



INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO SPORT: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Why discuss interculturalism and sport	5
3. What we mean by intercultural approach	7
4. Sport as a space for coexistence and transformation	11
5. The local ecosystem and multi-level governance	14
6. From concept to action: a step-by-step guide to designing an intercultural sport initiative	17
7. Monitoring, evaluation and sustainability	23
Annex 1. SPIRIT Training Plan – Spain	27
Bibliography	30

1. Introduction

This guide draws on the experience gained by Diversit in supporting cities and regions committed to intercultural policies, particularly through the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (RECI) and European projects such as [SCORE](#) – Sporting Cities Opposing Racism in Europe – and [SPIRIT](#) – Sports for Participation, Inclusion, Respect, Interculturality and Tolerance –. SCORE incorporated sport into cities’ intercultural and anti-racist agendas; SPIRIT builds on this approach, based on a conception of interculturality as a form of public policy-making¹. It is not merely a question of incorporating an intercultural perspective into sports policies, but of rethinking how needs are analysed, how decisions are made, who participates in them, how local stakeholders collaborate, and what conditions are created to guarantee equality, recognise diversity and foster interaction and a sense of belonging.

SPIRIT forms part of the Council of Europe’s *Intercultural Cities* (ICC) Programme, of which the cities participating in the project are members. The ICC Programme is based on the idea that diversity is a structural feature of contemporary societies and that public policies must create the conditions to guarantee equality, recognise diversity and foster positive interaction between diverse individuals and groups².

From this perspective, SPIRIT applies the intercultural approach to the sporting sphere. The project builds on SCORE’s previous experience in combating racism and discrimination in and through sport, but broadens its focus: it is not limited to preventing exclusion or facilitating access for specific groups, but rather explores how sports policies, organisations, venues and practices can actively contribute to building communities that are more inclusive, cohesive and capable of taking advantage of their diversity.

The purpose of the guide is to provide a common framework, criteria to guide decision-making and practical tools to analyse each local context, identify barriers and opportunities, agree on priorities and move towards more inclusive and intercultural sports policies and practices. It does not propose a one-size-fits-all solution. Each region has its own sports system, social context, institutional capacities and network of organisations; applying an intercultural perspective means starting from that context and developing tailored, shared solutions.

The guide is based on a fundamental premise: diversity alone does not guarantee that an action is intercultural. An activity in which people of different origins, ages, genders or backgrounds take part is not necessarily intercultural. It will be so only to the extent that it guarantees genuine conditions of equality and non-discrimination, recognises and values diversity, fosters positive relationships and interactions between diverse people, and creates effective opportunities for participation and influence. From this perspective, the challenge lies not merely in broadening access to sport, but in creating the conditions for diversity to become an asset for strengthening coexistence, a sense of belonging and social cohesion.

¹ Zapata, R. & Pinyol, G. (2013). *Handbook for the Design of Intercultural Policies*; Council of Europe (2019). *The Intercultural City Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Applying the Urban Model of Intercultural Integration*.

² Council of Europe (2019). *The Intercultural City Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Applying the Urban Model of Intercultural Integration*; Council of Europe (2022a). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on Multilevel Policies and Governance for Intercultural Integration*.

Who is this guide aimed at and how should it be used?

It is aimed at public authorities and officials; sports clubs, federations and associations; social and community organisations; organisations representing migrants, refugees or members of minority groups; coaches, instructors and volunteers; facility managers; educational establishments, universities, families and local networks. This broad scope reflects a fundamental premise of the intercultural approach: inclusion in sport is a shared responsibility, requiring a cross-cutting approach, cooperation and the participation of the various stakeholders in the local area.

The guide offers criteria, questions and practical tools for applying the intercultural approach to decision-making and action. It does not propose fixed solutions: each tool should be used based on knowledge of the local area, dialogue with the stakeholders involved, and the priorities and capacities of each specific context.

2. Why discuss interculturalism and sport

Diversity as a starting point

Societies are diverse in terms of origin, language, religion, age, gender, ability, socio-economic status, migration history, identity and other factors that shape people's experiences and opportunities. Migration has played a decisive role in this transformation, but **diversity cannot be understood only in terms of origin or nationality. It is a structural and dynamic feature of our communities.**

This diversity is particularly evident at local level, where people access public services and spaces, participate in organisations and activities, and build relationships and a sense of belonging. **Understanding and recognising existing diversity** (including that which is not always represented in institutional spaces and channels) is a starting point for designing sports policies that respond to the reality of the local area.

The intercultural perspective also proposes **moving beyond a view of diversity as a challenge to be managed and recognising its potential as a resource for the development of public policies and more inclusive communities.** However, the benefits of diversity do not arise automatically. An organisation may have a diverse membership while still maintaining unequal relationships or structures in which only certain people make decisions. The benefits of diversity are realised when conditions exist for different capabilities to be recognised, brought together and translated into collective action³.

Sport as a strategic arena

Sport combines physical activity, learning, socialisation and community life. It can foster well-being, routines, connections and a sense of belonging (Council of Europe, 2010; European Commission et al., 2016) and, for a newcomer or someone with a limited social network, a club, a local authority activity or an informal group can become one of the first spaces for building relationships with other people and with the local area.

The Council of Europe has progressively reinforced this social dimension of sport. The revised European Sports Charter stipulates that sports policies must promote the individual and social benefits of sport – particularly in terms of health, inclusion and education – and be developed in accordance with human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It also recognises access to sport for all as a fundamental right and establishes the principle of non-discrimination in access to sports facilities and activities⁴.

³ Council of Europe (2019). *The Intercultural City Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Applying the Urban Model of Intercultural Integration*; Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (2017). *The Benefits of Diversity in the Intercultural City: RECI Dossier*.

⁴ Council of Europe (2022). Revised European Sports Charter.

