also a lack of knowledge of the personal and sociocultural factors that contribute to facilitating or inhibiting their participation. This knowledge is of great importance for establishing PAS promotion strategies among trans persons based on sound evidence. This is the reason why we present the main results of two studies developed within the same project but in different phases, one quantitative and another qualitative follow-up study.

## **What do we know?**

Among the few studies available on trans persons' PAS participation, we find a comparative study between USA transgender ( $n = 33$ ) and cisgender ( $n = 47$ ) people (not trans) on leisure-time physical activity, social support, and physical self-perception (Muchicko et al., 2014). Trans persons were less active and reported lower social support than the cisgender participants. Another comparative study, developed with British citizens, informed of insufficient levels of physical activity among trans ( $n = 360$ ) and cisgender ( $n = 314$ ) participants, although the last ones engaged in significantly more physical activity than trans people (Jones et al., 2018).

Some studies also offer information on the PAS participation of trans people as subsamples within wider lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) surveys. One of them reported that 33.3% of a small sample of 14 Australian trans persons were active (30 minutes or more of physical activity) during the previous week. Moreover, close to 67% of them participated in team sports while 33% participated in individual sports, being walking the most popular activity (Symons et al., 2010). Another report found that young trans adults ( $n = 42$ ) from the United Kingdom were less disposed to participate in any sport than their lesbian, gay, and bisexual peer, although they showed a similar percentage of participation in team (approximately 53%) and individual sports (approximately 51%). Going to the gym was the most popular activity among trans participants, followed by rugby, running, football, and swimming (National Union of Students, 2012). In a recent large European study, more non-cisgender participants felt excluded or stopped sport participation (48.4%) than their cisgender counterparts (14.2%) (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021).

This brief review indicates the lack of knowledge about trans people's PAS participation and the quality of data provided. There are a handful of studies and samples are short, in some cases too short to obtain sounded evidence. In several studies, trans people represent rather small subsamples within wider surveys of LGBTQ's PAS participation. Accordingly, it exists a great necessity of research to obtain an accurate picture of trans persons' participation that could lead to a diagnosis for further PAS promotion.

This situation is not different regarding the knowledge on personal and socio-cultural factors that affects trans persons' PAS participation. Some qualitative studies highlight how heteronormative contexts, characterised by a sex or gender segregation of activities, strongly determine trans persons' experiences in PAS participation in different contexts such as physical education (PE) and sport. Beyond legal impediments, they refer to certain barriers to participation related to anxiety, body exposure, and being ridiculed or objectified in different PAS environments and spaces (Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada et al., 2018; Englefield et al., 2016). Trans people tend to describe changing rooms as uncomfortable and unsafe places that do not facilitate their engagement in PAS, as well as spaces that stimulate their social rejection (López-Cañada et al., 2021; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Semerjian & Cohen, 2006; Sykes, 2011). Changing rooms can influence people's subjectivities and identities and cause the marginalisation of non-normative bodies because they are not expected to be found there: unfit, old, non-heterosexual, or transgender bodies (Fusco, 2005; Sykes, 2011). Other trans people even avoid entering fitness centres to be less exposed to gender scrutiny (Ellis et al., 2014). Language is also a barrier to participation, because in the sports environment, it is often the usage of discriminatory and transphobic talking (Gill et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Symons et al., 2010). This is indicated by some studies which refer to verbal abuse as the predominant type of harassment in different contexts, including sports (Devís-Devís et al., 2017).

### **Filling the gap of knowledge: The case of Spain**

Recent reviews on trans persons' PAS participation, and by extension LGBTQ participation, indicate that research has increased during the last decade, although it is underrepresented in comparison with general population research (Hartmann-Tews et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2017; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2021; Landi et al., 2020; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Piggott, 2020). Moreover, most of this inquiry is focused on populations from English-speaking countries, showing a big black box from other countries, in particular Spain.

The results presented in this chapter come from a wider research project developed in two phases in Spain. The first phase analyses quantitative data obtained from a survey answered by 212 trans persons on different issues related to PAS participation (see López-Cañada et al., 2020). Of these, a group of 43 trans persons participated in a follow-up qualitative phase to obtain information about the personal and sociocultural circumstances of their lives that may complicate, facilitate, and influence the experience of their participation in PAS (see Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada et al., 2018; López-Cañada et al., 2021).

