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### **Come citare / How to cite**

MICHELINI, E. & BURRMANN, U. (2021). A Preliminary Impact Model for the Integration of Young Refugees through Sports Programmes. *Culture e Studi del Sociale*, 6(2), 265-281

Disponibile / Retrieved from <http://www.cussoc.it/index.php/journal/issue/archive>

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**Articolo pubblicato online / Article first published online:** December 2021



- Peer Reviewed Journal

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# *A Preliminary Impact Model for the Integration of Young Refugees through Sports Programmes*

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## **Abstract**

This paper outlines a provisional impact model for the social integration of young refugees in German sports clubs through sports programmes. The questions ‘what works, under what circumstances, and for whom?’ are explored based on a Realist Evaluation of these programmes’ integration goals. For this purpose, the sports programmes for refugees of selected sports clubs were examined by considering: (1) the available requests for funding and reports produced by the clubs; (2) guideline-based interviews with the clubs’ contact persons; and (3) participant observations of selected programmes. The resulting data (documents, transcriptions and observation protocols) were analysed qualitatively and interpreted using Esser’s conceptualisation of integration. The impact model shows that integrative processes were observable within the sports programmes examined. To facilitate these processes, sport must ‘show its best side’, which cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, the relevance of sport as a means of integration could not be weighed, because the influencing factors are numerous, complex and interrelated. Hence, what is portrayed as the integrative power could be the result of more complex psychosocial processes that manifest themselves in sport. Theory-guided and empirically-based evaluations may contribute to the development of a more objective reflection on integration in/through sport.

**Keywords:** Refugee, Integration, Realist evaluation, Sport.

## **Introduction**

The number of people fleeing wars, conflicts, persecution and famine has increased sharply in recent years and had reached 70.8 million by the end of 2018 (UNHCR, 2018). Every second person seeking protection is a minor, some of them are unaccompanied and on the run without their parents, relatives or friends.<sup>1</sup> With 1.1 million asylum applications, Germany is one of the five countries that received the highest number of refugees during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ (UNHCR, 2018).<sup>2</sup> While the number of refugees and displaced persons continues to rise globally, the influx of asylum seekers in Germany decreased after 2018. The highest number of asylum applications in Germany (since 1953) was recorded in 2016, with 745,545 applications (BAMF, 2019). During this and other migration crises, high expectations were placed in the integration potential of organised sport. The current report of the German Federal Parliament, for example, states that sport:

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<sup>1</sup> According to data from 53 countries, the number of unaccompanied refugee minors has increased to over 111,000, although the real number is expected to be much higher (UNHCR, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Importantly, 58 per cent of the 70.8 million forced migrants are internally displaced. In addition, many refugees live in neighbouring countries of their countries of origin, and 84 per cent of refugees seek refuge in developing countries (UNHCR, 2018).

‘[promotes] encounters between people with very different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. It creates an understanding and removes mutual prejudice through the common experience. Sport also conveys values, behaviour and orientation patterns—such as fair play, regulatory acceptance, and team spirit—and thus contributes to social integration’ (2019: translation of the authors).

Not only sports politics but also part of the scientific discourse assume that voluntary sports clubs, in particular, can produce a ‘social kit’, which is essential for interactions in society (Burrmann, Braun, & Mutz, 2019, 2020; Janssens & Verweel, 2014; Putnam, 2000). Sports clubs are the most widespread voluntary organisations in Germany with around 27 million members, and are largely composed of children and youth (Braun, Albert, Alscher, & Hansen, 2021). At the height of the refugee crisis, the German Sports Youth (*Deutsche Sport Jugend - dsj*) created the programme ‘Orientation through Sport – Concrete help for young refugees on-site’ (OtS). OtS is one of the programmes that promotes the integration of young refugees with the support of the state and implemented by sports clubs. Moreover, many initiatives have been and are being implemented by sports clubs on their own initiative. About one in five sports clubs reported that they were engaged in activities for refugees in 2015 (Breuer, Feiler, & Nowy, 2017).

To measure the achievement of OtS’s objectives and effectiveness, a scientific evaluation was commissioned by dsj in 2016. Given these goals, the research focussed particularly on the perspective of the sport organisations, which took part in OtS. The evaluation team, consisting of researchers from the Universities of Münster and Dortmund, also included the contributors of this paper. The results of that analysis are discussed in some scientific publications (Burrmann, Neuber, Michelini, Quade, & Brandmann, 2019; Michelini, Burrmann, Nobis, Tuchel, & Schlesinger, 2018; Michelini, Quade, Burrmann, & Neuber, 2021-Forthcoming; Tuchel, Burrmann, Nobis, Michelini, & Schlesinger, 2021). Based on preliminary theoretical considerations and the evaluation of the results so far, this paper outlines a provisional impact model for social integration, which is based on the Realist Evaluation (RE) approach developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). To this aim and to further investigate the development of OtS, the data collected during the scientific evaluation in 2016 was broadened through follow-up interviews in 2019 about seven selected programmes. In addition to the presentation of the preliminary model and its underlying assumptions, this paper aims to discuss the impact of sport-related social work for children and youth. Hence, rather than merely asking ‘Is sport a means of integration?’, this article explores the relationship between sport and integration based on the question ‘what works, under which circumstances, and for whom?’.

