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# Sport, citizenship and nationality – from antiquity to the present

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## ABSTRACT

In this Special Issue we introduce the topic of citizenship in sport, a topic pursued within the 4EU+ Alliance project, Flagship 2, devoted to the theme of Europeanness: multilingualism, pluralities and citizenship. The following five articles explore the concept of citizenship, its historical perspectives in the citizenships of ancient Greece and Rome, its contemporary legal and political context, and its relation to sport. The articles also discuss the relationship of the political concept of citizenship as belonging to a nation, and the idea of athletes becoming citizens within and through sport. We believe this topic warrants renewed attention in light of current challenges to citizenship in European society, and the opportunities offered by the particular situated power of sport as an agent of cultural learning and change.

## KEYWORDS

citizenship; sport; belonging; eligibility; nation

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## OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Citizenship has been an important theme in the historical development of the European Union, especially since the enlargement projects of 2004 and 2007 concentrated attention on emigrant communities and questions regarding eligibility for citizenship (Baubock et al., 2007). The 4EU+ Alliance, a strategic association of universities aiming to collaborate in research-intensive engagement with European issues, has this theme as one of its four Flagship themes. Specifically, Flagship 2 is devoted to the theme of Europeanness: multilingualism, pluralities and citizenship (<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-418.html>).

Currently, citizenship is most commonly defined in political terms as “one’s legal status as a member of a nation state with related rights and responsibilities” (Guschwan, 2014, p. 859). It presupposes some scope for freedom and public participation, and in its fuller sense citizenship is more closely associated with liberal democracies, whereas in authoritarian settings it often persists as a primarily legal-formal status with constrained exercise. Thus, while citizenship need not disappear under authoritarian rule, it may be hollowed out, when authorities treat people as subjects rather than rights-bearing participants.

Citizenship is typically examined within political philosophy and sociology, and its relationship to sport has been explored by several scholars, although it remains underdeveloped in sport studies. Still, this is not the first Special Issue of a journal on this topic. In 2014, the journal *Sport in Society* organized a Special Issue titled ‘Sport and Citizenship’ (Guschwan, 2014). In academic literature, citizenship has been mainly discussed as closely related to the theme of nationality, especially representing athletes as belonging to a nation state, which informs the possibility of international sport. It also looked at issues of athletes’ migration and change of affiliation within club and national sports organisations and also, in a limited way, the idea of ‘belonging’ to sport-communities, seeing athletes as ‘sport citizens’.

We believe these topics warrant renewed attention in light of current challenges related to citizenship in European society. Moreover, we think sport has a special role to play in citizenship development. Sport is a suitable area for thinking about citizenship, since it involves large groups of people, whether athletes or spectators, who are engaged in communities by a common practice that is based on democratic principles (McCoy & Martínková, 2022).

This Special Issue presents a collection of articles that examine various dimensions of citizenship and its relation to sport; and this essay will act in part as an introduction to these articles. Some contributions draw on historical perspectives from ancient Greece and Rome, while some focus directly on contemporary sport. In the context of sport, the discussion is centred primarily on athletes and their potential role as ‘sport citizens’. Since citizenship in sport is closely intertwined with political notions of citizenship, the issue also explores themes of national belonging, change of affiliation, and community building.

### **Citizenship in historical context and its conceptualization**

At its most general level, ‘citizenship’ can be defined as a relational status of belonging of an individual to a (political) community. Citizenship is usually understood in political terms as belonging to a *polis* (city-state) or a nation state, participating in its life and decision-making. Citizenship affords people a specific status in their community, defining their rights and responsibilities. (See e.g. Guschwan, 2014.) The rights and responsibilities that define this relationship of belonging differ for individual communities throughout history, changing with the development of these communities. But we need to start first with the question of what citizenship is and where the idea historically arises.

Manlio Cinalli, in his contribution ‘Citizenship as a Relational Field: Interests and Identities across Cleavages and Seams’ reconceptualizes the concept of citizenship as relational, by drawing on the examples of ancient Greece and Rome and connecting

them to contemporary issues. His approach sheds fresh light on the way we might think about citizenship today. Whereas contemporary debates frame citizenship either as a property of individuals (rights, identities, etc.) or as a feature of society (nation, social cohesion, etc.), Cinalli suggests a ‘relational’ understanding that reveals the underlying ‘architecture’ of citizenship. This architecture is strung along two axes. The vertical axis addresses the relationship between citizens and political authority – between the governors and governed, focussing on the engagement of citizens with their rulers and the accountability of the rulers. The horizontal axis captures the relationship among citizens themselves, addressing how they recognise one another as members of a shared community. Citizenship, according to Cinalli, is configured at the intersection of these two axes, which define concrete instances of citizenship, whilst operating neither in symmetrical nor parallel fashion.

This relational architecture of citizenship emerges from the genealogies of the Greek and Roman traditions and continues to shape contemporary configurations of citizenship. Cinalli’s account makes these roots explicit, identifying ancient Greece and Rome as the first crystallisations of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of citizenship, which can be seen as complementary. In the Greek *polis*, citizenship was characteristic of collective decision-making. The *agora* functioned as an open space enabling encounters between the governors and the governed, thus developing a vertical axis of representation, accountability, as well as potential contestation. By contrast, the Roman *civitas* formed a horizontal understanding of citizenship. Their civic status was grounded in the reciprocal recognition of equal rights and duties among individuals who otherwise differentiated by ethnic origin, local territory, social rank, etc. Civic equality was articulated through rights, legal protections, shared rituals, festivities and games that reinforced a sense of common belonging.

According to Cinalli, two main forces that shape citizenship are interests and identities. They both simultaneously cut across vertical and horizontal axes of citizenship, bringing calculation or mutual benefit as well as symbolic boundaries and emotional attachment into the picture. From this framework, Cinalli distinguishes four relational logics (ideal types) of citizenship: contentious, democratic, liberal-clientelist, and full citizenship.

In his article ‘Citizenship and the Ancient Olympic Games’ Jiří Kouřil explores the origins of the political understanding of citizenship and its relation to sport by describing the historical origins of citizenship in ancient Greece and Rome. In ancient Greece, full citizenship was initially limited to free adult males who were born to parents who were already citizens, and this was only later partly extended. Kouřil describes the criteria for citizenship and its changes during the period of Greek and Roman civilisations. He also presents the duties and benefits of Greek and Roman citizenship status, and the relationship of citizenship to sport, especially the Olympic Games.

In the early development of the Olympic Games, eligibility required citizenship in a Greek city-state, whether on the mainland or in the colonies, with the condition that the city-state was not banned (Crowther, 1996, p. 40). However, citizenship in a Greek city-state was not the only eligibility criterion. Kouřil also lists other criteria (such as compulsory training) as well as moral criteria (e.g. excluding individuals guilty of crimes, such as murderers and blasphemers). The criterion of citizenship evolved over time. In later periods, the eligibility criteria were broadened beyond the Greek city-

states – first to include non-Greeks of Greek ancestry (e.g. Macedonians of Greek origin), and later to include athletes from across the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, even during the Roman period, the Greeks retained a strong attachment to their city-states. For example, according to Finley and Pleket: “The Greek cities had lost their ancient political autonomy, but not their hold on the imagination and pride of their citizens. An Olympic victor in the third century A.D. still identified himself with his city, as had his predecessors a thousand years before, and his city with him” (1976, p. 11).

### **Citizenship and contemporary sport**

Irena Slepíčková’s contribution ‘Sport and citizenship – thinking about contemporary trends and problems’ examines contemporary issues in citizenship related to the functioning of civil society, such as immigration and the weakening of citizens’ engagement in civic affairs, and the importance of a sense of belonging.

She focuses on two ways in which sport and citizenship are related. Firstly, legal and political sports citizenship asks who can represent a country. This requires a definition of the ‘state’, which she sees as mainly a question of geographical borders, and attention to the rules for obtaining a passport. Importantly, international sports organizations must then establish clear rules for representation, and for changes in the affiliation of especially elite athletes, either for reasons of immigration, or for the recruitment of athletes to national squads. Secondly, community sport citizenship relates to everyday civic life. Sports in municipalities and various smaller communities are based on a sense of belonging and of contributing to the welfare of the whole.

Breana McCoy focusses on the development of athletes’ citizenship within sport, in the context of the democratization of contemporary international sport organizations. In her earlier article, McCoy (2025) examined the purported commitment of international sport organizations to democratic governance, which she exemplified by the International Olympic Committee and its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (IOC, 2022). She argued that one of the problems of limited development of democratic governing lies in an overreliance on institutional dimension of democracy, and the need to cultivate the cultural dimension of democracy.

In this Special Issue, against the backdrop of the need for top-down reforms of international sport organizations (the institutional dimension of democracy), McCoy centres her analysis on athletes as a key stakeholder group in sport (situated within the cultural dimension of democracy). Although sport involves many stakeholders, athletes are its principal stakeholders (see de Coubertin, 2000, p. 739), as sport is created and organized primarily for their participation and benefit. To capture athletes’ rights as well as responsibilities, McCoy uses the term ‘sport citizen’. Her central argument is that meaningful inclusion of athletes as stakeholders in sport governance hinges on targeted education. She examines one of the democratic principles – ‘challenging of authority’ – and argues that education can strengthen athletes’ capacity to exercise it. McCoy explores ideas on civic education and development of skills such as reasoning, critical thinking and communication skills, complemented by sport education. To this end, she draws on Eichberg and Jespersen’s (2009) education ‘for’, ‘by’, and ‘through’ sport.