Sport is also an area of public policy. Public authorities manage facilities, programmes, grants and public spaces, while clubs and federations make decisions regarding access, rules, opportunities, participation, volunteering and leadership. These decisions determine who participates, under what conditions and to what extent they can be part of sporting and community life.

This approach involves moving beyond viewing sport solely as physical activity or competition. Sport is also a space for social interaction: it creates opportunities for contact, cooperation, learning, recognition and the forging of bonds. It is precisely for this reason that it can help to strengthen social cohesion in diverse societies.

However, this potential is not automatic. Sporting spaces are part of society and can also reproduce its inequalities, prejudices, discrimination and power relations. Economic, administrative, cultural, linguistic or territorial barriers; racism and other forms of discrimination; unequal representation in clubs and decision-making structures; or certain organisational rules and cultures can limit access and the effective participation of certain individuals and groups.

Diversity and contact, on their own, do not generate inclusion or social cohesion⁵. Bringing different people together does not guarantee that they will get to know one another, cooperate or forge bonds; when relationships develop under conditions of inequality, insecurity or imbalance, they may even reinforce prejudices and dynamics of exclusion. Therefore, it is not enough for sport to be diverse in order for it to be inclusive or intercultural. It is necessary to analyse who gains access and who is excluded, who stays and who leaves, who participates and under what conditions, what relationships are formed, who makes the decisions, and to what extent sporting structures reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Turning sport's potential into a real opportunity for inclusion and coexistence requires creating the right conditions. From an intercultural perspective, these conditions are based on four principles – equality, recognition of diversity, positive interaction and participation – which must be incorporated across the board into sports policies, organisations and practices.

⁵ Council of Europe (2010). *Sport Facing the Test of Cultural Diversity: Integration and Intercultural Dialogue in Europe*; Sträter, T. & Behn, S. (2012). *Inclusion of Migrants in and through Sports: A Guide to Good Practice*.

3. What do we mean by an intercultural approach?

The intercultural perspective has developed in response to the growing diversity of societies and the need to move towards models capable of guaranteeing equality, fostering coexistence and harnessing the potential of diversity. Over recent decades, the approach has evolved from a focus primarily on the integration of migrants and minorities towards a broader conception of diversity and, above all, towards a way of designing and implementing public policy⁶.

The Council of Europe's *Intercultural Cities* (ICC) programme has helped to develop and translate this approach into the field of local policy. The intercultural approach is not conceived as a sectoral policy aimed exclusively at specific groups, but rather as a cross-cutting approach to governance that influences the way in which reality is analysed, priorities are defined, policies are designed, resources are allocated, relations with citizens are managed, and outcomes are evaluated⁷. This approach has been progressively incorporated into the Council of Europe's framework, from Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)1 on intercultural integration to Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on multilevel policies and governance for intercultural integration.

The model centres on four interrelated principles: equality and non-discrimination, recognition of diversity, positive interaction, and participation and representation. Applying this perspective involves reviewing not only who has access to a policy, service or activity, but also how it is designed, what barriers it creates, what relationships it fosters, who participates in decision-making, and how institutions adapt to the diverse reality of the local area.

The 'common' is not the same as the 'majority'. It is built by creating the conditions for people with different experiences, identities and abilities to participate, interact and contribute on an equal footing.

This approach is structured around four interrelated principles – equality, recognition of diversity, positive interaction and participation – which take on specific implications when applied to the sporting sphere.

When applied to sport, this perspective shifts the focus from the mere presence of diversity to the conditions under which people gain access, participate, interact and are able to influence decisions. It involves moving beyond an activity that is merely open in form to also examining the barriers, relationships, representation, rules, resources and structures that shape the sporting ecosystem.

Four principles that work together

The intercultural perspective is structured around four interrelated principles. When applied to the sporting sphere, they enable a shift from the mere presence of diversity to the creation of effective conditions for equality, recognition, interaction and participation.

⁶ Zapata, R. & Pinyol, G. (2013). *Manual for the design of intercultural policies*; Council of Europe (2019). *The Intercultural City Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Applying the Urban Model of Intercultural Integration*.

⁷ Council of Europe (2015). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)1 on Intercultural Integration*; Council of Europe (2022a). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on Multilevel Policies and Governance for Intercultural Integration*.

Principle	What this means in the context of sport	Key question
Equality and non-discrimination	Identify and remove barriers to ensure genuine conditions of access, retention, safety and progression.	Can everyone access, participate in and progress on an equal conditions?
Recognition of diversity	Recognise different backgrounds, abilities, identities and sporting practices, avoiding stereotypes and one-size-fits-all approaches.	Do sporting provision and organisation recognise the diversity that exists in the region?
Positive interaction	Creating opportunities for people to meet, get to know one another and cooperate, going beyond simply sharing an activity or facility.	Does taking part in sport foster meaningful relationships between people from diverse backgrounds?
Participation and representation	Incorporating diverse voices into the design, development and evaluation of activities, and increasing their presence in positions of responsibility and decision-making.	Who participates, who makes the decisions, and who remains excluded?

Adapted from Council of Europe (2019), Council of Europe (2022), Maza Bustamante (2020) and UNESCO (2013).

These principles must be understood collectively. Applying them means going beyond simply ensuring that an activity is formally open to everyone: it involves analysing the actual conditions of access and participation, recognising different practices and pathways, creating opportunities for connection and cooperation, and expanding the capacity of diverse individuals and communities to participate in and influence sports organisations and policies.

Equality and non-discrimination. Equality is the starting point of the intercultural perspective. It is not limited to ensuring formally open access, but requires identifying and removing the barriers that create inequalities, preventing and combating all forms of discrimination, and taking action when discrimination occurs.

In the sporting sphere, this involves reviewing the conditions for access, retention and progression, but also putting in place mechanisms to prevent, detect and respond to situations of racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination. Interaction or dialogue can never replace the protection of rights or a response to a discriminatory situation.