## 1. Theoretical framework

OtS supports sports programmes for young unaccompanied refugees. Nevertheless, as will be shown later, programmes aimed at families or involving adults have also been funded. OtS’s funds are targeted at facilitating three objectives: (1) the development of physical activity (PA) and sport for young refugees, (2) the establishment and development of a network of young volunteers in sports, and (3) the creation of positions and structures in sports clubs to support the inclusion of refugees (dsj, 2020). These objectives were successively widened by dsj to include social integrative ones. In addition to exercise, games and sports, OtS pursued ‘an improvement of the social situation of (minor) refugees through additional offers

such as language support, homework supervision, [CV and job] application training, etc. in cooperation with other local clubs/associations' (dsj, 2020: translation of the authors). Funding was also provided for sports programmes for refugee girls and young women, as they are underrepresented in sports clubs (Breuer et al., 2017). The initiative also aimed to provide possibilities for the participants to take part in sport vocational training to become coaches or trainers, for example, and to thereby strengthen their inclusion in sport and create the opportunity for them to manage sports programmes in the future (dsj, 2020).

The OtS programme's objectives touch on different dimensions of integration (Esser, 2006). Esser defines the—disputed (Schinkel, 2018)—concept of 'integration' broadly as the inclusion of actors into an existing social system, in the (1) social, (2) structural, (3) cultural, and (4) emotional dimensions. This process presupposes the modification of the receiving system, is likely to be long term, intergenerational and subject to drawbacks (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2014; Oberg, 2006). By meeting people and building friendships, the participation of young refugees in PA and sport creates opportunities for (1) social integration. Formally joining a sports club as a member might foster (2) structural integration.<sup>3</sup> Learning the German language and becoming familiar with the national and local traditions through sport are indicators of (3) cultural integration. Integration into these three dimensions may stimulate the long-term emergence of identification feelings or rather (4) emotional integration. However, by focussing on young and recently migrated refugees, the indicators of cultural, structural and emotional integration presuppose social integration or at least go hand in hand with it, so that we will concentrate here on the goal of social integration and how it was pursued in OtS (Mutz & Burrmann, 2015).

It must be noted that in term of social integration, sport does not always and ubiquitously take place under conditions that promote intercultural understanding (Burrmann, 2020; Mutz & Burrmann, 2015). This raises the question about the conditions and mechanisms that promote social inclusion and that explain the effectiveness of inter-group contacts. According to Allport (1954), contact between different groups may reduce mutual prejudice if the following four conditions are met: (1) equal status between the groups in the social situation of contact; (2) the pursuit of common objectives; (3) cooperation between the groups; and (4) support of such contact by public institutions. Contact and cooperation between groups means here the coming together of refugees from different countries of origin as well as of the 'old' members of the sports club.

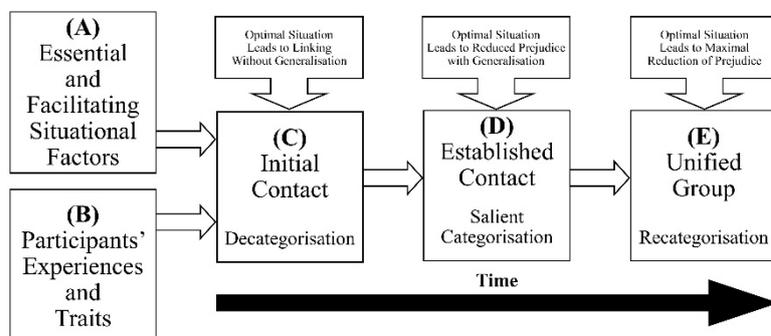
A meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) of over 500 studies substantiates the contact hypothesis. Some studies, however, found neither positive nor even negative effects, while in other studies, not all four conditions had to be met to reduce prejudice through inter-group contact. Besides, it remains unclear how and why contact between members of different groups leads to a change in attitudes and behaviour (Weymar, 2010, p. 10). To address the weaknesses of this theory, Pettigrew (1998) developed a process model that includes essential and facilitating situational conditions of contact situations along the temporal dimension. The reformulated version of this model is illustrated in a slightly modified version in the figure below. The creation of opportunities to develop friendships is an essential condition because it activates all further meditative processes. Facilitating situational conditions through which the effectiveness of contact can be explained,

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some programmes offer homework support and CV and job application training, which are also associated with structural integration (Baur, 2009).

learning about the foreign group, changes in behaviour, building affective connections and reassessing one's group are integrated into this model (Weymar, 2010).