It is important to emphasize that democratic thinking is not merely grafted onto sport through reasoning and critical thinking about sport; rather, participation in sport itself

cultivates a distinctive openness, akin to that fostered by philosophic inquiry and democratic practice – enacted in competition, where athletes compare their skill and abilities, trying to improve to overcome an opponent, under the ideals of equality and meritocracy (McCoy & Martínková, 2022; Parry & Martínková, 2024, p. 2). Accordingly, it is reasonable to contend that sport helps prepare athletes to be democratic citizens.

This kind of thinking about citizenship leads us to focus on athletes as citizens in more detail. When doing so, we can see that the large numbers of athletes, with different levels of groups of practitioners, allow us to distinguish at least the elite/professional sport level and its citizenship from the community sport level. So it is useful to distinguish between different levels of citizenship, such as ‘community sport citizenship’ and ‘elite sport citizenship’.

Sporting communities give people opportunities to practice sport together, to improve their physical abilities and skills through rule-defined tasks within often friendly community settings. The theme of ‘elite sport citizenship’ concerns high-level competitive sport, in which athletes of different countries form an ‘elite sport community’ (Henne, 2015). It aims at excellence and serious competition with higher stakes, with victories often bringing extrinsic values of fame and finance. ‘Community sport citizenship’ can nurture the idea of citizenship in competitive sport within local communities, i.e. especially club sport at lower levels of competition. Since competitive sport is the connection between these two groups (elite and community), they learn the same kinds of skills, but they are distinguished by level of intensity. Apart from improving physical abilities and skills, athletes also learn other skills necessary within competition, such as, for example, learning to win and lose, to communicate with others, and to deal with various moral issues arising from competition. Their sporting practice brings them sport-specific values, including interpersonal and moral values (Martínková, 2013).

### **Citizenship and nationality in contemporary sport**

While these ideas on athlete citizenship are crucial for development of athletes as active citizens within their communities as well as helping to improve sport through active engagement, in contemporary sport citizenship is most prominently expressed in political terms – specifically in competitions where eligibility is determined by affiliation with a nation state. This is different from ancient Greece, since the concept of nation state did not exist in antiquity, emerging only in 19th century European political thought. Sport in ancient Greece was organized around city-states, originally also with a restriction against participation for those without Greek identity, which was based on shared language, alphabet and religion, even though individual city-states were spread over a wide geographical area. Whilst there are some similarities, such as athletes from smaller units competing against each other in a higher-level competition, this did not entail the mingling of people of vastly different backgrounds. That is why we cannot speak about international sport in the context of ancient Greece in the way that we do nowadays.

The categorization of athletes according to nation is one of the usual eligibility rules in international competition (Martínková & Parry, 2024). The category of nation is a necessity for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (and International Federations), and the rationale behind this category is to promote sport all over the world. For ex-

ample, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) structure goes down as far as the nation, i.e. to National Olympic committees (NOC) and athletes in national sport federations. Rule 44 of the Olympic Charter states: "The invitations to take part in the Olympic Games shall be sent out by the IOC to all NOCs one year before the opening ceremony... An NOC shall only enter competitors upon the recommendations for entries given by national federations..." (IOC, 2025, p. 82). And the athletes to be selected must be citizens of the country in question – Rule 41.1 states: "Any competitor in the Olympic Games must be a national of the country of the NOC which is entering such competitor" (ibid., p. 80). However, this does not prevent some athletes from changing their citizenship in order to compete for other countries.

Currently, athletes can change nationality in accordance with the Bye-law to Rule 41.2, which permits such a change after a period of three years (IOC, 2025, p. 81). This provision allows foreign athletes to join national teams following a period of adaptation. This is not a new approach within contemporary sport; even in ancient Greece: "[s]ome Greek cities took an interest in trying to recruit athletes from other cities, again for reasons of national prestige" (Crowther, 1996, p. 34). Nevertheless, beyond the eligibility criterion, club sports are already open to athlete migration, attracting skilled athletes to boost their teams' performance.

William Crossan and Martin Chalupník use the concrete and topical example of football to examine attitudes towards the inclusion of foreign players and coaches in Czechia. Complemented by interviews with club executives, marketing directors, and sport managers, analysis of their five-year survey data highlights how foreign players and coaches can be integrated in ways that strengthen not only club performance but also broader forms of citizenship, understood as practices of belonging, respect, and inclusion within Czech football and society.

With reference to the recent experience of Sparta Prague the results suggest that, although there is still some scepticism towards internationalization, this is not to be understood through simple explanations relying on the idea of nationalism and prejudice. Crossan and Chalupník develop a more sophisticated analysis that draws on the importance of on-field performance and the notion of cultural proximity, and they emphasise the significance of value-driven communication from clubs.

Racism cannot be ignored as a factor, although (for example) African players are increasingly visible in football in recent times. This highlights the fact that elite clubs are not only sporting institutions, but are also important civic actors at the forefront of racial inclusion. For example, coaches and fans of English Premiership clubs want the best players – who cares where they come from? Thus, the perhaps (politically) insignificant football club contributes to the formation of inclusive racial and national narratives. The personal, and the social, become political.

In a wider perspective, we might consider issues of cosmopolitanism, in addition to those of nationality. The FIFA initiative with the Global Citizen Education Fund (Global Citizen, 2026a, Insideworldfootball, 2025) seems to raise such issues, although its rationale mainly relates to the relief of poverty and to community education through football. The alliance of FIFA with the Global Citizen (2026b) organisation might seem to promise something important with regard to the development of sport citizenship, but its terms of reference are much narrower, and its conceptualisation with regard to citizenship remains under-developed.

## CONCLUSION

In this Special Issue, we have begun to explore various aspects of the concept of citizenship, in order to illuminate the role of sport in developing attitudes and practices that contribute to the humanising of sport and the promotion of liberal democracy. The hegemonizing practice of sport (Parry, 1983), based on its isomorphism with political liberalism, sets sporting practice at the forefront of contemporary political debates about who should play against who, and on what basis.

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# Citizenship as a relational field: interests and identities across cleavages and seams

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## ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an ontological reconstruction of citizenship grounded in a relational architecture composed of two fundamental axes: the vertical relationship between citizens and political authority, and the horizontal relationship among citizens themselves. Moving beyond epistemological approaches that focus on how citizenship is recognised or classified, the paper identifies the relational dynamics through which citizenship is experienced, negotiated, and contested. Drawing on genealogical insights from ancient Greece and Rome, the framework distinguishes between vertical representation and responsiveness on the one hand, and, on the other, horizontal recognition and mutual sharing among citizens themselves, showing how interests and identities operate as essential forces that shape seams along both axes. By combining these axes, the paper develops a bi-dimensional field composed of four ideal-types – subjectship, democratic, liberal-clientelist, and full citizenship – each reflecting distinctive configurations of relational citizenship. The analysis emphasises that interests and identities are not obstacles to citizenship but its constitutive ingredients, determining the strength, or otherwise weakness, of relational seams.

## KEYWORDS

relational citizenship; vertical networks; horizontal relations; interests; identities

## DOI

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## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the idea of citizenship lies a tension that has marked human communities from their earliest institutional forms to the most complex contemporary democracies. This tension concerns the ways in which individuals are linked to one another and to the authority that binds them, and it resurfaces with renewed urgency whenever established mechanisms of community integration fail or citizens express

dissatisfaction with how their voices are translated into public decisions. It would be tempting to imagine that these tensions are the product of recent transformations, for example highlighting the illness of globalisation, digital communication, or the weakening of traditional channels of political integration such as party systems. Yet, a longer view reveals that the dilemmas of citizenship have always emerged from the interplay between two complementary axes: the political relationships that articulate how decisions are made on behalf of the overall community, and the civic relationships that sustain the social fabric that enables those decisions to be legitimate and meaningful.

Rather than considering citizenship as a set of categories, for example, in terms of rights, membership and participation in the work of Bellamy (2008), we may thus benefit from approaching it as a relational space in which political and social vectors intersect in different ways depending on historical configurations, institutional settlements, and collective imaginaries. In particular, two vectors have accompanied the development of citizenship from its earliest developments. The Greek polis confronted the question of how citizens could influence the decisions that governed their common life, introducing a vertical logic of representation, accountability, and potential contestation. By contrast, the Roman *civitas* elaborated a horizontal understanding of citizenship as a shared civic status, grounded in the reciprocal recognition of equal rights and duties among individuals who were otherwise differentiated by ethnic origin, social rank, or local territories. These two axes, vertical and horizontal respectively, could thus provide the coordinates through which citizenship could be structured and reinvented across many centuries.

At the same time, the social and political dynamics that animate these axes could be shaped by the dual fundamental forces of interests and identities. Citizens mobilise their interests to protect material advantages, negotiate collective goods, or resist policies that threaten their position. At the same time, identities, whether national, ethnic, religious, professional, or territorial, inform how individuals perceive one another, draw boundaries, and formulate expectations about mutual inclusion and exclusion.

Both interests and identities operate simultaneously across the vertical and horizontal dimensions: they influence how citizens relate vertically to institutions and how they relate horizontally to one another, often reinforcing or undermining the seams that sustain political and social reciprocity. Yet, we have witnessed in recent years the erosion of both types of seams. Declining trust in representative institutions, polarisation along deep identitarian cleavages, the weakening of intermediary organisations, as well as the growing reliance on judicial rather than political arenas to settle conflicts (Cinalli & Jacobson, 2020; Jacobson & Cinalli, 2025), all point toward a disturbance in terms of relational citizenship. These phenomena are frequently analysed in isolation, but they become more intelligible when viewed through the double lens of vertical-horizontal structuring and the crisscrossing logics of interests and identities. In this sense, reconstructing citizenship as a relational field offers not only a conceptual clarification but also a way of interpreting current transformations in democratic life without reducing them to exceptional disruptions, or to yet another “crisis”.