Nor does equality always mean offering exactly the same thing. When starting points differ, identical treatment may perpetuate or reproduce inequalities. Equity requires analysing the effects of rules and procedures and adopting proportionate measures where necessary.

Recognition without stereotypes. Recognising diversity means valuing different experiences, knowledge, abilities, identities and practices without attributing common characteristics or preferences to all people of the same origin, religion or community. Identities are multiple and ever-changing; therefore, recognising diversity requires listening before interpreting and avoiding both stereotypes and folklorisation.

Positive interaction. Sharing a facility or taking part in the same activity does not guarantee that meaningful relationships will develop. The intercultural approach seeks to create conditions for mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation amongst diverse people. In sport, this requires paying attention to how groups are formed, what roles each person plays, what goals are shared and what real opportunities exist for collaboration. It is not about forcing a relationship, but about fostering safe, equal and sustained interactions that can build trust and a sense of belonging.

Relationships can take on different levels of intensity:

Situation	What is observed
Coexistence	<i>People share a space, but barely interact.</i>
Interaction	<i>There is contact and mutual understanding.</i>
Cooperation	<i>People work together to achieve a goal.</i>
Co-creation	<i>Definitions, decisions and responsibilities are shared.</i>

Adapted from the Council of Europe (2019) and the Kaleidos Network & the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (2019).

Participation and representation. Participating does not simply mean attending an activity. It involves having opportunities to express needs and proposals, influence decisions, take on responsibilities and gain access to leadership and representation roles. Applied to sport, this means asking not only who takes part in the activities, but also who designs the programme, who sets the rules, who holds technical or managerial positions, and whose voices remain excluded from these spaces⁸.

An open call for participation does not, in itself, guarantee representative participation. Institutional spaces tend to incorporate easier those who are already familiar with their channels, have the time available and feel empowered to participate. Therefore, an intercultural perspective requires paying attention to the absent voices and creating the conditions to include individuals and groups who face greater barriers to participation.

Furthermore, representation should not be considered only in terms of those who practise sport. It is also important to consider who is present in volunteering, employment, technical teams, coaching and refereeing, boards of directors, and participatory and decision-making bodies.

Presence alone is not enough: representation also implies a real capacity to influence.

Interaction and participation are closely related, but they are not the same thing. An activity may foster good relationships while keeping decision-making closed off; similarly, it may incorporate consultation mechanisms without building bonds of trust. **An intercultural approach requires addressing both dimensions and linking them to equality and the recognition of diversity.**

⁸ Kaleidos Network & Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (2019). *The development of participatory intercultural processes at local level*; Council of Europe (2019). *The Intercultural City Step by Step: A Practical Guide for Applying the Urban Model of Intercultural Integration*.

A cross-cutting perspective and a process of change

Interculturalism should not be limited to one-off activities or to programmes aimed exclusively at migrants or minorities. It is a perspective that must be progressively incorporated into the day-to-day running of public authorities and sports organisations. This involves applying it to:

- planning and programming;
- the management of facilities and spaces;
- grants and procurement;
- communication and customer service;
- staff recruitment and training;
- relations with clubs and communities;
- prevention of discrimination;
- participation and evaluation.

The intercultural perspective must also be present throughout the entire cycle of an initiative: from understanding the reality on the ground, defining priorities, designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and deciding on its continuation.

A well-designed intercultural activity does not, on its own, transform an organisation if its procedures, teams or decision-making structures continue to create barriers or inequalities. Moving towards an intercultural perspective also requires developing the ability to listen, engage in dialogue, recognise prejudices and power relations, manage diversity and critically review one's own practices.

Mainstreaming interculturality is a process, not a list of requirements that must be met simultaneously. The tools and checklists proposed in this guide help to formulate questions, identify blind spots and detect opportunities for improvement, but they do not expect all organisations to be able to meet all the criteria from the outset.

Each organisation starts from a different reality, with different resources and capabilities. Applying the intercultural perspective involves setting priorities, striking a balance and moving forward strategically and progressively. Some changes can be introduced within a specific activity; others require organisational changes, new partnerships, professional skills or institutional decisions that can only be consolidated in the medium to long term.

The important thing is to maintain a clear direction: identifying where barriers exist, deciding where action is possible, learning from experience and gradually scaling up the changes. **The intercultural perspective is not a result that is achieved all at once, but rather a way of shaping policy and working that is continuously developed and reviewed.**

4. Sport as a space for coexistence and transformation

Applying the intercultural perspective to the sporting sphere requires a dual approach: acting within sport, transforming the conditions under which people access it, participate, progress and make decisions; and acting through sport, harnessing its potential to foster relationships, learning, trust and a sense of belonging.

These two dimensions are complementary. An intercultural sports policy must, on the one hand, help to guarantee rights, equality and non-discrimination within the sports ecosystem itself and, on the other, use sporting practice and the relationships it fosters as a space to promote interaction, coexistence and social cohesion. SPIRIT works on both dimensions.

Dimension	Purpose
Interculturalism in sport	To transform policies, organisations, regulations, programmes and spaces to ensure equality, recognition of diversity and participation.
Interculturalism through sport	To harness sporting activities and the relationships they foster to promote interaction, cooperation, coexistence and a sense of belonging.

Adapted from the European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (2023) and the SCORE Project (2024).

An initiative may bring together diverse people while maintaining barriers within the organisation behind it. It may also improve access without creating opportunities for relationship-building and cooperation. A coherent intercultural approach requires work on both these dimensions.

Intercultural approach in sport: transforming the sports system

An Intercultural approach in sport draws attention to the functioning of the sports system itself: governing bodies, clubs, federations, associations, facilities and other stakeholders. It matters who gains access, but also who remains, progresses and participates in decision-making. This involves examining the extent to which the diversity of the local area is also reflected in sports structures, and who holds technical, managerial, leadership and representative positions.