### ***Trans persons' PAS participation***

From the 212 participants from the first phase, about 44.1% were trans women, 51.2% trans men, and 4.7% non-binary persons. Most are young adults in an age

range of 10 to 62 years ( $M = 30.63$ ,  $SD = 10.75$ ). They were recruited from main LGBTQ associations using a convenience sampling and a snowball strategy to reach more potential participants. The main results of the first study are:

- The 75.5% of the sample practiced PAS at some time in their lives, 50% of them with a frequency of  $\geq 3$  times/week. These results indicate similar participation of trans persons in comparison to the general Spanish population of young adults (closer age range of 15–24 years) (Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte, 2016).
- About 14.5% of them stopped the activity after gender disclosure. Therefore, special attention is required for policies that contribute to the development of a proactive socio-cultural environment that fosters trans' involvement in PAS before and after gender disclosure.
- The results also reinforce international trends in gender differences, as trans men (78.7%) participate more in PAS than trans women (72%).
- Participation in unorganised and individual physical and sport activities predominates among those trans persons who took part in PAS, both before (67.5%) and after gender disclosure (94.2%).
- Taking into account the 12 most practiced activities in trans persons, the study points out that after gender disclosure, activities like swimming, football, basketball, dancing, and volleyball are significantly reduced, while others like bodybuilding became more practiced. When analysing by gender identity, a significant drop has been seen in trans women after gender disclosure in football, basketball, and volleyball. In contrast, in trans men, participation increases significantly in bodybuilding, jogging, and cycling.

### ***Personal and sociocultural factors that affect trans persons' PAS participation***

The second qualitative phase helped to obtain deeper insights about personal and sociocultural factors affecting PAS participation. Forty-three participants in this phase were selected for attending to the following three criteria: (1) gender balance of participants, (2) wide range of age, and (3) participation in PE and sport before and after their gender disclosure (López-Cañada et al., 2021).

We called upon a socio-ecological perspective for understanding and identifying personal and sociocultural factors and barriers that may complicate, facilitate, and influence their participation in PAS. The most relevant factors we identified are (a) body appearance; (b) compensation of hormonal side effects; (c) sports spaces; (d) legal recognition of gender; and (e) school PE.

A) Achieving a body appearance coherent with the gender they are identified with and the consequent increasing body satisfaction is an important factor influencing their PAS participation (Jones et al., 2017; Klein et al., 2018). For instance, trans men often engage in weightlifting and fitness exercises to burn fat, as well as



to look fitter and more muscular. For example, Darío (trans man, 18 years old) and Carlos (trans man, 35 years old) point out:

For example, if you walk a lot your hips get reduced. It is a change that trans guys want . . . well, they do not totally disappear . . . but yes. . . . It is true, they [the hips] get reshaped.

(Darío)

I would like to be a little more physically fit. . . . I'd especially like bigger pectoral muscles. . . . This year I'm working on it a little more.

(Carlos)

B) Another factor refers to the role reserved for physical exercise to compensate for undesired effects of hormonal treatments that many trans people undertake (oestrogens for trans women and testosterone for trans men). Trans people are aware of the positive influence of exercise in mitigating some of the physical and psychological side effects, such as fluid retention, liver difficulties, poor blood clotting, insomnia, psychological stress, or overweight. As Laura (trans woman, 14 years old) remarks:

I have to do a lot of sport . . . a lot of cardio and stuff like that so that hormone treatment does not affect me.

C) Sports spaces and facilities are hyper-normative areas that operate as a hegemonic influence on gender issues (Doan, 2010). The overt or implicit regulation of gender binarism in changing rooms and many sports facilities and activities conditions the gender expression of many trans persons. Thence, they often choose to avoid such facilities, opting for outdoor individual activities such as jogging or cycling. Others even build their own gym at home to avoid the crowds, as Yeraí (trans man, 20 years old) puts it:

No, I never go to gyms. Before chest surgery, I was too anxious. And now [after surgery], I rather prefer to exercise alone at home. I do not feel comfortable with many people and so . . . that's why I have the gym at home. I have the weights and a punching bag at home, and I practise with tutorials.