Figure 1: The reformulated contact theory of Pettigrew (1998, p. 77)



Sport is considered an ideal platform for building (inter-ethnic) relationships, as members of a sports group regularly interact with each other and are able to perceive similarities between them due to common sports preferences and practice. As a result, mutual sympathy may develop, and social ties or friendships may arise (Baur, 2009). Interactions between members of a sports group (micro level) are framed in the context of a sports club (meso level) and in an overall social context (macro level). For a scientific observation of inter-group contact, all of these levels must be taken into consideration.

## 2. Methodology

This essay understands ‘evaluation’ as the systematic use of scientific methods to assess the conception, design, implementation and benefits of social intervention programmes (Rossi, Freeman, & Hofmann, 1988). In recent years, the number of scientific evaluations based on the theory-guided approach of Pawson and Tilley’s Realist Evaluation (RE) (1997)<sup>4</sup> has increased. One of the starting points is the criticism of classical experimental evaluation studies, which are considered to have a high degree of scientific evidence, but whose usefulness for everyday practice is limited and debatable. The complexity of social interventions, the heterogeneity of the participants and coaches, and the differences in contextual factors make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the evaluated programme or intervention. According to Donner-Banzhoff and Bösner (2013, p. 114), large-scale meta-analyses of experiments on complex social interventions produces unclear results. In certain settings (schools, blocks, prisons), programmes implemented in a facilitating context and by persons who are committed showed positive results. The same programmes, however, yielded negative outcomes, if the context was characterised by indifference or conflicting interests.

Coalter (2012) advances additional reasons for carrying out RE in sporting contexts: (1) the evidence of the effectiveness of social interventions in sport is often

<sup>4</sup> RE designs are only one variant of evaluations that deal more intensively with the mechanisms of action. For example, the working model for the evaluation of Dössegger et al. (2017) is based on the approach outlined by Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2004). The basic features of the procedures are similar to those of Pawson and Tilley (1997).

limited because robust and comparable monitoring and evaluation (e.g. using experimental and control group design) cannot be consistently carried out or because there are methodological difficulties in measuring the outcomes; (2) due to the variety of sport and exercise forms and settings, generalisations about the effects of sport are not meaningful. Thus, whether the organised activities are carried out sporadically or (almost) daily should make a difference. What is even more important than this quantitative aspect is that the degree of centrality of sport within the programme has important implications for the outcomes (Burrmann & Konowalczyk, 2020). In 'pure' sports programmes for children, youth and adolescents from different social backgrounds, it is assumed that their engagement in recreational or competitive sport can break down barriers and lead to changes in attitudes and behaviour. In Sport-Plus programmes, sport is seen as an important context for influencing values, attitudes and behaviour, but nothing is left to chance. Sport-Plus uses the popularity and low-threshold access of sport to educate or help children and youth, for example, by guiding them in changing their beliefs or behaviour. (3) Moreover, participation in sport is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving certain aim, for example, the social integration of young people (Smith, Spaaij, & McDonald, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to identify the conditions under which certain results can be achieved.

RE designs are also increasingly being used for the evaluation of sports programmes with children and youth but—to the authors' knowledge—never with young refugees or asylum seekers before. It is often pointed out that RE can overcome the weaknesses of alternative evaluative approaches. Specifically, RE designs might be better able to explain the contextual dependence of social interventions. Most REs of sports programmes focus on the macro and meso levels, use a circular research process and apply qualitative methods. However, the literature has mainly produced descriptive models (Daniels, 2015; Edwards, 2011; Harris, 2016; Herens, Wagemakers, Vaandrager, van Ophem, & Koelen, 2017; Linsley, 2013; Tacon, 2007; Willis et al., 2018) and has only rarely generated theories or effect models (Coalter, 2012; Dössegger et al., 2017; Henry, Chen, & Ko, 2013).

The focus of RE designs is no longer on whether the programme is functional or not, but on how the programme affects who, under what conditions and to what extent. REs constitute the basis for formulating solid middle-range theories on relationships between effects, which can inform and help professionals in their decision-making in this field. Yet according to Haunberger and Baumgartner (2017, p. 123), REs face challenges in terms of producing data and theories grounded knowledge.

The iterative procedure for RE can be described as an evaluation circle involving three main steps (Elkeles, 2012; Kazi & Spurling, 2000). The first step is the selection or (further) development of a model through so-called CMO-Configuration, which consists of the examination of three central analytical components: context (C), mechanism (M) and outcome (O). These 'building blocks' can (and should) be identified by both scientists and practitioners. In a second step, working hypotheses are formulated, which are tested in a third step based on a suitable data collection method, whereby a mixed-methods approach is favoured. The results are initially only valid for the given context being investigated. Before empirical generalizations can be made, the hypotheses and assumptions need to be tested by considering further programmes.