Barriers are not always found in written rules. They can also arise from routines, relationships and expectations: who is listened to, who is given responsibilities, what behaviours are tolerated, or which sporting practices are considered legitimate. **Transforming the system does not necessarily mean creating new measures, but rather critically reviewing existing ones and modifying those conditions that generate inequality or exclusion.**

Equality also requires preventing and taking action against discrimination. Ensuring equality is not merely a matter of removing barriers to access or facilitating participation. The first principle of the intercultural perspective involves preventing and combating racism and any other form of discrimination, as well as the ability to take action when rights are violated.

In sport, discrimination can manifest itself directly, indirectly, structurally or institutionally, and may arise in relation to access to an activity, selection, the allocation of spaces and resources, relationships within teams, the stands, social media or decision-making bodies. It can also take the form of insults, stereotypes, harassment, unequal treatment or seemingly neutral rules that produce unequal effects⁹.

Therefore, an intercultural organisation must combine prevention and response: reviewing its own practices, establishing clear rules, training those in positions of responsibility, providing accessible channels for reporting incidents, protecting those affected, and having procedures in place for recording, responding to, referring and following up on incidents.

The intercultural perspective provides a framework for addressing these issues through equality, the recognition of diversity, interaction and participation. This framework is complemented and reinforced by other specific approaches and areas of expertise, including the human rights-based approach, anti-racism, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, the inclusion of people with disabilities and child protection. These are not mutually exclusive perspectives, but rather frameworks that enable us to understand and respond more accurately to different forms of inequality and discrimination.

Intercultural perspective through sport: building relationships and a sense of belonging

Sport can bring together people who do not usually interact and offer them shared goals, responsibilities and experiences. However, these effects do not stem solely from physical activity. They arise from preparation, cooperation within the group, the organisation of events, volunteering, relationships with families and moments of interaction before and after training sessions.

Coaches, instructors and volunteers influence the composition of groups, the distribution of roles, conflict management and the atmosphere of safety. Families, supporters and governing bodies can also reinforce or interfere with intercultural objectives. Fostering a sense of togetherness is therefore the responsibility of all those involved in the sporting experience.

Nor is sport's potential to foster relationships automatic. For such encounters to foster meaningful relationships, certain conditions must be created¹⁰.

Practical	Practical application
Equality and trust	Avoiding subordinate positions and ensuring clear rules and a response to discrimination.
Shared objectives	Set a goal that requires everyone's contribution.
Genuine cooperation	Create interdependent tasks and distribute responsibilities.
Continuity	Schedule enough meetings to allow trust to be built.
Facilitation and dialogue	Observe group dynamics, intervene when people are excluded and create opportunities for reflection.

⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2010). *Racism, Ethnic Discrimination and Exclusion of Migrants and Minorities in Sport: The Situation in the European Union*; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2013). *Tackling Racism and Discrimination in Sport: Guide to Promising Practices, Initiatives and Activities*.

¹⁰ Council of Europe (2010). *Sport Facing the Test of Cultural Diversity: Integration and Intercultural Dialogue in Europe*; Sträter, T. & Behn, S. (2012). *Inclusion of Migrants in and through Sport: A Guide to Good Practice*.

Sports facilities and spaces as social infrastructure

Sports facilities and spaces are not merely physical infrastructure: they are also social infrastructure that shapes who meets there, who participates and which uses are recognised as legitimate. Their location, design, opening hours, accessibility and management model distribute opportunities and organise interactions.

The analysis must include both formal facilities and parks, squares, beaches, courtyards, footpaths, open-air pitches and community spaces. Self-organised, traditional or minority practices provide insight into interests and needs that do not always feature in official planning. Recognising them can mean improving safety, facilitating access to spaces or incorporating their proposals, without the need to regulate them entirely.

Basic map of spaces	What to look out for
Public and private facilities	Uses, opening hours, costs, access criteria and groups that are not represented.
Educational centres	Opportunities for community use and links with the neighbourhood.
Open public spaces	Accessibility, safety, coexistence of uses and maintenance.
Informal or minority practices	Who drives them, what needs they meet and what support they require.

5. The local ecosystem and multi-level governance

The barriers that limit participation in sport rarely belong to a single sphere. They may relate to costs, transport, care, education, health, discrimination, information or the use of public space. Similarly, the opportunities and capacities to address them are distributed amongst different stakeholders within the region.

From an intercultural perspective, governance involves recognising this interdependence and developing shared responses. This requires linking policies, levels of government and diverse stakeholders, incorporating different forms of knowledge and experience, and allocating responsibilities in accordance with the capacities and competences of each actor.

Local leadership and shared responsibility

Local authorities occupy a central position due to their proximity to citizens and their remit over services, programmes, grants, facilities and spaces. They can link together policies that currently operate in isolation, bring together local stakeholders and provide institutional continuity for agreements.

Leadership does not mean carrying out all actions or centralising decision-making. Intercultural leadership creates the conditions for clubs, organisations, communities and other stakeholders to contribute their knowledge, participate in setting priorities and take on responsibilities. The administration retains its obligations as the guarantor of rights, but can share in the assessment, design, implementation and evaluation of responses.

This approach is also in line with recent developments in the Council of Europe's framework on sports governance. The Resolution adopted by the 18th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport (Porto, 2024) promotes collaborative governance in sport, based on ongoing dialogue between public authorities, sports organisations, athletes, local clubs, youth representatives and civil society, recognising their role as partners in the development of values-based sport¹¹.

Intercultural governance

Mainstreaming involves linking sport to other policy areas that influence access, participation and social cohesion. Depending on the challenge identified, this may require cooperation with sectors such as equality, youth, education, health, social services, mobility, urban planning, communication, civic participation or other areas. The aim is not to involve all sectors in everything, but to link each challenge to the necessary competences and capacities to address it.