Swimming pools are some of the most unsafe spaces for trans persons, because body exposure causes them acute discomfort, as Alex (non-binary, 32 years old) expressed:

I really like the water but, of course, with the problem of the swimsuits . . . swimming pools are much more normative [spaces] . . . then I feel a little uncomfortable, . . . in the swimming pool, as I have breasts and I go. . . [top-less], well I feel a little self-conscious.

Despite these examples, there are other PAS spaces in which trans persons feel welcome, such as LGBTQ sports teams. Some participants, as Darío (trans man, 18 years old) and Llurena (trans woman, 32 years old), feel part of the teams and have affinity and empathy with the rest of the players:

You feel integrated into a group, you see people who are just like you, who have the same problems, and protest against the LGBTQ phobia. . . . There is always companionship, they pass you the ball, everyone plays, teams exchange, we always stay longer, we have a drink and comment on the game . . . for me, this is very rewarding.

(Darío)

[In the LGBTQ team] there are lesbians, as well as heterosexuals, bisexuals, and so on, and then I, who did not match with anyone, did not stand out much in the end! [laughs]. . . . I chose this LGBTQ club because in my case as a trans person, a woman in this case, at that time I was not reassigned. Then my body, at least the genital part, could induce doubts, some little problem, and then I chose that team because I thought it would be easier for me not to get stuck. . . . Having a safe space in which you do not have to think, do not have to think over and over, you just practice sports, just play.

(Llurena)

D) The legal recognition of gender identity is of the utmost importance for trans people. In the realm of sport, to have the gender registered in the National Identity Card (Documento Nacional de Identidad [DNI]) is often required in competitions. However, the lack of an updated DNI does not mean per se the trans persons' exclusion of sports facilities. Often, those who have not achieved legal recognition of their gender identity find the understanding and compliance of managers, workers, and other users of the facilities as Laura (trans woman, 14 years old) indicated:

I've never [had any problems], I've never even had to explain anything. Anyway, those who run the sports club know me and love me a lot, so they have never said anything. And on the DNI there is another [male] name, that is not "Laura", but they corrected my name on my sports card.

(Laura)

Despite the advances in the recognition of trans and intersex participants in some sports contexts and organisations, the public acceptance of this population is not generalised.

E) School PE is remembered by trans people we interviewed as a subject in which they felt misplaced, because they did not fit in those physical and sports activities segregated by gender. As Antonio (non-binary, 32 years old) said:

At the end, you are in the middle and you are completely alone. And you think you are isolated in the universe.

Usually, trans boys refused to carry out activities that the teachers and the rest of the students considered girlish, and vice versa. This had consequences in the way they were treated by schoolmates. Some say they were insulted, stigmatised, and harassed when they tried to swap to “the opposite side”. Carlos’s classmates yelled at him: “look at the butch lesbian!” because he was playing soccer. And when Antonio attended PE swimming classes without a shirt, he remembers some pupils squawking: “Why do you go topless if you are a girl?”

Negative experiences in PE were also frequent among trans girls. For example, Verónica (trans woman, 50 years old) and Gloria (trans woman, 28 years old) said that before making the gender change public:

I didn’t want to do those tough things [in PE] . . . just to avoid being seen as a rough guy . . . and I tried to do more feminine things. . . . I did it because I didn’t want to get strong muscles.

(Verónica)

In my case, I haven’t got such good memories of PE classes. It wasn’t because of sport, since I did practise it, but rather because of situations in which certain kids were teasing me, and finally I didn’t want to do it.

(Gloria)

Contrariwise, Jorge (trans man, 42 years old) and Carlos also positively remembered their PE classes:

I’ve always felt comfortable doing sport [in PE] because I was in my element and I liked what I was doing, I was at ease. . . . I participated in everything, races, relaxation sessions.