The goal of this introductory paper is therefore to sketch the broad contours of this relational understanding of citizenship by returning to its genealogical roots and linking them to contemporary sociopolitical dynamics. In the sections that follow, I reinterpret the Greek and Roman inheritances as foundational axes of citizenship, ex-

amine how interests and identities permeate each dimension, and show how different combinations of these factors give rise to distinct configurations of political and social integration. Without yet entering the terrain of empirical measurement, I aim to provide a conceptual map that can guide future inquiry into the challenges and possibilities of citizenship in complex democracies.

## **VERTICAL GREECE VS HORIZONTAL ROME**

Any attempt to reconstruct citizenship as a relational configuration must begin by confronting a longstanding ambiguity that shapes both scholarly debates and the everyday citizens' experience of their own citizenship. In fact, much of the contemporary literature approaches citizenship epistemologically. Here, the analytical starting point is to determine how we recognise who is a citizen and what counts as a citizenship, drawing upon criteria such as legal status, birthright, descent, territorial belonging, ethnic membership, or the various categories through which the insiders of a community are distinguished from the outsiders. This epistemological orientation has played a major role in structuring influential lines of work, from Marshall's tripartite model of civil, political, and social rights (1950), to the boundary-making perspective developed by Brubaker (1989), or the civic-national vision articulated by Renan and later Schnapper (1996). Similar tendencies are common amongst so many other scholars who treat citizenship as an attribute or a status that can be identified, classified, and applied (or not) to individual citizens.

A parallel epistemological logic also governs how ordinary citizens themselves recognise one another. In daily life, many people rely on rigid markers such language, religion, customs, descent, territorial attachment, to decide who "really" belongs to their own community of citizens. The distinction between citizen and non-citizen, insider and outsider, majority and minority, is therefore not only an analytical operation performed by scholars; it is a cognitive operation performed by individuals as they navigate all sort of boundaries, thereby attributing legitimacy or suspicion to other fellows they interact with. While this epistemological approach is crucial, it captures however only one layer of citizenship, and not the most fundamental one.

By contrast, an ontological conception of citizenship focuses not on how citizenship is recognised (either by scholars or citizens themselves), but on the relational field that makes it substantiated in the first place. Citizenship is not primarily a label or a set of attributes; it is the space of vertical and horizontal relationships within which individuals transform their preferences into policy-making, express expectations and emotions vis-à-vis to each other, and possibly develop deep sense of solidarities with other citizens or with the rulers. From this ontological perspective, rights, membership, and participatory practices are consequences of relational configurations, not their foundations. An ontological approach thus shifts emphasis from classifying citizens to understanding how ties, seams, and interactions constitute political membership and sustain (or destabilise) democratic life.

It is under this approach that the genealogies of ancient Greece and Rome acquire analytical significance. They are not normative exemplars to imitate, nor historical curiosities, but the first crystallisations of the vertical and horizontal logics through which citizenship became possible. The Greek polis articulated a distinctly vertical

conception of citizenship. Membership was inseparable from participation in collective decision-making, and the agora symbolised a political vector running between governed and governors. Authority was legitimate only insofar as it remained permeable to citizens. This dynamic anticipated later republican reflections – whether Machiavelli's emphasis on contestation, or Rousseau's debate on general will. The vertical axis thus concerns the continuous circulation between citizens and political authority, the conditions under which decisions are recognised as binding, the processes that allow individuals to influence the exercise of political power, and policy-makers to be attentive to political preferences from below.

Rome, by contrast, elaborated a horizontal dimension of citizenship. While some forms of bottom-up participation existed, the enduring legacy of the Roman *civitas* laid in its capacity to articulate a form of civic equality grounded in rights, legal protections, and shared rituals and festivities to enforce a shared sense of community. In this context, citizenship became a social relationship among individuals who recognised one another as part of a same whole, irrespective of local loyalties, ethnocultural markers, or status differences. Horizontal citizenship is thus valuable to capture the bonds of reciprocity, mutual recognition, and commonality that allow citizens to cooperate, trust one another, and sustain commitments to collective life.

Of course, looking at these historical developments with contemporary lenses, these two traditions of ancient Greece and Rome are not opposed models but complementary ontological logics. The vertical axis addresses the political dynamics of how citizens relate to the rulers and how the rulers remain accountable. The horizontal axis addresses the social dynamics of how citizens recognise one another as part of a shared community. What emerges from this genealogy, and successive developments throughout history and different geographical experiences is that citizenship is always configured at the intersection of these two axes (Jacobson & Cinalli, 2023), in line with well-known scholarly treatment of institutions and state formation (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), community building through contentious politics (Tilly, 1975), or civic engagement (Putnam, 2000).

Understanding citizenship ontologically through these axes also clarifies why contemporary debates often appear fragmented. Epistemological approaches examine rights, legal statuses, national boundaries of different kind, participation, identity, welfare, cohesion, and so forth: each captures an important piece of the puzzle but struggles to reveal the underlying relational architecture. By referencing to the Greek and Roman experiences, we can appreciate better how contemporary crises, often grounded on declining trust, polarisation, disaffection, and inequalities of all kinds, are not isolated phenomena; but they consist of disturbances in the vertical and horizontal seams that sustain the ontological field of citizenship. This overall framework provides the coordinates for analysing distinct configurations of modern citizenship. When the vertical axis is weakened, legitimacy and representation deteriorate; when the horizontal axis is weakened, solidarity and mutual acknowledgement decline.

## **THE TWO AXES OF VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL CITIZENSHIP**

If we take seriously the idea that citizenship must be understood ontologically (as the relational field that structures how individuals connect horizontally with one another

and vertically with the political authority) then the two axes emerging from the Greek and Roman genealogies become more than historical references. They become the conceptual coordinates through which contemporary forms of citizenship can be analysed. Too often, debates on, say, political belonging and democratic practices move directly to the level of empirical indicators or legal classifications, as though citizenship could be reconstructed from discrete attributes or administrative statuses. But if we begin instead from the relational architecture that sustains political communities, we see that citizenship takes shape through the interplay of two fundamental vectors: the vertical, which organises the political relationship between citizens and ruling institutions, and the horizontal, which structures the civic relationship among citizens themselves.

The vertical axis concerns the ways in which political authority is constituted, legitimised, and made accountable. It is the vector that enables individuals to recognise themselves in the decisions taken on their behalf and to perceive governing institutions as responsive, fair, and accessible. This dimension draws together a wide set of questions that are often treated separately in the literature: the role of representation, the functioning of parties and intermediaries, the quality of political responsiveness, the mechanisms of participation, and the institutional arrangements through which public decisions are contested or upheld. Studies of political culture, investigations into the legitimacy of public authority, or analyses of political trust converge here, even when they are not explicitly framed in relational terms. The vertical dimension is not reducible to specific institutional forms; it is an ongoing process through which citizens interpret the intentions, actions, and accountability of those who govern them.

In democratic contexts, this vertical relationship is meant to be reciprocal, both flowing from the bottom to the top and viceversa. Citizens are expected to articulate preferences, express demands, and evaluate the performance of governments. Rulers in turn are expected to justify their actions, respond to public concerns, and ensure that the channels of influence remain open. When these expectations break down (for example, when citizens perceive that their voices no longer matter, or when institutions become insulated from public contestation), the vertical axis weakens. This weakening is not simply a loss of trust; it is a rupture in the ontological fabric of citizenship, a disturbance in the relational logic that links individuals to the public decisions that shape their lives.

The horizontal axis, by contrast, concerns the relationships through which citizens recognise one another as members of a shared community. This dimension encompasses the social expectations, solidarities, and emotional dispositions that enable cooperation and sustain a sense of belonging. It is here that long-term scholarly debates on social cohesion (since Durkheim), the community (since Ferdinand Tönnies), the nation (since Ernest Renan), or indeed “citizenship” (since Thomas Humphrey Marshall) find their ontological grounding. In this dimension, citizenship is not primarily about influencing decisions but about sustaining the social bonds that make citizenship possible. Citizens must not only feel connected to institutions; they must also see one another as part of the same civic project.

The horizontal axis therefore includes the interpersonal dispositions (for example trust, reciprocity, empathy, social recognition) that make cooperation possible within

complex societies. Research on social capital (Putnam, 2000), studies of collective mobilisation (Tilly, 1978), and analyses of intergroup relations, including in deeply divided societies (Cinalli, 2002) converge here, illuminating how shared identities, symbolic boundaries, and social narratives shape the capacity of individuals to collaborate or to isolate, to include or exclude the others, to support redistribution or to oppose it. When horizontal bonds weaken, everyday interactions can become coloured by suspicion, resentment, or indifference. What erodes is not only social trust but the sense that one's fellow citizens are partners in a same political community.

Importantly, the vertical and horizontal axes are not symmetrical, nor do they operate in parallel. They intersect in every concrete instance of citizenship. A political system may maintain a functioning vertical axis, with regular elections, stable institutions, and procedural accountability; but it may at the same time experience profound horizontal fragmentation, as we observe in settings where ethnic, religious, or economic divides structure social life more strongly than national belonging. Conversely, horizontal bonds may remain relatively stable while the vertical axis weakens, as when citizens continue to engage with each other but distrusts the rulers and no longer perceive them as legitimate or responsive.