At the same time, local action takes place within regional, national and European frameworks that determine rights, competences, resources and priorities. Governance enables us to identify what can be resolved locally, what requires intervention from other levels, and what lessons learnt at the local level can contribute to broader policies.

¹¹ Council of Europe (2024). *Collaborative governing and good governance in sport: Supporting a fresh approach to match its societal importance*, adopted at the 18th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport, Porto, 8–10 October 2024.

Level	Main contribution
European	Frameworks for rights, guidelines, funding and exchange.
National	Legislation, strategies, programmes and territorial coordination.
Regional	Capacity building, technical support and links between local authorities.
Local	Knowledge of the local area, service management and the implementation of measures.

Mainstreaming is not a secondary aspect of an inclusive sports policy. The European Sports Charter expressly highlights the need to ensure horizontal coordination between policies and authorities relating to sport – including education, health, social services, culture, urban planning and human rights – and vertical coordination between the national, regional and local levels. From an intercultural perspective, this coordination is particularly important, as barriers to participation in sport can rarely be addressed exclusively by the sports sector¹².

Understanding and activating the local sport ecosystem

The sport ecosystem comprises public authorities, clubs, federations, associations, educational institutions, businesses, universities, social and community organisations, technical staff, volunteers, families, participants and informal networks.

Mapping this ecosystem involves more than simply drawing up a list of stakeholders. From an intercultural perspective, it is important to understand who makes decisions, who has access to resources and knowledge, who builds relationships of trust, who can drive change, and which individuals or groups are under-represented or face greater barriers.

A rights-based approach also helps to ensure that individuals and communities are not viewed only as recipients or beneficiaries. They can contribute their experience, knowledge and skills, and participate in defining, implementing and evaluating responses.

Actor	Contributes	Responsibility or capacity
Public authorities	Expertise, resources, a regional perspective and the ability to bring people together.	Guaranteeing rights, coordinating and being accountable.
Sports organisations	Technical expertise, facilities, equipment and relationships with participants.	Reviewing access, regulations, safety and opportunities.
Social and community organisations	Understanding of barriers and networks of trust.	Support, connect and participate in decision-making.
Educational centres and universities	Training, research, spaces and links with young people.	Supporting knowledge, innovation and evaluation.
Participants and communities	Real-life experience, priorities and capabilities.	Defining, co-designing, implementing and evaluating.

¹² Council of Europe (2022b). *Revised European Sports Charter*; Council of Europe (2022). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)10 on Multilevel Policies and Governance for Intercultural Integration*.

From the stakeholder map to joint action

Cooperation is most effective when organised around a specific challenge. Once this has been identified, it is necessary to agree on what needs to be changed, which stakeholders should be involved and what each can contribute. Networking does not mean that everyone does the same thing, but rather connecting different contributions around shared objectives.

Cooperation also requires a degree of continuity, but does not necessarily entail creating new structures. Before establishing a new forum, it is advisable to identify existing councils, roundtables, community networks, technical committees or other mechanisms that could be strengthened or linked together. Intercultural governance is not measured by the number of structures or meetings, but by its capacity to incorporate diverse voices, reach agreements, distribute responsibilities and sustain action over time.

6. From concept to action: a step-by-step guide to designing an intercultural sports initiative

This section sets out a practical roadmap for incorporating an intercultural perspective into the design or review of a sports initiative. It can be used to create a new initiative, but also to review an existing programme, activity, facility or policy.

The process is organised into five phases that enable a transition from understanding the current situation to defining, implementing and evaluating the initiative. It is not intended to be a rigid sequence or a list of requirements that must be met in their entirety. Each organisation can use it to identify where it currently stands, which aspects it needs to strengthen and what its priorities for improvement are.

Phase	Purpose	Outcome
1. Understanding and Diagnosis	To gain a participatory understanding of the current situation, barriers, inequalities, capacities and stakeholders in the local area.	Diagnosis and shared priorities.
2. Define and co-design	Translate the priorities into objectives and design the initiative by applying intercultural principles.	Design of the initiative.
3. Implement, support and adapt	Roll out the initiative, observe its dynamics and make adjustments where necessary.	Monitoring and adjustments.
4. Evaluate, provide feedback and improve	Analyse results and lessons learnt, provide feedback to those involved and decide on the next steps.	Review and proposals for improvement.

Compiled by Diversit based on the European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (2023), Maza Bustamante (2020) and the Kaleidos Network & Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (2019).

* Participation is not a separate phase of the process. From an intercultural perspective, the people and stakeholders involved must be able to contribute knowledge, compare priorities, participate in the design, support the implementation and contribute to the evaluation. The extent and mechanisms of participation may vary at any given time, but listening to diverse voices and providing feedback on the results must form part of the entire cycle.

Phase 1. Understanding and diagnosing

Start with the challenge, not the solution. The starting point must be a situation that one wishes to understand, not an activity that has already been decided upon. It is worth asking what is happening, who it affects, who has defined the problem, on what information, and whose voices may be missing.

Examine the local area and the organisation. The assessment must combine two complementary perspectives:

- A community-based perspective, focusing on the population, formal and informal sporting practices, available spaces and resources, existing relationships and inequalities.
- An organisational perspective, focusing on conditions of access and participation, communication, rules and procedures, incidents of discrimination, and opportunities for participation and representation.

Looking beyond access. Knowing who enrolls or takes part is only the first step. An intercultural perspective must also consider who stays, who drops out, who gains access to new opportunities, and who ultimately takes on responsibilities or is represented in decision-making forums.

Drop-out or low participation should not automatically be attributed to a lack of interest. They may be linked to costs, timetables, transport, care needs, discrimination, language barriers, a lack of role models, or a lack of recognition and a sense of belonging.

Access → participation → retention → progression → representation

Listen also to those who are not there. It must also actively seek out the voices of those who do not have access, have dropped out or are not present in the usual channels of participation. An open call alone does not guarantee diverse or representative participation: timetables, language, care needs, transport, a lack of information, mistrust or previous experiences may exclude certain voices.