### 3. Results

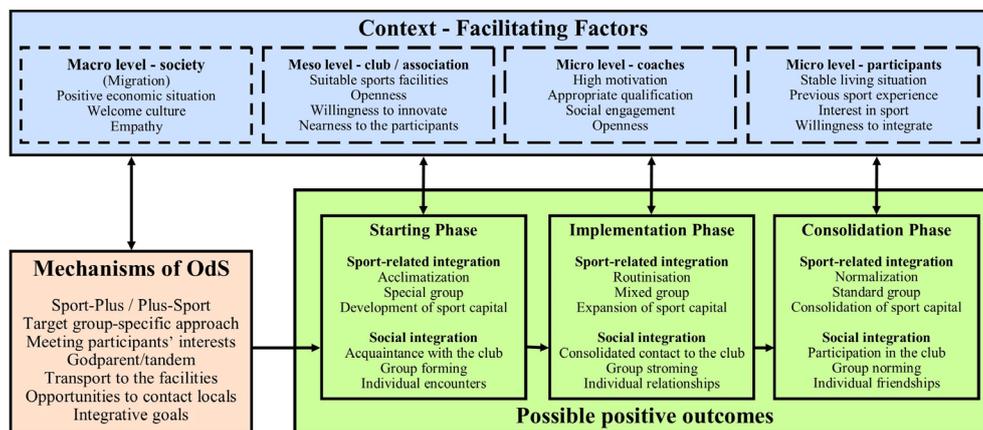
Based on the evaluation of OtS, this results section proposes a theory-guided preliminary impact model for the integration of young refugees through sport, considering in particular the above-mentioned components: context, mechanism and outcome. After outlining the model in the next section, it will be verified and extended against the backdrop of selected offers, which have been considered in-depth and longitudinally.

#### *The Preliminary Impact Model*

Between 2016 and 2017, OtS’s sports programmes were retrospectively analysed. This scientific evaluation was based on applications and reports about the programmes as well as on guideline-supported interviews with 28 of the clubs’ or associations’ contact persons (sometimes abbreviated as ‘CP’). The resulting data (documents and transcriptions) were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The following questions contained in the interview guidelines also guided the analyses: what are the objectives of both the participants and trainers? To what extent have the goals been achieved? Which of the associations’ regional characteristics and conditions were particularly relevant? What did the programmes’ social network look like and how did it function? What issues and barriers did the clubs face?

A preliminary impact model was outlined based on the theoretical assumptions and results of the scientific evaluation (Fig. 2). This model considers OtS programmes as mechanisms, and only explores the facilitating factors and possible positive outcomes. Obviously, these cannot be taken for granted and this will be extensively commented on in the remainder of the paper.

Figure 2: Preliminary impact model for social integration in OtS measures



To further describe some of the features of this figure, the following sections explain the three components of the model’s CMO configuration in more detail.

#### *Context*

The context entails the preconditions and frames that are necessary for the OtS programmes to trigger mechanisms and ultimately, to achieve the outcomes – outlined here using the example of social integration.

A review of the data collected reveals several relevant contextual factors at the macro (social environment), meso (sport club) and micro (participants, trainers) levels, which facilitate the triggering of mechanisms and thus ultimately also the achievement of social integration goals. While highly relevant, the macro and meso levels are far too complex to be explored in this paper and will therefore be ignored. Instead, we focus on the participants and trainers, whose interactions constitute the essence of the micro-level.

In the best case, the participants had previous sport experiences and willingness to establish contact between participants of other ethnic groups and members of the host community. For refugees, regular participation in sports and a regular daily routine are sometimes encumbered by their unresolved residence status and fear of deportation, long periods of stay in refugee housing, frequent moves and accommodation in emergency facilities. According to the contact persons, previous sports experiences, an interest in sport as well as the necessary social skills for joining a group increase the probability of (regular) participation in sport. By contrast, the lack of the necessary sport-related prerequisites (e.g. the ability to swim as a safety condition for rowing), problematic attitudes and behaviours (e.g. tardiness, aggression, lack of care for equipment and facilities) were the main obstacles. Additionally, it was reported that refugees often tended to isolate themselves by keeping among themselves (CP 23).

All contact persons already had experience with integrative work and were able to rely on an existing network. At the outset of the programmes, many contact persons complained that participation was irregular, that many participants were unpunctual, that there was a high fluctuation and that how many participants would actually show up was unpredictable. The trainers had to first learn how to deal with these challenges. During the course of the projects, clear and binding rules were agreed with both the participants and the first reception facilities, tandem partners or supervisors were provided for the refugees, and transport to the sports facilities was ensured. In sports-related social work involving unaccompanied male refugees, upper limits were set (e.g. 20 participants per course) and sessions were carried out with fixed groups and numerous trainers per group to achieve the corresponding goals (e.g. conflict and aggression reduction). In this context, contact persons also mentioned the importance of trainers as role models and the effectiveness of mentoring approaches. A change in caregivers often meant that the participants would leave. Some contact persons were very engaged and tried to help refugee participants in many regards, including supporting them in legal proceedings against (threatened) repatriation.