These configurations remind us that citizenship cannot be reduced to rights, nor to participation, nor to identity alone. Its ontological reality depends on the simultaneous organisation of political authority and social belonging. This insight also clarifies why contemporary democracies often struggle to diagnose their own challenges. Declining trust in institutions is frequently analysed separately from the rise of identity polarisation, or from debates around welfare retrenchment, immigration, or inequality. Yet these phenomena make sense only when viewed as disturbances in one or both relational axes. A political system may attempt to strengthen the vertical dimension through transparency initiatives, but without addressing horizontal distrust, such reforms remain insufficient. Similarly, efforts to promote solidarity or civic cohesion may fail when citizens feel that political decisions are made without meaningful input or accountability.

The theoretical framework proposed here is therefore useful for assessing the diverse and often contradictory developments that shape contemporary citizenship. It invites us to see citizenship not as a legal artefact, as a social category or as a normative ideal, but as a relational field requiring continuous negotiation and renewal. Let's now move to explore how interests and identities interact with both vertical and horizontal citizenship to generate different relational patterns.

## **INTEREST VS IDENTITY: RELATIONAL FORCES ACROSS THE TWO AXES**

If the vertical and horizontal axes allow us to reconstruct the relational architecture of citizenship, the following question then must engage with interests and identities respectively, as the two main forces that shape citizenship. Interests and identities are central to understanding how cleavages (or otherwise seams) emerge, solidify, erode, or shift across both axes. These forces can be considered beyond the traditional sense of attributes linked to individuals or groups, as modes of relationality that shape how citizens orient themselves toward one another and toward governing institutions. Without interests, citizens would lack the motivation to engage and

articulate preferences across the public and the policy domain. Without identities, citizens would lack recognition, belonging, and the symbolic resources that sustain civic life. The challenge is therefore not to eliminate interests or identities but to understand how they operate across vertical and horizontal citizenship, whether as forces that strengthen seams or forces that weaken them.

The emphasis on interests resonates with a longstanding tradition that ranges from early moral philosophy to political economy. Thinkers in the Scottish Enlightenment, for example, saw the meeting of interests as a crucial mechanism for social coordination, whether through market exchanges (since Adam Smith) or the stabilising effect of reciprocal expectations (since John Hume). Their view was not limited to economic interactions. It extended to a broader understanding of how individuals, motivated by needs, preferences, and concrete stakes, recognise that their cooperation with others is indispensable. When this logic unfolds horizontally, citizens link their lives to those of their peers through shared objectives, mutual advantage, and everyday reciprocity. When it unfolds vertically, interests connect the governed and the governors through channels of representation, responsiveness, and policy influence.

Identities, however, bring a different but equally powerful relational dynamic. They operate not through calculation or mutual benefit, but through shared belonging, symbolic boundaries, and emotional attachment. Classical sociological thought, from Durkheim's reflections on "moral community" to Weber's analyses of "status groups", has recognised how identities produce cohesion within groups while also defining who is perceived as "insider" or "outsider" (Merton, 1972). In a horizontal sense, identities shape whether citizens recognise one another as partners in a shared civic project. In a vertical sense, identities influence whether citizens interpret public authority as legitimate, inclusive, or biased, and whether authorities themselves perceive certain groups as "proper" members of the national community.

Accordingly, interests and identities cut across vertical and horizontal citizenship simultaneously. They are not subsets of either dimension but permeate the relational field in ways that can reinforce or undermine both political and social exchanges.

Thus, four ideal-typical configurations can be distinguished:

1. Horizontal interests: where the pursuit of mutual advantage, reciprocity, and cooperative bargaining shapes ties among citizens. This is visible, for example, in neighbourhood networks or civic practices, for example in terms of alliances campaigning over ad hoc goals.
2. Vertical interests: where policy preferences, representation, and access to institutions ensure that citizens perceive governing actors as responsive to their preferences, for example in terms of openings of 'political opportunity structures' (Kriesi et al., 1995).
3. Horizontal identities: where shared belonging and recognition structure civic community. This logic has deep roots, from republican universalism (Schnapper, 2000) to later work on boundary formation (Brubaker, 1989).
4. Vertical identities: where the identity of the state, the legitimacy of public institutions, and the symbolic status of various groups shape intimately the relationship between governors and governed. This includes classic debates on national models and citizenship regimes (Weil, 2008) and more recent analyses of how minorities are perceived by political elites (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2009).

By explicitly distinguishing these four relational logics, it becomes possible to explain why citizenship takes divergent forms even within the same institutional context. A polity may display strong horizontal interests but fractured horizontal identities, or it may succeed in representing vertical interests while failing to establish vertical identities, and so forth. Each pattern is therefore expected to produce different experiences, expectations, and orientations among citizens.

This is possibly the crucial point that distinguishes this approach to relational citizenship from other more traditional epistemological accounts that focus on criteria to classify individuals (whether by descent, *ius soli*, ethnic markers, legal status, and so forth) and therefore tend to reproduce usual debates on models of membership. By contrast, relational citizenship demands to examine how interests and identities animate the overall field, shaping the dynamics through which actors across the public and the policy domains (whether they are institutions, political parties, civil society organisations or simple citizens) trust, contest, cooperate, or otherwise withdraw (Ambrosini et al., 2020).

This dual emphasis also helps illuminate many apparent paradoxes in contemporary democracies. For instance, horizontal interests may align, as in the case of shared economic insecurity across different groups, but horizontal identities may still remain sharply divided, preventing solidarity. Conversely, vertical identities may be broadly inclusive, as in the case of civic-national models, but vertical interests may be poorly represented. These tensions are not incidental but are tied to the interplay of interests and identities across vertical and horizontal citizenship.

Interests and identities function as relational forces that substantiate vertical and horizontal citizenship. They make visible both cleavages and seams that connect and divide, opening space for the identification of relational combinations of high or low cleavages/seams across the two axes. Accordingly, a bi-dimensional space of citizenship is valuable to identify four main distinct configurations that may characterise, at least in theory, the relational field of citizenship. Let's move to evaluate how these four distinct relational logics combine into a coherent analytical field.

## **THE RELATIONAL FIELD: COMBINING THE TWO AXES IN THE BIDIMENSIONAL SPACE**

If interests and identities operate as relational forces across the vertical and horizontal axes, the next step is to examine how these forces combine to structure the overall field of citizenship. This section therefore moves from a discussion of individual logics to a more systematic reconstruction of the bi-dimensional space that results from their intersection. The aim is not to construct a classification for its own sake but to show how citizenship takes shape through variable combinations of political and civic relationality (Cinalli, 2017). These combinations allow us to recognise how different contexts may generate distinct expectations, dispositions, and practices among citizens.

The value of mapping citizenship in a bi-dimensional space lies in the capacity to show variation, movement, and tension across settings, rather than focusing on an unsubstantiated dichotomy between citizens and non-citizens. In fact, both vertical and horizontal citizenship can display, in their simplest operationalisation, strong or weak seams. When combined, vertical and horizontal citizenship can thus produce

four broad configurations that capture relational tendencies that can tighten or loosen over time.

The first configuration appears when seams are weak along both the horizontal and the vertical dimension. Citizens neither engage with one another through strong civic ties nor consider governing institutions as responsive or open. This ideal-typical combination can be named “subjectship” (Cinalli, 2017). It may be characterised by a prevalence of conflict, distrust, and frustration across both vertical and horizontal citizenship, with interests and identities operating as divisive forces. Thus, interests may take the form of ad hoc grievances rather than coordinated expectations, and identities may tend to harden along antagonistic lines. This configuration produces an exclusionary dynamic that is not simply oppositional in the short term but rooted in structural lack of vertical and horizontal exchanges. With strong cleavages along both axes, citizens oscillate between withdrawal and confrontation, politics become the realm of conflict between ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ across the public and the policy domains, and the rulers struggle to maintain legitimacy and representation.

A second configuration emerges when horizontal seams are strong but vertical cleavages also remain strong. In such settings, citizens forge extensive horizontal exchanges, such as for example interpersonal trust, associational life, shared norms, but they remain vertically detached from the rulers. This second configuration can be named “democratic citizenship”, not because it represents a fully realised democratic order, but because its logic resonates with scholarship arguing that strong relations across civil society may support political inclusion over time (Putnam, 2000). However, without vertical seams, the horizontal stretching of the relational field cannot transmit preferences and orientations of citizens into the political agenda. Representation may be perceived as incomplete, responsiveness as limited, and access to institutional arenas as uneven. In this case, the normative assumption is that civic vitality might, over time, support political inclusion, but in fact this trajectory is neither automatic nor guaranteed.

The third configuration arises when vertical seams are strong but horizontal cleavages are also strong. In this case, citizens (or their groups) have channels of representation, visibility, and negotiation with public authorities, but they experience limited engagement with each other horizontally. This ideal-type can be named “liberal-clientelist citizenship”. Its logic is one of institutional inclusion without broader cohesion across civil society. Policies may provide access, often with the aim to pre-empt bottom-up claims (Cinalli, 2016) yet overall recognition remains partial or contested with groups (such as ethnic and religious minorities) acquiring political rights or targeted policy benefits while still experiencing exclusion in broader civic life. In this configuration, identities often function as boundaries rather than resources, and interests are negotiated competitively rather than under larger collective coordination.