Reaching out to them may require engaging with everyday spaces, collaborating with trusted organisations and networks, adapting formats and timings, offering support, or contacting directly those who do not participate or have dropped out.

No single person represents a community on their own. It is advisable to diversify profiles and avoid systematically relying on the same organisations or individuals as the only points of contact.

Identify barriers, capabilities and stakeholders. Mapping the ecosystem enables us to understand not only who is present, but also what knowledge, relationships and capacity for influence each stakeholder can contribute, and who remains to be included.

Stakeholder	What do they know or contribute?	Who do they connect with?	What influence do they have?	Are they involved?
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Who is missing?: Which individuals, groups or organisations relevant to the challenge do not yet appear on this map?

Outcome of this phase: a shared understanding of the challenge, the main barriers and existing capabilities, and the stakeholders who should be involved in the response.

Phase 2. Defining and co-designing

Agree on what we want to change. Based on the assessment, we need **to prioritise the challenge and agree on the change we wish to achieve**. Phrases such as ‘promoting inclusion’ or ‘fostering coexistence’ can provide direction for action, but they are too broad to guide its design or subsequently evaluate its outcomes.

An operational objective must specify what change is expected, who or what the action is aimed at, and how we will know if it has taken place.

General formulation	More verifiable formulation
To foster inclusion.	Reduce identified barriers to access and increase retention rates among under-represented groups.
Promote coexistence.	Create ongoing opportunities for cooperation and value the connections formed.
Encourage participation.	Involve participants in the design and review of results.
Improve organisation.	Modify procedures for registration, communication and incident response.

Co-design with those involved. Consulting on a fully defined proposal may help to introduce improvements, but it does not constitute co-design. Those involved must be able to help verify the assessment, set priorities, evaluate alternatives and take part in design decisions.

It is particularly important to involve those who do not participate in the usual forums. To do this, it may be necessary to reach out to neighbourhoods, facilities and informal gathering places, collaborate with trusted organisations, or use brief and accessible formats. Participation must adapt to people’s circumstances; it must not require everyone to attend a technical meeting.

An initiative may prioritise a group experiencing a specific form of inequality without becoming segregated. It must be explained which inequality justifies the measure, what objective it pursues and how it will connect with shared spaces.

Define the scope of influence that is shared. Participation does not always mean the same thing, nor do all decisions require the same level of involvement. The important thing is to define transparently what scope of influence participants will have, on which issues and within what limits.

Level	Capacity offered
Information	The organisation communicates a decision or outcome.
Consultation	Gathers opinions and proposals, whilst retaining the final decision.
Collaboration	Specific tasks or actions are shared.
Co-design	The problem and the solution are defined together with the people involved.
Shared decision	Decision-making authority over certain matters or resources is shared.
Co-creation	Definition, decisions, implementation and evaluation are shared.

Not all initiatives require the same level of participation. What matters is that there is a match between what is offered and the actual scope for influence. Presenting a proposal that has already been finalised as co-design or co-creation leads to frustration and can undermine trust.

Translating principles into concrete decisions. The design must translate the objectives and intercultural principles into concrete decisions regarding who participates, how the initiative is carried out, where and when it takes place, what support is required, who assumes responsibilities and how it will be monitored.

Element	Decision to be defined
Need and objective	Which situation is being transformed and what verifiable change is expected.
Participants	Who is prioritised, who may be excluded, and how will these people be reached?
Methodology	How will equality, recognition, interaction and participation be promoted?
Stakeholders and responsibilities	Who coordinates, who is involved, what each stakeholder contributes, and how decisions will be made.
Venue and timetable	Why these factors facilitate access, safety and continuity.
Costs and support	What costs are involved and how inequalities will be addressed.
Communication	What messages, channels and language support will be used.
Safety	What rules, responsible parties and response mechanisms are in place.
Evidence	What information will be collected and how the results will be reported.

Allocate responsibilities and resources. This matrix helps to identify unclear responsibilities, duplicated tasks, underutilised capabilities or an excessive concentration of work on certain individuals.

Action	Coordinate	Execute and collaborate	Resources	Monitoring

Creating the conditions for interaction and safety. When one of the objectives is to encourage interaction, simply bringing diverse people together is not enough. The design must take into account how groups are formed, which activities require cooperation, how roles and responsibilities are allocated, and what opportunities exist for dialogue. The conditions that enable participation must also be considered: timetables, childcare, transport, accessibility, costs and other necessary support.

Rules must be clear, well-known and applied consistently. People must know what behaviour is expected, what conduct will not be tolerated, who they can turn to, and how the organisation will respond to situations of discrimination, violence or exclusion.

Before you begin: return to the four principles. Before starting the activity, it is advisable to review the design in the light of the four intercultural principles. This is not a test, nor does it require a 'yes' answer to every question: the review serves to identify strengths, blind spots and areas that can still be improved.

	Review question
Equality	Have we identified and reduced the main barriers to access, retention and participation? Are there genuine conditions of equality and mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to discrimination?
Recognition	Does the initiative recognise different needs, abilities, backgrounds and practices without perpetuating stereotypes?
Interaction	Have we created specific conditions to foster relationships, cooperation and a sense of belonging?
Participation	Do those involved have a genuine opportunity to contribute, make decisions and take on responsibilities?

Assess the quality of participation. This tool does not set an ideal level of participation that all initiatives must achieve. It serves to clarify who is participating, to what extent they can influence decisions, and which aspects could be strengthened.

Dimension	Question
Access	Have we reached a diverse range of people and removed barriers to participation?
Representation	Are those affected and voices that are usually absent represented?
Influence	Can contributions bring about change on key issues?
Shared responsibility	Are there opportunities to take on tasks, responsibilities or decisions?
Feedback	Is it clear how decisions and the follow-up on commitments will be communicated?