(Jorge)

It was my favourite [subject], it was my favourite one. . . . I always beat everybody. I don’t mean to brag about myself, but there was only one other guy who ran faster than me.

(Carlos)

The experiences trans people tell about PE teachers are not always positive. In general, they remark that teachers enhanced the isolation and distance they felt in PE classes. For instance, Jorge, when still considered a girl in school, expressed his desire to be evaluated with the boys in the fitness lessons, and his teacher harshly rejected his request:

They [teachers] examine and value you like a woman and I, at least, did not consider myself a woman, I was a man. . . . Then, I said “I want to be assessed like that [like the boys]” but he replied, “here are the men and there are the women and the exams are different”.

At the same time, in many cases, the indifference and apathy of teachers somehow supported the violence exerted towards trans students as Carlos, who was severely beaten by his classmates and the teachers washed their hands off, and they “stared at us doing nothing”.

## Final comments

PAS can benefit trans persons' health and social involvement, and it can fuel their recognition and self-affirmation. However, to accurately assess this affirmation, it must be taken into account that the umbrella term “trans” gathers around a cluster of diverse gender identities, transition moments, and embodied experiences which determine diverse and, eventually, contrasting experiences in PAS contexts. For those trans persons who aim to be recognised either as men or as women, PAS provides a privileged scenario to succeed (or fail) in their performance of gender binarism. Conversely, trans people with fluid gender identities reject any form of gender normativism explicitly or implicitly imposed in PAS contexts. Despite these nuances, all trans persons experience numerous and diverse hindrances to participate in PAS that cisgender persons do not have to experience. This is unfair, insofar as the involvement and access to PAS is a right for all persons that, therefore, should not be menaced or limited by gender identity issues.

In particular, body exposure seems to be a determining factor after gender disclosure, because it provokes an acute anxiety and potential discriminatory period, which facilitates PAS disengagement and a difficulty in subsequent PAS reengagement. The analysis of sociocultural factors that affect trans persons' engagement in PAS reveals that they also face interwoven interpersonal and sociocultural issues (body passing, fear of being unmasked, hormone treatment, friends, health, and PE professionals) in several social contexts (family, gyms, sport teams, PE and health system, legal requirements) that influences their behaviour and decisions regarding their commitment to PAS.

These factors are usually interrelated in many ways. For instance, a relevant issue that appears in different themes is the role that PAS play as “technologies of the self”. For Foucault (1988, p. 18), technologies of the self “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves”. Therefore, PAS can be considered as technologies that trans people use to change gender power relations that allow them to fulfil their gender identities. However, trans people's technologies of the self may also become technologies of power and domination. This especially appears in those trans people who only acknowledge a dichotomised “true” embodied identity of man or woman. In those cases, the value conferred on PAS and the motivation and satisfaction of their practice is reduced to specific outcomes (e.g. construction of hypermasculinised/feminised body) that reflect compliance to the social stereotypes explicitly or implicitly imposed by heteronormativity and gender binarism (Travers, 2006).

This focus on the interaction between interpersonal and sociocultural factors provides a deeper social character to this work because of political and social complexities in the analysis of trans persons' PAS participation (López-Cañada et al., 2021). This is necessary to track patterns of oppression and make visible social gaps and hidden issues that affect their PAS (non)participation. Despite the barriers trans people meet in PAS, they still make choices and adopt strategies for becoming social full participants and achieving personal and community well-being. Needless to say, the promotion of trans persons' participation in PAS contexts is a matter of social justice and, consequently, it needs to be fulfilled. To do this, a first step would be to promote social sensitivity and commitment to facilitate that trans people can carry out their right to practice PAS in similar conditions as those of the rest of the population. In the recreational and health domains of PAS, it is important to establish a clear order of priorities: political, sports, and educational actors must put the right to participation first, and take care to guarantee the effective and satisfactory practice of this right to all people, entailing whatever it takes to make PAS suitable for trans people, not trans people suitable for PAS.