The fourth configuration represents the ideal-type whereby extensive networks are built both horizontally and vertically, with strong seams characterising the overall relational field. Horizontal reciprocity, together with vertical exchanges between the ruled and the rulers, reinforce one another, creating conditions for “full citizenship”. In this case, citizens experience both meaningful ties across civil society, for example in terms of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms, while at the same time having political institutions as accessible, fair, and responsive. Vertical exchanges and horizontal

exchanges reinforce each other, creating a relational environment in which citizens recognise themselves as part of a shared community and as active participants in public decisions. Interests are channelled into meaningful relationships, and identities function as sources of recognition rather than exclusion. This is not a utopian model but a potentially empirical orientation toward the most integrated relational configuration potentially available within democratic systems.

Overall, the relational field shows well how citizenship is sensitive to variation, complexity, and diachronic change. It shows why similar legal frameworks can be matched by different relational patterns, accounting for trajectories that may not be linear. For example, a vibrant associational life may forge extensive vertical networks with policy-makers and institutions, but it may also deepen segmentation when confined to homogeneous groups (Sunstein, 2002). At the same time, institutional inclusion may encourage broader recognition, but it may also produce competition for visibility or funding, weakening horizontal exchange among citizens and their groups, as well as pre-empting claims that are the expression of broader civil society. Likewise, horizontal cohesion may become fragmented if economic insecurity or political polarisation alters the logic of recognition. So shifts are possible from subjectship to democratic citizenship as horizontal ties expand, or from liberal-clientelist back to subjectship if vertical channels erode.

The bi-dimensional field thus provides a dynamic representation of citizenship as a relational process. Citizens do not simply hold rights, a static membership, or fixed attitudes and behaviours; but they rather navigate a large and complex field, experiencing shifts in seams and cleavages in terms of both interests and identities. Citizenship is a relational field shaped by tensions, adjustments, and potential movement across configurations. These movements are not merely institutional, but they reflect how citizens themselves interpret, negotiate, and inhabit their positions within the relational field.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper has been to reconstruct citizenship not as a status, an attribute, or a legal condition, but as a relational architecture grounded in two axes of vertical and horizontal citizenship respectively. By moving beyond epistemological approaches that focus on how citizenship is recognised, classified, or attributed, I have argued that a more fruitful perspective emerges when we examine how citizens (as individuals and groups) relate to political authority and to each other. The genealogies of ancient Greece and Rome have provided the conceptual foundations for this approach. Overall, four main relational configurations (subjectship, democratic, liberal-clientelist, and full citizenship) have been identified so as to represent distinctive combinations of cleavages and seams along the vertical and horizontal axes respectively. These ideal-types are not fixed categories but analytical constructs that reveal the underlying relational dynamics of citizenship, showing also that movement across configurations is neither linear nor predetermined.

Within this relational architecture, interests and identities function as the two central forces that animate both axes. They are not external or secondary to citizenship; they are its constitutive ingredients. When interests and identities operate in cooper-

ative and inclusive forms, they strengthen relational seams. When they take the form of antagonism, exclusion, or manipulation, they weaken them. In turn, these dynamics open space for further investigation on how contemporary democratic polities increasingly contend with exclusionary interests (for example those shaped by economic insecurity, market pressures, and digital manipulation) and exclusionary identities (for example, those shaped by boundary-marking narratives and populist frames). These dynamics illuminate the movement of polities across the bi-dimensional field, often with backward and restrictive movements across the horizontal and the vertical dimensions.

Whether citizenship moves toward democratic, liberal-clientelist, or full citizenship, depends not only on institutional design or socioeconomic conditions but also on the capacity of public actors and civic communities to foster inclusive interests and inclusive identities. This requires long-term investment in institutions, policies, civic infrastructures, recognising that citizenship is not a static condition but a relational and never-ending enterprise, continuously shaped by the forces that structure how citizens and their groups interact among themselves and how they relate to political authority.

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# Citizenship and the ancient Olympic Games

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## ABSTRACT

For people in antiquity, citizenship was crucial, since only citizens enjoyed full rights. Citizenship encompassed not only rights but also responsibilities, including the duty to train and be physically prepared to defend their *polis*. Citizens who neglected this duty were often labeled *idiotai*, or “untrained”. Citizenship granted access to active participation in Olympic events in the stadium, and only citizen-aristocrats could compete as horse and chariot owners in the hippodrome. This structure changed with the rise of Macedonian kings like Alexander I, Archelaus, Philip II, and significantly with Alexander the Great and his successors, who divided and ruled the vast empire he had established. This shift also transformed public perceptions of citizenship and fandom, as exemplified by the Olympic boxing match between Cleitomachus of Thebes and Aristonicus of Alexandria. With the expansion of the Roman Empire, the Games opened to other nations, and in 212 AD, Emperor Caracalla’s *Constitutio Antoniniana* (*Antonine Edict*) extended Roman citizenship to all free individuals across the empire. This development enabled athletes from across the Roman Empire to participate in the Olympic Games, broadening the event’s inclusivity beyond its traditional Greek confines.

## KEYWORDS

ancient Greece; ancient Macedonia; ancient Olympic athletes; ancient Rome; athletic identity

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between citizenship and the Panhellenic Games – especially the Olympic Games – in antiquity was fundamental, as initially only citizens, and likely only aristocrats, had active access to the competitions. Over time, the athletic and combative disciplines held in the stadiums became democratized, allowing ordinary citizens to participate and achieve victory. In response to this, the aristocracy mostly relocated to the hippodrome, competing in equestrian events through their horses

and charioteers. The next phase in the social stratification of sport came with the admission of non-Greeks – that is, foreigners – into the Games. After Greece was conquered by Macedonia and later by Rome, this rule underwent significant change. By the 3rd century AD, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Caracalla, citizenship was extended throughout the Roman Empire, rendering the earlier restrictions practically irrelevant. What had begun as a local event for Greeks alone gradually expanded over the centuries into an international spectacle open to dozens of nations. The first Olympic victor was Coroebus of Elis (a *πόλις* near Olympia, which usually organized the Games), and the last known winner was Varazdates of the Arsacid dynasty in Armenia. Generally speaking, most participants came from Greece, Macedonia, the Hellenistic states, and the Roman Empire. For most of the Games' history, the level of one's citizenship did not play a decisive role; on the contrary, Olympic victors could sometimes be granted citizenship by various city-states or cities as a reward for their glory.

### Citizenship in antiquity

In ancient Greece, a full citizen (*πολίτης*) was any adult free man born to two citizen parents. In Athens, a citizen was even forbidden from marrying a foreign woman and passing her off as an Athenian. The concept of citizenship was most notably defined by Aristotle. According to him, the state is a collection of citizens who are defined by their right to participate in judicial functions and public office – that is, those who share in judicial and deliberative power. However, this also depends on the type of constitution under which the citizen lives – a citizen differs and holds different rights in a democracy, an oligarchy, or a tyranny. A further condition for citizenship, as already mentioned, is that one must be the child of two citizens (Aristot., *Pol.* 3.1274b–1275b).

There were many different social strata consisting of people who were only partial citizens. In Athens, these were the *μέτοικοι* (resident foreigners), and in Sparta, the *περίοικοι* (craftsmen and merchants living in the surrounding area). Although they were not full citizens, they were indispensable to the functioning of the community. For this reason, the Spartans, especially in the 5th century BC, granted them more rights (for example, they were allowed to bear the lambda symbol on their shields, referencing the first letter of another name for Sparta, *Lakedaimon*). Necessary concessions to the *μέτοικοι* in Athens were discussed, for instance, by Xenophon. Xenophon (Xen, *Ways*, 2–3) considered this, alongside support for maritime trade and the leasing of slaves for work in the mines, to be one of the main ways to strengthen Athens' economy at the beginning of the 4th century BC.

Among other non-full citizens were women, whose status varied across different city-states. The most favorable position for women was found in Sparta and its colonies. Here, they were not only allowed but rather required to engage in sports and, as young girls, even wrestle against boys. They wore very loose clothing, often revealing their thighs. For this reason, they were known in the Greek world as *φανομηρίδες*, or “thigh-showers” (Ibyc., F5). Spartan women could even own and inherit property and were entitled to a portion of the harvest from land worked by slaves. As a result, despite not being full citizens, they often became quite wealthy. If a woman's husband or father died in battle – a common occurrence in Sparta – she inherited part or all of his estate. She could then marry a wealthy Spartan, perpetuating this cycle (Blundell, 1995, p. 156). It should be noted, however, that in reality, ultimate ownership of everything –

even children – belonged to the Spartan *πόλις* (Plut., *Lyc.* 15). The state would then allocate land, resources, and slaves to individual Spartan families. In the rest of Greece, such a system was virtually unthinkable. Girls and women were typically confined to the household, limited to domestic tasks, and when they ventured outside, they had to be veiled. They could not own property and were entirely dependent on their husband or male relatives (father, brother). The differences in clothing, public appearance, and physical fitness between Spartan women and Athenian women (or women from other parts of Greece) are brilliantly depicted by Aristophanes in his comedy *Lysistrata*, set during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC). He highlights that, unlike Athenian women, Spartan women were trained in gymnastics and athletics, often exercising in the nude; in one scene, the other women marvel at a display of *βίβασις*<sup>1</sup> performed by Lampito, a Spartan, admiring both her beauty and strength (Ar., *Lys.* 76–82). Spartan women were indeed physically formidable, and according to Pomeroy (2002, p. 24–27) and Scanlon (2002, p. 115 & 2008, p. 162), they were often the ones who participated in the *Heraia*, the women’s Olympic Games held before or after the traditional Games. There is, however, limited evidence that girls from outside Elis traveled to Olympia to compete in the *Heraia*, even though it seems plausible<sup>2</sup>.