Adapted from Red Kaleidos and the Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities (2019)

Phase 3. Implement, support and adapt

Also observe the relationships. During implementation, it is worth observing who participates, how groups are formed, who occupies central or peripheral positions, how speaking time and responsibilities are distributed, what conflicts arise and whether the planned support is sufficient.

Also observe who exerts influence. During implementation, it is not enough simply to observe who attends. It is also worth checking who speaks up, who makes proposals, who takes on responsibilities, which contributions are incorporated, and whether certain people consistently remain in peripheral positions.

Participation can perpetuate existing inequalities if the same people are always the ones making decisions, representing others or taking the lead. Facilitation should help to diversify the voices involved and create genuine opportunities for people to take on responsibilities.

Listen and adapt. Brief reviews with participants, staff, volunteers and families allow adjustments to be made before difficulties become entrenched. Flexibility does not mean abandoning principles or objectives, but rather adapting the methods when experience shows that they are not working.

Record changes. A simple record of attendance, incidents, barriers, dynamics and adjustments facilitates monitoring and preserves a record of the process.

What to look out for	What has happened	Adjustment made	Result

Phase 4. Evaluate, provide feedback and improve

Return to the objectives. The evidence must be defined alongside the objectives: what change will be observed, who will collect the information, when it will be reviewed and who will be involved in interpreting it. Quantitative data must be combined with qualitative methods capable of assessing trust, a sense of belonging, safety or organisational learning.

Listen to different experiences. Aggregated results can mask very different experiences. Wherever possible, it is advisable to analyse who has joined, stayed, participated and taken on responsibilities, and to record how different types of participants have experienced the process.

Feedback and accountability. Feedback should explain what was heard, what decisions were taken, which proposals could not be incorporated and what improvements will be implemented. Gathering input without communicating how it has been used undermines trust. Feedback is part of participation: people who have contributed knowledge, proposals or time must be able to find out how their contributions have been used, what decisions have been taken and what the next steps are.

Learn and decide on the next step. The evaluation should help to determine which actions to continue with, which ones need to be modified, and which lessons learnt should be incorporated into day-to-day operations. Section 9 sets out the evaluation and sustainability framework in detail.

7. Monitoring, evaluation and sustainability

Evaluation enables us to ascertain whether an initiative is bringing about the intended changes, for whom and under what conditions. From an intercultural perspective, it should not be limited to counting activities or participants: it must also examine access, retention, relationships, safety, a sense of belonging, representation and changes within the organisation.

Monitoring and continuous feedback

Monitoring enables difficulties to be identified and adjustments to be made before the initiative concludes. It can combine brief records, reviews of attendance and drop-out rates, conversations with participants, observation of group dynamics, tracking of incidents and team meetings.

It is not necessary to use lengthy forms for everything. A brief conversation can provide relevant information if it is recorded responsibly, analysed and linked to a decision.

Monitoring should function as a cycle:



It should also involve participants and communities. Their feedback may reveal unexpected outcomes, persistent barriers or discrepancies between institutional perceptions and lived experience.

A feedback mechanism is only useful when it generates a response. Collecting information on an ongoing basis without explaining how it is used can lead to fatigue and mistrust.

Evaluation, learning and sustainability

Evaluation must distinguish between different levels of change:

Level	What it represents	Example
Outputs	Activities and resources generated directly.	Sessions, materials, people trained or agreements.
Outcomes	Changes in people, access or relationships.	Greater retention, trust or sense of security.
Organisational change	Changes to rules, procedures or capabilities.	New protocol, review of registration or representation.
Impact	Widespread and sustained transformations.	Reduction in inequalities or improved social cohesion.

Outputs are easy to record, but do not in themselves demonstrate that an improvement has taken place. Impact, on the other hand, takes time and depends on multiple factors; it is therefore advisable to avoid attributing transformations that cannot be demonstrated to a single activity.

The evaluation should combine:

- **quantitative indicators**, such as participants, attendance, retention, use of facilities, access to roles of responsibility, incidents or resources;
- **qualitative information**, on reception, safety, relationships, a sense of belonging, capacity to influence, staff learning and cooperation between organisations.

Data always requires interpretation. An increase in reported incidents may indicate that the problem is growing, but it may also reflect greater awareness of reporting channels and increased confidence in the response. Similarly, high attendance may coexist with isolation or a lack of influence.

The main dimensions that can be assessed are:

Dimension	Examples of evidence
Access and retention	Enrolment, attendance, drop-out rates, reasons for leaving and reduced barriers.
Interaction and belonging	Cooperation, relationships, trust and a sense of belonging.
Equality and safety	Treatment, incidents, perception of safety and effectiveness of responses.
Participation and representation	Influence, responsibilities, volunteering, employment and leadership.
Organisational change	Modified policies, procedures, resources, training and coordination.

Compiled by Diversit based on the SPIRIT Project (2026), Diagnosis Report.

Not all initiatives need to measure all dimensions. Each objective must have reasonable evidence, a source of information, a time for data collection and a person responsible.

Communities must be involved in defining the criteria for success and in interpreting the results. An increase in enrolments may be viewed positively by the organisation and, at the same time, considered insufficient by those who still do not feel part of the activity or lack the ability to influence it¹³.

Evaluation should serve to learn and improve, not merely to justify resources or present positive results. It should enable us to recognise what worked, for whom, who was left out, what barriers remain and what capacities the organisation needs to strengthen.

Feedback should be communicated in an accessible manner:

- What was evaluated and who took part;
- what results and difficulties were identified;
- which proposals will be implemented;
- which ones cannot be implemented and why; and what decisions will be taken

¹³ Kaleidos Network and Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities, 2019; SPIRIT Project, 2026

Sustainability involves preserving the changes that have proved useful and ensuring they do not disappear when funding ends or the team changes. To this end, they must be integrated into policies, budgets, procedures, training, professional roles and standard coordination structures.