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# Conclusion

*Ilse Hartmann-Tews*

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European institutions and sports organisations have long adopted policies to promote sport for all and repel discrimination on grounds of gender, age, and other aspects. However, anti-discrimination policies with regard to LGBTQ individuals have only recently been put on the agenda. The Revised European Sports Charter (Council of Europe, 2021) now includes an article on “The Right to Sport. For the first time since the adoption of the European Sport for All Charter” in 1975 and its update in 1992 and 2001 as the European Sports Charter, a no-discrimination clause has been adopted that specifically integrates sexual orientation as one of the grounds listed. However, it does not mention gender identity.

The intention of “Sport, Identity and Inclusion in Europe: The Experiences of LGBTQ People in Sport” has been twofold: to explore the challenges and experiences of LGBTQ people in sport and to critically assess sports inclusion policies with regard to LGBTQ people in various European countries. This endeavour means taking into consideration the diversity of people embraced by the acronym LGBTQ and the diversity of the sports policy frameworks of sports systems. It is up to the reader to decide whether the intentions have been fully met. Moreover, new evidence is presented to help us better understand the challenges that both LGBTQ people and sports systems face in overcoming discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. The chapters present consistent evidence that LGBTQ people continue to experience discrimination in sport and that there are many structural barriers to engagement in actions that curtail discrimination.

Undoubtedly, European institutions play a powerful role in the coming out of states (Ayoub, 2016), and hopefully, this holds true for the coming out of sport systems as well, as the Revised European Charter of Sports adopted in October 2021 provides for a greater visibility of the norm of anti-discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation.

However, there are numerous barriers to action, many of which have already been identified in international research (Denison et al., 2021). With regard to additional evidence, the contributions of this book refer to a particular feature of European sports: the autonomy of sport. The data of the Outsport survey clearly indicate a lack of relationship between the legal situation of LGBTQ people in

European countries and the perceived and experienced homo- and transnegativity in sports in these countries. This means that there is a gap between equality-based policy and regulation in civic society in general and in sport in particular. As the autonomy of sport has long been a tradition in Europe, the Revised European Sports Charter only serves as a frame of reference for sports managers and organisations. The country-specific reports clearly show that there is no official political instrument to induce sports organisations to abide by values of equality and anti-discrimination and thus fulfil their societal roles. Against this background, it remains unknown whether specific sports policy configurations are more or less successful in the process of the diffusion and implementation of norms of anti-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, the evidence of the chapters in this book provides a foundation for public sports administrations, sports organisations, and individuals involved in sports to identify ways and means to curtail discrimination and mitigate the harm experienced by members of this population. The chapters of this book, as well as other international research, show that future studies need to address specific issues in the field with regard to at least three areas.

First, research is needed to understand differences and intersections in the forms of discrimination between the subgroups of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, taking into consideration sexual orientation and gender identity. At the same time, it seems important to expand the analytical categories of gender expression to better understand the processes of othering and discriminating behaviours. Gender expression refers to a person's manifestation of their gender identity through any kind of gender role-related behaviour (e.g. clothing, haircut, movement, talk, or voice). Since homo- and transnegativity are based on the construction and social perceptions of gender roles and their adequate performance, this dimension becomes an additional cue for understanding discrimination and avoiding uniform, "one size fits all" (Anderson, 2017, p. 38) approaches to tackling discrimination.

Second, studies are required to understand the reluctance of sports officials to take meaningful anti-discrimination action against LGBTQ discrimination. Undoubtedly, there are sports managers who are open to engaging in diversity but are uncertain how to act. Although there are shifts towards more professionalised governance of sports in some of the European countries, it is volunteers who play the central role in running sports clubs and organising the community in an environment that reproduces the social structures of heteronormativity privileging males and masculinity. Relatively little attention has been given to understanding their self-consciousness about LGBTQ diversity and their resistance to putting LGBTQ anti-discrimination on the equality agenda.

Finally, research is needed to evaluate the already existing programmes and educational resources on LGBTQ inclusion, as there are only a few evaluation studies, and these create doubts regarding successful outcomes (Shaw, 2019). The aim of these evaluation studies should be to generate answers to the following questions: Are inclusion and anti-discrimination programmes valued and used by

sports clubs and, if not, why not? Are these programmes and materials effective in curtailing discrimination against LGBTQ athletes?

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