Another economic group was that of the slaves. They were often treated as property, especially the Messenian *helots* (*εἰλωτες*) in Sparta. The Spartans distrusted and feared them, as their numbers far exceeded those of the Spartans. The Spartans organized the *κρυπτεία*<sup>3</sup> against them, and the helots had very few rights – for example, they were allowed to keep only a small portion of the harvest from the fields they cultivated for themselves and their families. *Helots* not originating from Messenia – which the Spartans had subjugated during the so-called Messenian Wars (743–724 BC and 660–650 BC) – had a somewhat better status. They were most likely the ones who accompanied Spartans into battle<sup>4</sup> and, in exceptional cases, could be otherwise recognized or rewarded. Some sources even attest to friendly relations between helots and Spartans. There is even a recorded case of a freed *εἰλωτος* who held the office of *ἀρμοστής*<sup>5</sup>. There were also numerous other semi-citizen groups, such as the *μόθακες* (illegitimate brothers – typically sons of a Spartan father and a helot mother), the

<sup>1</sup> A typical exercise practiced by Spartan women involved leaping into the air and striking their gluteal region with their heels, immediately followed by an identical jump (Miller, 2004, p. 157). Polydeuces mentions a certain Spartan woman who was reportedly able to repeat this exercise 1,000 times (Poll. 4.102).

<sup>2</sup> At both Olympic Games (those held in honor of Zeus and those in honor of Hera) a strong (political) influence of Sparta could be observed up until the early 6th century BC, where athletic education was extended even to women. The Spartan state possessed sufficient authority to elevate these originally local competitions into events of greater significance, aimed at reinforcing the educational system for Spartan girls (a view also supported by Schöbel, 1965, p. 114).

<sup>3</sup> A particular Spartan institutional practice served both for the training of selected youth and the elimination of *εἰλωτες*.

<sup>4</sup> Every Spartan soldier was accompanied into battle by a *εἰλωτος*, who carried his shield and provided support.

<sup>5</sup> The Spartan military commander appointed over a subjugated region was typically a Spartan or a *περίοικοι*, though an exceptional case is recorded in which this position was held by a former *εἰλωτος* who had been dismissed.

νεοδαμώδεις (new citizens – mainly freed slaves) ... In the context of the Olympic Games, these individuals could participate only if they had been freed individually (as in the case of a freed slave who later held the office of *ἀρμοστής*), or collectively (as after the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC and the campaign of Epaminondas into Sparta – in the case of the Messenian *εἰλωτες*). In Athens, slaves (*δοῦλοι*) were considered the property of their master. They had no political rights, could not own property, yet played an essential role in the economy and in households. Even a freed slave could not become a citizen.

This stratification of rights and statuses was also reflected in the famous Greek democracy – specifically the Athenian slave-owning democracy – referencing *δῆμος* and *κράτος*, rule of the people, although slaves, foreigners, and women were excluded from the *δῆμος*. If true rule by all people had been intended, the proper term would reference *ἄνθρωπος* (human being, every person), suggesting instead an anthropocracii.

In Rome, a *civis Romanus* (Roman citizen) was also a person with full rights – both political and legal. A citizen was someone born to Roman citizens, but one could also become a citizen as a freed slave (*libertini*), although such individuals did not have full political rights. Full citizenship would pass to their descendants. If citizenship was granted to a city or province, its inhabitants became citizens as well. Foreigners could also be granted citizenship as a reward for service – such as in the military – and after 25 years of service, members of the auxiliary troops (*auxilia*) were granted citizenship for themselves and their children. In 212 AD, when Emperor Caracalla issued the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (*Antonine Edict*), he extended citizenship to almost all free inhabitants of the Roman Empire, making citizenship an universal status. Among other things, this edict also served as a way to bring more revenue into the imperial treasury by extending certain taxes to a wider population<sup>6</sup> (Dio Cassius 78.9). By that time, however, the practical difference between citizen and non-citizen had begun to blur. In the legal scholarship of the late 2nd century AD, terms such as *honestiores* and *humiliores* (privileged and non-privileged citizens) appear more frequently than citizen and non-citizen.

### Benefits and duties of citizenship

Being a Greek citizen came with a wide range of benefits. It was a fundamental status for a person who could then live and express themselves authentically to a certain degree. Citizens had full rights and access to religious cults, theaters, and various local and pan-Hellenic games (Olympic, Pythian, Nemean, Isthmian) and festivals. Greek citizens could vote (*ἐκκλησία* in Athens, *ἀπέλλα* in Sparta), serve as jurors in courts, and be elected (*ἄρχων* or member of the *βουλή* in Athens, member of the *γερονσία* in Sparta). They also had property and inheritance rights, and the right to protection.

Citizenship also entailed duties, such as military service (often required of non-citizens and slaves as well), and preparation for it, which was carried out through training for boys and adolescents (*εφεβία* from ages 18 to 20 in Athens, *ἀγωγή* from age 7 to 18–20 in Sparta). A citizen was obliged to participate in political public life and to improve physically. Those who could not or refused to do so were punished with

<sup>6</sup> Such taxes included, for instance, the manumission tax imposed upon the release of a slave, or inheritance taxes.

ἀτιμία (loss of honor) and labeled as useless (*ιδιώτης*) for not engaging in the political life of the *polis* and exercising their rights, or as *ιδιότης* if they failed to spend their free time (*σχολή*) meaningfully – ideally through sports or visits to the gymnasium. For Plato, an *ιδιώτης* was someone who could not read/write or swim; more generally, it was someone who refused physical activity and bodily development. Such people were mentally or physically unfit citizens, those who rejected participation in public life (Kouřil, 2016, p. 16). Citizens were also obliged to pay certain special taxes, for example the honorary taxes known as *λειτουργία*, which financed training, theater performances, or the functioning of gymnasia (*γυμνασάρχος*, olive oil, etc.).

One could say that the main duty of Greek citizens was to train and be physically prepared to defend their *πόλις*. That is, to preserve freedom (*ἐλευθερία*) for its citizens – the most valuable thing for Greeks. According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1.1254a–b), freedom was what distinguished the citizen from the slave. Similarly, Plato in the *Laws* (6.776e) highlights the degradation of human worth and soul in conditions of slavery. This view is echoed already in Homer, where Zeus “takes away half his worth from a man, when the day of slavery comes upon him” (*Od.* 17.322–323). Yet this conception was not reciprocal: while slavery diminished a man’s *ἀρετή*, the loss of *ἀρετή* did not automatically entail the loss part of a citizen’s freedom. In this sense, *ἐλευθερία* remained the fundamental prerequisite of civic identity, whereas *ἀρετή* defined its quality.

In the case of Rome, this depended on the given period (for instance, whether it was during the Republic or the Empire), but generally, the benefits of Roman citizenship included legal privileges such as the right to vote during the Republic, the right to defend one’s case in court, to appeal to the people’s assembly or later to the emperor (*provocatio ad populum, provocatio ad Caesarem*), in some cases the right to hold office, to manage one’s property, the right to personal protection (such as a legal trial), and the right to higher military rank. Roman citizenship was highly prestigious, though it also depended on a person’s position in society – particularly within the *cursus honorum*<sup>7</sup>, the sequence of public offices. Among the duties were, for example, military service (especially during the Republic), paying certain taxes, and fulfilling civic obligations such as giving testimony in court. Just like in Greece, citizenship in Rome did not imply equality. Greek *ἰσονομία* (equality of rights) did not include *ἰσόμοιρία* (equality of property); wealth and lineage played a key role in both societies and defined, for example, the difference between patricians and plebeians.

### Citizenship and the Olympic Games

For participation in the Games, it was necessary to be a Greek citizen during the Archaic and Classical periods. Participation was banned for slaves, foreigners, barbarians, non-Greeks, murderers, sacrilegists, blasphemers, and married women (Kössl, Štumbauer & Waic, 2018, p. 23). At that time, the death penalty was imposed

<sup>7</sup> The sequence of political offices that a Roman citizen – whether patrician or wealthy plebeian – was required to hold in order to become a senator was as follows: 1. *Quaestor* (financial administrator), 2. *Aedile* (overseer of public order, markets, festivals, and games), 3. *Praetor* (judicial magistrate and deputy to the consul), 4. *Consul* (the highest executive official of the Republic).

on a married woman who attended the Games as a spectator. She would be thrown off the Tropaion cliff (Drees, 1968, p. 56). Only one woman is known to have violated this rule – Pherenice (also known as Callipatira), the mother of Peisirrhodus, who came from the famous Olympic-winning Diagoras family<sup>8</sup> (Sweet, 1987, p. 220). The mother of the future victor disguised herself as his trainer, and after Peisirrhodus' victorious *άγων*, she revealed herself while jumping over a barrier. Because of the high status of her family, she was not punished. From that point on, however, even the trainers of *άθληταί* were required to observe the competitions naked (Ael., VH = 10.1; Philostr., Gym. 17; Paus. 5.6.7–8, 6.7.2). Kyle (2006, p. 224–225) argues that this story was entirely fictional and suggests that nudity may have been introduced to prevent bribery (hiding money). According to surviving sources, bribes were provided by the *άθληταί* or their fathers, not their trainers<sup>9</sup>.

This structure changed with the rise of Macedonian kings like Alexander I, Archelaus, Philip II, and significantly with Alexander the Great and his successors (*διάδοχοι*), who divided and ruled the vast empire he had established. The influence of these Macedonian kings on access to the Olympic Games by citizens and non-citizens was fundamental.