Transferability and adaptation

At the end of a cycle, an initiative may be consolidated, adapted, expanded, transferred, replaced or terminated.

Discontinuing an initiative that does not produce the expected results may be a responsible decision. Continuity must be based on evidence, not merely on inertia, the visibility of the activity or the availability of funding.

Transferring an initiative does not mean copying it. Its principles, questions, methodologies, tools and quality criteria can be transferred, but they must be adapted:

- the objectives;
- the participants;
- the venues and timetables;
- the resources;
- the responsibilities;
- and the indicators.

Before replicating a practice, it is important to understand what conditions made its results possible and to check whether those conditions exist or can be created in the new context. Evaluating from an intercultural perspective means understanding what changed, for whom and under what conditions, and using that knowledge to improve, be accountable, sustain progress and adapt it to other contexts.

Operational summary

Before concluding the process, it is advisable to review:

- Does the initiative address a verified need?
- Is it known who is excluded, drops out or remains on the margins?
- Are the rules, costs, timetables, spaces and channels accessible?
- Does the methodology foster cooperation and meaningful relationships?
- Are there mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to discrimination?
- Can people have a say and take on responsibilities?
- Is it clear who coordinates, implements, funds and evaluates?
- Do the indicators provide insight into changes in access, safety, a sense of belonging and representation?
- Will the lessons learnt be incorporated into policies, procedures, resources and training.

Annex 1. SPIRIT Training Plan – Spain

The SPIRIT Training Plan provides a common framework for strengthening the capacities of local authorities and stakeholders to incorporate an intercultural perspective into the sporting sphere and harness the potential of sport as a space for inclusion, coexistence and social cohesion.

In Spain, the Plan is being implemented in Bilbao, Cartagena, Castelló de la Plana and Tenerife and combines two complementary dimensions:

- the application of the intercultural perspective to sports policies, organisations and sport initiatives, and
- the design of sporting practices intentionally aimed at promoting inclusion and social cohesion.

The Plan has been coordinated and designed by Diversit, with Fútbol Más contributing to the design of the second training module, ‘Sport as a strategy for inclusion and social cohesion’.

Objectives

- To understand the intercultural approach and its application to sport as a cross-cutting perspective for local public policies.
- To recognise the potential of sport to promote inclusion, equality, and a sense of belonging, as well as its limitations when it is not designed with a social and educational purpose in mind.
- To identify the principles, criteria and key elements for designing sports policies and activities from an intercultural and inclusive perspective.
- Acquire tools to design and facilitate sporting activities that promote participation, inclusion, the building of relationships, well-being and social cohesion.
- To analyse the role of prejudices, narratives, governance and cooperation between stakeholders in building more inclusive sporting ecosystems.
- Design a sports initiative with an intercultural focus that incorporates objectives, participation, safe spaces, key stakeholders and basic indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Organisation and methodological approach

The training will consist of a total of eight hours of face-to-face sessions, divided into two complementary sessions of four hours each:

Session	Main content
Block 1	Interculturalism applied to sport: intercultural framework, anti-rumour strategies, governance, checklist and design cycle for an intercultural sporting initiative.
Block 2	Sport as a strategy for inclusion and social cohesion: sport for development, an intersectional approach, safe spaces, participation and socio-sporting application.

Both modules are designed as complementary parts. The first module provides the intercultural framework, the analytical tools and the action planning cycle. The second module explores their practical application through socio-sporting methodologies, participation and the creation of safe environments.

- Short presentations linked to local challenges.
- Case studies and practical experiences.
- Exercises tailored to the context of each local steering group.
- Review of an existing initiative or design of a new proposal.
- Work with simple tools that can be used after the training.

Structure and content

Module 1: Interculturalism applied to sport: from approach to action

Duration: 4 hours

1. The intercultural perspective applied to sport

- Interculturalism as a cross-cutting approach in public policy.
- Principals of the intercultural approach: equality, recognition of diversity, positive interaction and participation.
- Applying these principles to the design of sports policies and activities.
- From an open or accessible activity to an intercultural sporting initiative.

2. Key elements for promoting intercultural sports policies

- Interculturalism as a shared responsibility: a cross-cutting approach across public policies.
- Multi-level cooperation and networking.
- The local area as a space for intervention.
- Assessment and participation to identify challenges and opportunities.
- The role of narratives in building more inclusive communities.

3. Prejudice, rumours and narratives in sport

- Prejudices, stereotypes and rumours relating to diversity.
- How narratives influence inclusion or exclusion.
- Inclusive communication and anti-rumour strategies applied to sport.

4. Practical workshop: designing an intercultural sporting initiative

Working in groups, designing a sporting initiative that addresses a local challenge, applying intercultural principles, defining objectives, key stakeholders and basic indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Module 2: Sport as a tool for inclusion and social cohesion.

Duration: 4 hours

1. Sport as a tool for inclusion and social cohesion

- The potential and limitations of sport as a tool for social transformation.
- The educational and social purpose of sport.
- Sport as a space for social interaction, a sense of belonging, and personal and community development.

2. Key elements for inclusive sport

- Meaningful participation and a leading role for participants.
- Equal opportunities and the removal of barriers.
- Building relationships, cooperation and a sense of belonging.
- Adapting activities to diverse needs and contexts.

3. Creating safe and inclusive sporting environments

- Dimensions of a safe space: physical, emotional, social and cultural.
- Preventing situations of discrimination, exclusion and violence.
- The role of professionals, clubs and organisations in creating protective and positive environments.

4. Practical workshop: designing a socio-sporting initiative with impact

Design, in groups, of a social-sporting activity with an educational and social inclusion purpose, incorporating participation, the creation of safe spaces, equal opportunities and basic criteria for assessing its impact.

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