### *Mechanisms*

Mechanisms are the processes of OtS programmes that might lead to the emergence of specific results in the given context (Haunberger & Baumgartner, 2017). These need to be considered against the background of the facilitating contextual factors described above and of the processes triggered by them.

The dsj's first call for interest (2020) focussed on target groups and contents. According to the project objectives, these were low-threshold, cost-free PA and sporting activities for young unaccompanied refugees. Despite the OtS's narrow target, the implementation of the programmes mostly included also children and adult refugees as well as families. In line with the migration trend in Germany at the time of the data collection, many participants of the activities came from Syria. Female refugees only rarely engaged in the sport activities offered. This said, the

groups' heterogeneity and the highly floating participation makes it hard to describe in general the composition of the participant groups. Often, the sport organisations had to (re-)adjust their programmes according to changes in the attendance's trend. Therefore, further information will be considered later in the article, when specific sport offers will be considered.

The OtS offers had to be carried out either regularly for at least two months or as one-off sports activities or events. Among other benefits of participating in OtS, the dsj's public relations and press work was positively emphasised because it raised awareness about the programmes and clubs. The high bureaucratic effort required to obtain the funding was perceived as an obstacle by all contact persons. Many of them also reported a decline in the public's willingness to donate and a decrease in the 'welcome culture' among the population after 2016. Negative feedback (openly or via social media) were also sporadically received. Furthermore, at the beginning, not all club members were enthusiastic about the clubs' expenditures on refugees, for example, that their membership was free of charge. There are reports of diffuse concerns among members and of prejudice, which may have also been prompted by media reports on incidents that occurred after 2016 (e.g. the 2015-16 New Year's Eve sexual assaults in Cologne and the rape cases in Freiburg). At the outset of the programmes, awareness-raising work had to be carried out in the association to reduce concerns and prejudice towards strangers and to create a basis for facilitating contacts.<sup>5</sup>

The supported clubs and associations mostly provided sports- and exercise-related programmes (e.g. football, cricket, gymnastics, judo, rowing, climbing), which were primarily aimed at young (partly unaccompanied) refugees, but programmes for families and young adults were also designed and implemented. Exercise and sports activities often took place (initially) in separate groups, e.g. when the participants were living in refugee accommodations or when certain groups were introduced to the activities (e.g. learning to swim or new disciplines). In addition to physical activities and sports, other activities were also carried out, such as the creation of flyers or a 'lexicon' in various languages, concepts for the training of instructors and language support material.

From the inception of OtS, all measures could be categorised as Sport-Plus programmes, with one exception. Only one offer (CP 14) was classified as a mere sports programme. The other contact persons also reported that sports activities were used to carry out educational measures (e.g. punctuality, personal care), to improve German language skills, to reduce aggression, and to build trust and social contacts between themselves and with other members of the club. Generally, sport in the narrow sense was relegated to the background and became a means of reaching out to young refugees and to performing social work.

### *Outcomes*

Outcomes are the effects that are (supposed to be) triggered by causal mechanisms. A distinction is made between short-, medium- and long-term effects. While mutual sympathy and social relations between the sport groups' participants may develop in the relatively short term as a result of joint sports activities, feelings of togetherness or social relations with members of the host society within and outside the club tend to develop later.

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<sup>5</sup> However, the interview does not contain sufficient information to clarify this topic. Amongst other gaps, this is one that deserves further attention in the future.

The clubs' and associations' contact persons either took initiative on their own or in a small group (in some cases, they were approached by other engaged persons) to do something for young refugees. If the initiators were supported in their project by their association and/or by other cooperation partners, they initiated the programmes. OtS funding made it possible for them to purchase sports equipment for the programmes, sports clothes for the participants and, if necessary, to (minimally) compensate the volunteers for their efforts. Humanitarian (e.g. providing assistance and help) and sports-related integration goals (e.g. inclusion in the club and scouting of talents), were (initially) the main focus. Besides, measures were taken to facilitate the social integration of refugees (e.g. enabling contact between each other and with locals, deconstructing prejudices and implementing joint social activities). Occasionally, measures were mentioned that related to other integration goals (e.g. language acquisition, volunteering, support for vocational training and in bureaucratic endeavours) as well as to the sports clubs' further development (e.g. recruitment of members, expanding the portfolio of sport offers).

According to the contact persons, it was usually possible to guarantee a continuous sports programme, which was mostly frequented by boys and young men, but increasingly also by girls and young women with a refugee background. The latter is probably attributable to the target group-specific approach taken and the reorientation of programmes (e.g. cycling, mother-child swimming courses).