Alexander I was the first Macedonian king to compete in the Olympics as a non-Greek. He would not have been allowed to compete, but he proved his Argive ancestry, as Macedonian kings were said to be descendants of Heracles. Herodotus records this shift in access to the Games for non-Greeks:

When Alexander decided to compete in the Olympic Games and arrived in Olympia for this purpose, his opponents from amongst the rest of the Hellenes reacted because, supposedly, no barbarians but only Hellenes had the right to participate in the Games. Alexander, however, having proved his Argeian origins and having been judged as an Argeian by descent, competed in the stadion and finished almost simultaneously as the winner. (Hdt. 5.22.2)

This passage is interesting not only because it marks a shift in access for non-Greeks to the Games – and probably a second-place finish for the Macedonian king, which is deeply tied to Macedonian history<sup>10</sup> – but also because a wealthy aristocratic king

<sup>8</sup> Diagoras was a victor in *πυγμαή*; his three sons also achieved Olympic victories – Acusilaus likewise in *πυγμαή*, and on the same day, Damagetos triumphed in *παγκράτιον*. The youngest, Dorieus, later won in *πυγμαή* as well. Diagoras's grandsons, Eukles and the aforementioned Peisirrhodus, also emerged victorious in *πυγμαή* (Paus. 6.7.1–3).

<sup>9</sup> From the 4th century BC onward, instances of attempted corruption and fraud began to emerge at the Olympic Games. These transgressions were commemorated by the erection of statues known as *Ζάνες* (i.e., statues of Zeus). These penalty statues were commissioned at the expense of those found guilty of bribing competitors or judges (three recorded cases), or of committing other infractions – such as cowardice, as evidenced by a statue paid for by an athlete who fled upon facing his opponent; the use of a false excuse for late arrival at the pre-Olympic training camp; or a prearranged outcome of a contest (Drees, 1968, p. 131; Miller, 2004, p. 93; Sweet, 1987, p. 239–240).

<sup>10</sup> It was especially the latter – Achilles – who was renowned for his athletic prowess and was described in the *Iliad* with the epithet “swift-footed”.

competed not in the *ἵππικός ἀγών*, but in the *γυμνικός ἀγών*. At that time, wealthy aristocrats typically scorned stadion contests and competed instead as horse and chariot owners, represented by jockeys and charioteers on the hippodrome.

A king who significantly expanded Macedonian influence in Olympic Games and simultaneously promoted Greek influence in Macedonia was Archelaus I, an Olympic victor in the *τέθριππον*<sup>11</sup> in 408 BC and founder of the Macedonian Olympic Games in Dion or Aigai (Arr., An. 1.11.1; Diod. 17.16). Archelaus established these games to strengthen connections with the Greeks and promote the Olympic ideal and Greek culture in his kingdom.

Philip II fully exploited Macedonian access to Olympia and cleverly used victories there<sup>12</sup> to further his political ambitions (following the model of the Athenian statesman and general Alcibiades) and to promote Macedonia's rise at the expense of Greece itself.

Alexander the Great did not compete in the Olympics, although he was reportedly an excellent runner. When asked if he would race, he responded that he would only do so if his opponents were kings and sons of kings, reflecting the aristocratic view on democratization in sport. At that time, ordinary citizens such as farmers, fishermen, herders, and even individuals without full citizenship rights – like the Spartan *περίοικοι* Ladas and Nicocleus – were winning Olympic events (Christesen, 2013, p. 41 & 47).

The 4th century BC also brought key changes to the access of full and non-full-right citizens to the Games – particularly regarding women. The first female Olympic victor was Cynisca of Sparta, who won the *τέθριππον* as the owner of a chariot team in 396 and 392 BC at the age of 40 to 50 (Pomeroy, 2002, p. 21). Xenophon and Plutarch both wrote in their biographies of Agesilaus that the idea of horse breeding and Olympic competition was not Cynisca's, but the king's (Plu., *Ages.* 20.1; Plu., *Mor.* 212b; Xen., *Ages.* 9.6). It was likely part of his military reforms and a way to downgrade individual glory in favor of collective success won on the battlefield. In 368 BC, another Spartan woman, Euryleonis, won the two-horse chariot race (Paus. 5.8.11; Crowther, 2007, p. 148). Other women Olympic victors included Berenice I (who sought to rival Cynisca's fame), her daughter Arsinoë II (sister and wife of Ptolemy II), who was the first to win all three equestrian events (*τέθριππον*, *συνωρίς*, and *τέθριππον πῶλων*<sup>13</sup>) at a single Olympiad (Golden, 2005, p. 17 & 27; Kyle, 2014, p. 269; Remijnsen, 2009, p. 251).

Ptolemy's courtesan Belistiche Machesis of Macedonia also won the *τέθριππον πῶλων* in 268 BC and the *πῶλων συνωρίς* in 264 BC. Berenice II, wife of Ptolemy III Euergetes, won the *τέθριππον* in 248 BC (Paus. 5.8.11; Crowther, 2007, p. 148; Kyle, 2006, p. 216 & 2014, p. 269). Thus, women's participation and victory in the Olympic Games is linked to Sparta – where women could inherit and own property – and the Ptolemaic royal house in Egypt. These women only participated passively, as owners represented by their chariots, drivers, and horses.

<sup>11</sup> The basic equestrian event, a four-horse chariot race.

<sup>12</sup> Philipp won in *keles* (356 BC) and twice in *tethrippon* (352 and 348 BC).

<sup>13</sup> The race in *πῶλων συνωρίς* (two-horse chariot race with foals) was introduced only after her death.

When studying the development of Olympic victors (see especially Christesen, 2012) and their regional origins in relation to Greek citizenship and the Olympic Games, the reign of Alexander the Great and the *διάδοχοι* appears to be a turning point. The campaign of Spartan king Agesilaus II (396–394 BC) in Asia Minor and the subsequent expedition of Alexander the Great into the Greek East (334–333 BC) led to the liberation of Greeks in Asia Minor and sparked a rapid rise in participation and victories by athletes from that region. A similar surge in athletes and victors from Egypt – especially Alexandria – was connected with the rule of the Macedonian-Ptolemaic dynasty, founded by Alexander’s general, friend, and (according to some legends<sup>14</sup>) half-brother, Ptolemy Soter (Paus. 1.6.2), who strongly supported science and the arts. The Ptolemaic dynasty supported astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, medicine, and athletics, producing many Olympic champions from this region. These “Egyptians” were in fact Greeks and Macedonians ruling in Egypt but were no longer strictly Greek citizens. By then, the requirement of Greek citizenship for Olympic participation had ceased to exist. Simultaneously, the number of Olympic victors from mainland Greece declined.

During the hellenistic period the Olympic rule about citizenship fell. This shift also transformed public perceptions of citizenship and fandom, as exemplified by the Olympic boxing match between Cleitomachus of Thebes and Aristonicus of Alexandria. Cleitomachus was a remarkable champion, winning both *παγκράτιον* (216 BC) and *πυγμαί* (212 BC) at the Games, and also claiming victory in *πάλη* at other competitions; he even won one of the games at the Isthmus in *παγκράτιον, πυγμαί* ἢ *πάλη*. Aristonicus, talented boxer, received support from Egyptian Ptolemy IV Philopator.

When he [Aristonicus – author’s note] appeared on the arena at Olympia a great number of the spectators, it seems, immediately showed their favour for him, and cheered him on, being rejoiced that some one should have had the courage to make some sort of stand against Cleitomachus. But when, as the fight went on, he showed that he was a match for his antagonist, and even gave him a well-placed wound, there was a general clapping of hands, and the popular enthusiasm showed itself loudly on his side, the spectators calling out to Aristonicus to keep up his spirits. Thereupon they say that Cleitomachus stepped aside, and after waiting a short time to recover his breath, turned to the crowd and asked them “Why, they cheered Aristonicus, and supported him all they could? Had they detected him in playing foul in the combat? Or were they not aware that Cleitomachus was at that moment fighting for the honour of Greece, Aristonicus for that of king Ptolemy? Would they prefer an Egyptian to carry off the crown by beating Greeks, or that a Theban and Boeotian should be proclaimed victor in boxing over all comers?” Upon this speech of Cleitomachus, they say that such a revulsion of feeling came over the spectators, that Aristonicus in his turn was conquered more by the display of popular feeling than by Cleitomachus. (Plb. 27.9.7–13)

This passage illustrates not only the geopolitical shifts that influenced athlete participation in the games, but also a fascinating evolution in how the Greeks perceived the

<sup>14</sup> They were most likely introduced later in order to support the dynastic succession of the Ptolemies.

games, athletes, and patriotism. This transformation was closely tied to the changing world and the globalization sparked by the conquests of Alexander the Great.

In Greece before the 4th century BC, obtaining the citizenship of another city-state was extremely rare. Up to that time, Sparta had granted citizenship to only two non-Spartans, and such cases were exceptional elsewhere as well. This practice was rooted in a view that emphasized loyalty or disloyalty to two different cities. Olympic victors, however, gained a variety of privileges due to their fame and were often sought after as suitable friends of kings and aristocrats or as husbands for their daughters. In later periods, the custom of granting citizenship for such individuals began to fade, but several Ὀλυμπιονίκαι received honorary citizenship in other πόλεις, and some were even called “the citizens of all the world” (Drees, 1968, p. 106; Kouřil, 2019, p. 81).