In the case of offers that took place in the club or were organised by it, (single) participants could be integrated into existing teams. In one case (CP 03), at the request of a group of refugees, the club's first cricket team was established in 2017 and participated in the German cricket league. Because of these new members, the club experienced very dynamic times, renewed itself and mobilised fresh resources. Despite the sportive success and the engaged participation of dozen of participants, the cricket team was confronted with social conflicts between internal factions and the recruitment of players by other newly established cricket teams, which resulted in some of the teammates dropping out.

The contact persons also reported on successes, e.g. in terms of identifying with the group and the establishment of social contacts with long-established club members (e.g. through celebrations and events). The statements collected entail few explicit indications of how sports programmes can activate mechanisms and under what conditions the participants' (increasing) social integration can be achieved.

### *Verification of the model*

To verify the preliminary impact model, in-depth data on OtS's seven programmes described in the tab below were used.

These programmes were analysed more comprehensively than the others during the initial scientific evaluation based on one participant and one non-participant observation of the activities, and was carried out on-site by two members of the evaluation team. Moreover, these programmes were re-examined in the summer of 2019 by conducting a follow-up telephone interview with the seven contact persons. This second interview was important for better understanding the development of the programmes over time, which is discussed below. In a second step, the section outlines and verifies new hypotheses that were formulated based on a case study within this additional analysis.

*Table 1: Details of the selected OtS project activities*

| CP              | Region            | Type of Club          | Contents of the Programme   | Number of Participants |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
| 03              | Bayern            | Catholic-sponsored    | Sport-Plus (swimming, later cricket, cycling)<br>2019: Inclusion of talents in existing teams                 | 30                     |
| 11              | Baden-Württemberg | Multi-sport           | Plus-Sport (different disciplines)<br>2019: Sport offers and support for girls only                           | 15                     |
| 13              | NRW               | Federation-affiliated | Sport-Plus (Football)<br>2019: Additional table tennis  | 20                     |
| 14 <sup>a</sup> | Hessen            | Athletics             | Sport-Plus (athletics) for children and parents   | 5                      |
| 15              | Bayern            | Rowing                | Sport-Plus (rowing, swimming, cycling, indoor sports)<br>2019: Progressive integration in other sports groups | 10                     |
| 23 <sup>a</sup> | Bayern            | Multi-sport           | - Sports-Plus (football) and additional tutoring  | 8                      |
| 27              | NRW               | Catholic-sponsored    | Sport-Plus (football, swimming, boxing, excursions)<br>2019: Fluctuation and adaptation of activities         | 15                     |

### *Development of the programmes*

At the time of the first survey, three of these sports clubs provided specific offers for unaccompanied male refugee minors. Another sports activity involving refugees was offered at a first reception facility for refugees. Three clubs provided sport offers in their facilities, whereby the offers were specifically developed for young refugees, partly intending to integrate (talented) refugees later on into existing association groups (Michelini, 2018). Over time, a consolidation of the sports programmes took place. They were expanded by offering additional activities and/or other sports and forms of exercise (CP 03, 13, 15 and 27). One programme (CP 11) was adapted in response to the increasing number of refugee girls and young women and evolved into a Plus-Sport programme. The activities of two projects (CP 14 and 23) ended due to the closure in autumn 2018 of the reception facilities where the refugee participants lived.

For programme consolidation, the importance of qualified and committed trainers, good communication and cooperation with network partners, support within the club, proximity to the refugees' place of residence and the availability of sports clothes, equipment and facilities were highlighted. According to the data, extending the sport offers might overstrain the club if it does not have suitable trainers, facilities, resources or donations. The sporting activities' sustainability and long-term participation in the programmes were threatened by various risks, which were partially entirely new to the clubs. For example, the cooperation and exchange of information with the reception centres' staff and social workers were sometimes crucial for the failure of the programmes or part of them. Indeed, in some cases, overlapping offers for refugees (e.g. language courses) were created or the participants were moved to other places.

The (still provisional) results reported by the contact persons indicate that sports and exercise programmes took place regularly and were attended by refugees, that talented athletes had already been integrated into existing teams participating in leagues, and that clubs' sports programmes have been expanded (e.g. cricket). There were also isolated reports of the integration of local peers into the separate

<sup>a</sup> Project activity was discontinued in 2018.

‘refugee groups’ and the establishment of contacts with long-established members, which contributed to the reduction of existing concerns. In addition to these positive aspects, however, it is also clear that the programmes did not always develop without conflict, for example, when different expectations collided. Although the contact persons perceived these situations as threats and as energy-drainers, they were generally able to manage these conflicts and retrospectively even commented positively about the opportunities these conflicts generated. Indeed, the conflicts sometimes initiated learning processes and generated necessary changes to the *status quo* (Burrmann, Neuber, et al., 2019).

### *Case study-based hypotheses and verifications*

Based on the observation protocols and on the statements made in the follow-up interviews, new hypotheses could be formulated and the impact model further developed. In the following, this step-by-step procedure is illustrated by considering an exemplary case study.

In 2015, a voluntary, multidisciplinary association with 1,200 members in a city with a population of about 100,000 applied for a financial grant from OtS to provide sports activities for young refugees. The programmes were mainly taken up by men aged 20 to 30 from Syria and Afghanistan. The refugees had the opportunity to join existing sports groups of the association, which was also mostly the case if they had previous sports experience. The majority of refugees, however, took part in sports activities (for example, indoor sports, swimming and soccer) that were offered specifically for them. A good three years later, these separate sports groups sponsored by OtS still exist, although there has been some fluctuation in participants, e.g. due to changes in priorities related to residence or due to other and concurring leisure activities. There is now also a cricket team that was started by young refugees themselves.

Apart from the contextual factors already described, the club’s experience in integration work, the high degree of networking with municipal partners (e.g. the sports federation, Caritas, the city administration) and the high level of commitment of the instructors and of the club’s board are mentioned as conducive contextual factors.

*I think this can succeed when you have the feeling that you’re not alone with your own commitment. And then you just do it. A lot of people have to get involved, too. I don’t even have to get involved with them in a goal-oriented group. But I have the feeling of having company, ‘I am not alone with my commitment. I am being supported’ (CP 27-2016, 00:42:08-translation of the authors).*

*The [working group] has also really developed nicely. The working group has grown. The existing offers by the instructors who do this, take part in it, we meet every two months or so, now again on Thursdays, to see what works well, what works less well, what doesn’t work at all anymore and what we can change about it. So that is already, I would say, a positive development too, isn’t it? We also do this now; when we find someone in our environment who might suit us, then we invite the person or persons into our network (CP 27-2019, 00:03:04-translation of the authors).*

In addition to the joint sports activities, friendships among the sports group’s participants have developed, according to the contact person.

*And what I always notice is that they meet new Syrian colleagues, who they haven't met before in their community. You always get the feeling that they all know each other. And they are extremely grateful to find new friends (CP 27-2019, 00:39:59-translation of the authors).*

However, even three years later, contacts between the refugees and members of the host society seem to be rather rare, even though the interviewees believe that contact with 'native speakers' is important.

*Then we have programme-related groups, which mainly address the target group, but we make sure that native speakers are also included. Because otherwise integration doesn't make sense if they stay among themselves only in the sports group (CP 27-2016, 00:07:15-3-translation of the authors).*

Contact with members of the host society in the examined case is mostly limited to the respective instructors. They sometimes organise transportation from a reception centre to the club, remind the participants about the next training session in the WhatsApp group, and speak a few words with the participants when they meet outside the sports club.

*Yes, they very much follow one instructor. So they need such a high degree of orientation (CP 27-2019, 00:08:12-translation of the authors).*

The conditions are good, joint events (e.g. weekend excursions) are organised and the volunteers reflect self-critically on the measures and their own convictions and behaviours. Why, however, are the contacts between the refugees and members of the host society so scarce, even though many things are being done properly?

Presumably, three years is not enough and—so the first assumption—more time is necessary to establish contacts between groups to build trust and reduce prejudice on both sides. The extent to which the newly established cricket team now includes locals is unknown.

*'Oh ..., did you bring all the [refugees] with you? But we don't have space for all of them here anymore. Then the old club members will quit.' (...). I also say: 'Be happy about everyone who uses our facilities here. We have nothing to gain from an empty swimming pool'. Breaking down the attitude of the elderly is a difficult endeavour (CP 27-2016, 00:38:47-translation of the authors).*

*So I don't see it coming, that they [the refugee groups] will automatically integrate into previously existing groups. Sometimes one will play table tennis or perhaps one will play volleyball. Nevertheless, I would say that we also communicate this and we inform all departments over and over again about the fact that we also have funding for this, but this does not result in them changing their attitude. Or even their own goals in the departments. We tend to set these goals in our working group (CP 27-2019, 00:13:23-translation of the authors).*

The second assumption is that encounters between refugees and members of the host society might be easier to bring about in childhood than in adolescence and adulthood. Findings from Raabe and Beelmann's meta-analysis (2011), among others, suggest this. In particular, the transition from middle to late childhood (7-10 years) seems to be a sensitive period for the implementation of intergroup physical

activities and sports programmes, as the divergence of developmental trajectories (regarding the formation of prejudice and the avoidance of inter-ethnic contact) was significantly higher in this age group than in others. If children do not have opportunities for contact, their social information processes for perceiving and remembering stereotypical information in their environment may stabilise, they may be less willing to seek out situations in which they have contact with out-group members, and they may actively avoid future social contact situations. Reducing prejudice through positive contact experiences thus becomes increasingly unlikely (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011, p. 1731).

The instructors take on important bridging functions. Obviously—according to the third assumption—there is a lack of encounters between persons/groups who have the same status in the contact situation, i.e. who meet at eye level. This is an essential condition for Allport (1954) to actually achieve an effect. Moreover, sports programmes with humanitarian or integrative goals entail particular relationships of power (Harrell-Bond, 2002). Feuchter and Janetzko (2018) point out that the (well-intentioned) availability of clubs to help participants overcome existing barriers could trigger a compulsion to participate. This is an interesting phenomenon that deserves further investigation because it is likely to occur when decisions on the orientation of offers are made *for* and not *with* the participants.

This is connected to the fourth assumption: refugees are still less involved in the organisation of the programmes. Measures are organised for this target group, but are still too rarely organised together with them or by them. People are proud that the young men are ‘taking flight’ and have the opportunity to learn about new offers, but they are rarely included in the conception and implementation of the association’s activities. While a broad range of factors might explain this situation (Seiberth, Thiel, & Hanke, 2018), our analyses suggest that this is most likely connected with the difficulty of surrendering control, responsibility and, consequently, power (Harrell-Bond, 2002). This pattern emerges in different passages of the interviews, in planned activities for mothers and their children (see quote). Nevertheless, the association also offers space for refugees to organise themselves and practice their sport (in this case, cricket).

*... This [the organisation of a weekend excursion] also took place last year and it was found that with the registrations... shortly before the departure, there were quite a lot of new registrations from women and their children. And our spaces were limited to 20. So we said, ‘Oh, man, we can offer something sustainable for this target group’. That’s one of our goals this year (CP 27-2019, 00:13:23-translation of the authors).*

*No, there’s also more of a fluctuation. Three years ago, when they arrived here, they first organised a safe space for themselves. And they have all now become more selective. They learned about new services, and I find that quite impressive here [in the town]. There’s a tremendous amount of help and offers. And then they have the choice of many, many offers and could also choose freely, and then also say ‘Let’s see what’s better next’ on the way (CP 27-2019, 00:09:12-translation of the authors).*

## Conclusions

RE designs are an interesting alternative to (quasi) experimental designs for the evaluation of sports programmes with social objectives, which are difficult to implement in practice, are often limited in results and neglect impact analyses. The

data in this study was considered against assumptions about the integration potential attributed to organised sport and previous findings on the integration effects of sports clubs on migrants and especially on young refugees.

The presented RE will be expanded by gradually including further OtS programmes and their longitudinal examination, so that the assumptions can be tested and the impact model successively developed. The inclusion of considerations borrowed from developmental psychology would also contribute to the expansion of the model's theoretical basis. Nevertheless, the data limitations, which are based on document analysis, interviews with the contact persons and on observations of some OtS measures, must be pointed out. The views of long-established association members and, importantly, of the refugee participants have not yet been satisfyingly assessed. Particularly the lack of deeper insights into this last perspective is a main limitation of this study. The need to gather useful information for the dsj, the implemented research design of this evaluation and the impossibility to carry out a deeper follow-up are the main reasons for the scarce information on the refugees, as recipients and co-creators of the offers. As a result, mechanisms of action remain unclear and statements about processes and effects have a provisional and biased character. Importantly, further evaluations should focus on the voice of the young refugees. Moreover, this study could be broadened by deepening further aspects of the relationship between sport and integration with respect to structural forms and indicators (Strang & Ager, 2010) and forms of social capital (Spaaij, 2011). Finally, a cross-country comparison would permit to grasp the role of the national legal frameworks and of wider processes of migration-related social change (Gasparini & Cometti, 2010).

So far, descriptive models rather than programmatic theories or impact models have been conceived (Coalter, 2012; Dössegger et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2013). Our model is also not yet a 'real' impact model. The analysis and description of CMO configurations are difficult – especially when they cover a long period and changes in framework conditions. Moreover, the use of the concepts 'mechanism' 'context' and 'outcomes' sometimes overlaps, is blurred and problematic. In this respect, we agree with Haunberger and Baumgartner (2017, p. 139), who view RE as being a heuristic framework. It helps analyse mechanisms and effects in the sense of being a 'white box' and for exploring their interdependency. Similarly, the CMO configurations are treated here as an interpretative rather than a logical-deductive task.

Dössegger et al. (2017) point to unresolved issues concerning RE. There is controversy about (1) the extent to which unintended effects can also be revealed in the context of impact models, (2) the roles stakeholders should play in the evaluation process, and (3) the level of efforts required to develop an impact model. There are furthermore some unresolved methodological questions, including the extent to which (4) the principle of openness in the qualitative approach is maintained despite the formation of presuppositions, how (5) quantitative or combined quantitative-qualitative research designs must be set up to conduct a process and outcome evaluation (even without a control group), and (6) whether it makes sense at all to categorically exclude control groups in RE evaluations. In our opinion, RE designs offer advantages over conventional methods, especially in the evaluation of sport-related projects in children and youth work. Nevertheless, they are not free of blind spots that should be further worked on and discussed.

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