The games gradually and steadily opened to other nations, and in 212 AD, with the issuing of the *Antonine Edict* (*Constitutio Antoniniana* by the Emperor Caracalla), they were made accessible to nearly everyone within the Roman Empire through the extension of citizenship. This also explains how Varazdates of Artaxala could become one of the last champions. He was an Armenian king who, later in life, was exiled by the Romans to the island of Thule, which is likely modern-day Iceland.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the relationship between citizenship and sport, focusing particularly on the ancient Olympic Games. The first part summarized the essence of Greek and Roman citizenship and then reflected on its role as a prerequisite for participation in the Games, followed by the gradual erosion and exceptions to this originally unshakable requirement (that only Greek citizens could actively participate in the Games). The first to challenge this rule was the Macedonian king Alexander I, who demonstrated his kinship with the Greeks through his claimed descent from their ancestor Heracles. He was followed by other Macedonian rulers such as Archelaus and Philip II.

The rule concerning the participation of full citizens was further broken with the inclusion of women in the Games (most notably Kyniska of Sparta, whose entry was made possible through the influence of her brother, King Agesilaus II). After the conquest of Greece by Macedonia and later by Rome, and with the rise of the Hellenistic kingdoms, the requirement of Greek citizenship was applied much more loosely – residents of cities like Alexandria and Rome regularly took part in the Games. These were still citizens, though not Greek ones.

By the late 2nd century AD, the concepts of “citizen” and “non-citizen” gradually disappeared (especially in legal discourse) and were replaced by the categories *honestiores* and *humiliores*. This shift culminated in the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, issued in 212 AD by the Roman emperor Caracalla, which made citizenship a universal category. With a few exceptions (such as the *dediticii*, or surrendered peoples), nearly every free person in the empire became a Roman citizen. The Olympic Games thus became accessible to virtually all men and women (although Roman women did not continue the tradition set by their Spartan and Ptolemaic predecessors) from both nearby and distant regions. The Armenian king Varazdates, who was mentioned above, is the best example of this.

The development of the relationship between citizenship and the ancient Olympic Games has been closely tied to the broader history of the ancient world. The weakening and eventual subjugation of Greece marked the first major turning point that allowed for significant change. This was followed by the conquests of Alexander the Great and the transformation of the ancient world into a globalized one. Roman imperialism and influence in Greece were merely the epilogue to these already irreversible changes for the ancient Greeks.

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# Sport and citizenship – thinking about contemporary trends and problems

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a reflection on what citizenship means today, how it can be generally characterized, and how it manifests itself in sport. It does not attempt to provide an exhaustive overview of the topic based on a systematic review, but focuses on aspects that, according to the author, must be considered essential. Supranational organizations (the United Nations, the European Union) and states today talk about different forms of citizenship (global, active, national), but the literature points to possible controversies associated with the concept of citizenship in today's globalized and complex world where there is large-scale mobility of people between countries. For most authors, the core of citizenship lies in belonging, or a sense of belonging. This article discusses the main components of belonging and their potentiality for human life, and for sport, too. Citizenship is also viewed as multifaceted, and so its dimensions are distinguished (legal/political, social, cultural, and economic) and explained. Sport represents a specific area in understanding citizenship. Not all features of belonging or dimensions of citizenship play the same important role here. Elite sport and the sport of the ordinary population must be distinguished. In elite sport, the legal ties of athletes to society/the state dominate, while in community sport, other aspects of belonging play a role.

## KEYWORDS

belonging; dimensions of citizenship; elite sport; sport immigration; community sport

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## INTRODUCTION

Sport has changed significantly in recent decades and has become an everyday part of the lives of societies and individuals around the world. Sport is practiced by the general public as a physical leisure activity or as passive entertainment in the form of spectatorship. For some participants, however, sport is a source of livelihood, their

work, their job. These are primarily elite athletes who compete at the highest level in an ever-expanding number of sports disciplines and types of competitions. The basic characteristics of sport include performance and success. If we consider these characteristics in relation to the general public and in relation to elite athletes, we find many differences. For the purposes of our discussion on citizenship and sport, we will focus primarily on elite sport.

Since sport has become a profession, and in some sports a very well-paid one at that, athletes and their support teams strive for success in competition, for fame, prestige, and money. This effort involves not only the athletes themselves, but also their closest associates (trainers, coaches, technicians, doctors, etc.). The desire to capitalize on the successes of teams or individuals permeates the activities of sports organizations, from large professional clubs to national sports federations, from small states to world powers. Presenting oneself as successful is the driving force behind elite sport in general, as well as for all those involved in its implementation (coaches, clubs, states, sponsors). Their success can represent political dominance and power, economic prosperity, or simply visibility in an interconnected global environment.

Of course, achieving the above goals is not possible without athletes. Having exceptional athletes in a club or national team who are capable of winning international competitions is a prerequisite for the success of a given sports club, sports federation, or country. For countries, successful representation in international sports is an important factor in strengthening their prestige and national pride. Labour migration in sports has become a reality around the world and affects not only foreign athletes playing in professional clubs, initially mainly in soccer and basketball, as published more than 30 years ago by Bale and Maguire (1994), but today in all sports.

For the reasons mentioned above, in recent decades we have witnessed wealthy countries recruiting and purchasing sports champions for their national teams. However, this migration of outstanding athletes cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of states and their policies. For many top athletes, changing the country they compete for is attractive and advantageous. They may seek better financial rewards for their 'sporting' work, better training conditions, an easier path to qualifying for major sporting events, or a more favourable political or cultural environment for their lives. We could cite a long list of athletes who have changed their citizenship for money, living and sporting conditions, love, or other reasons. Examples include the Brazilian footballer Mehmet Aurelio, who accepted Turkish citizenship, Cuban Vilfred León, who has become a prominent figure in the Polish volleyball team, and many others).

In today's global sport, the migration of top-level athletes is essentially based on the principle of supply and demand. At the club level, the situation is simpler. Athletes can play for a club abroad without having to change the citizenship of their country of origin. However, if migrating elite athletes decide to represent a country other than their native one, they must become citizens of their 'new' homeland, get its passport. National and international sports federations, including the International Olympic Committee, have had to address this phenomenon of athlete migration by creating appropriate rules and quotas for foreigners on teams. Gardiner and Welch (2016) document how general legal regulations also played a role in this process. In particular, the principle of free movement of labour for EU citizens (*viz* the Bosman case) has influenced professional sport not only in Europe but also around the world.

We should not overlook another aspect of citizenship that is not so visible, not presented in the media, and not so much perceived in everyday life. Being a citizen means being part of society and participating in a range of activities with other people. This aspect of sport concerns participation in sport at a level below the elite, in the sport of ordinary people. It represents active or passive sporting activity in various communities, such as local sports clubs, groups of friends, or fan groups. This social aspect of sport is also emphasized by the European Union in its important document, the White Paper on Sport (European Commission, 2007). It sets out a framework for sports policy and attributes to sport the potential to promote active citizenship (*ibid.*, p. 6). Citizenship in the context of sport therefore does not only apply to top athletes, but is closely linked to people's everyday lives, where it can be seen as one of the tools contributing to the building of a prosperous society and good relations between its members.

This raises the foundational question: what does citizenship mean, how can it be generally characterized, and how does it manifest itself in contemporary sport? The aim of the following text is to provide a basic overview of this topic based on important documents and interesting published works by experts from various scientific fields, focusing more on reflections than on an exhaustive explanation of this multi-layered issue.

## **CITIZENSHIP – BASIC CONCEPTS**

The topic of citizenship is important for human society and is discussed and approached from many angles. As a result of historical, social, and other changes that society is undergoing, the meaning of citizenship for individuals and various social groups, from the local to the global level, is gradually changing. It can be said that in today's complex and diverse world, which is seeking global solutions in various areas, we encounter different approaches. However, global and supranational organizations, in particular the United Nations (UN), are striving for a unified view of citizenship in the interests of mutual understanding between people and the prosperity and security of the whole world.

The UN talks about global citizenship and emphasizes the idea of democratic citizenship, enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 2015). This document emphasizes that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (UN, 2015, page v.) and applies to 'all people, at all times and in all places – people of all skin colours, races, and ethnic groups; regardless of whether they are disabled; citizens or migrants; regardless of their gender, class, caste, religion, age, or sexual orientation' (*ibid.*, p. vi). In line with the intent of the document, it lists rights, not obligations, related to citizenship. Here we find the principles of good coexistence and cohabitation of all people and all nations living on Earth, with respect for the environment. This idea is wonderful, but the diversity of the world makes it difficult to implement.

For the purposes of our article, we consider it useful to refer to some of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). These are:

'Article 13 (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State; (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.'

‘Article 15 (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality; (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.’

‘Article 20 (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.’

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on the idea of ‘democratic’ citizenship, which is linked to democratic attitudes and values that enable people, as democratic citizens, to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2025) ‘strives to promote and share universal UN values such as tolerance, pluralism, respect for human rights, freedom, and dialogue’.

We also encounter other attributes of citizenship that mainly relate to social issues that need to be addressed. Hanemann (2019) provides a brief overview of some other attributes used for citizenship. ‘Active’ citizenship means that citizens are social actors and participate in civic affairs at the local, national, and global levels, think critically and creatively, and are responsible for their actions. She also talks about ‘critical’ citizenship, which means the need to seek new perspectives when addressing important issues and problems.

The term ‘global citizenship’ has emerged as a general and unifying concept. This global or world concept is discussed, for example, in Dower and Williams (2002) in which several authors show that the idea of global citizenship or world citizenship is highly controversial. For many authors of this publication, the idea of global citizenship is necessary and natural for the world of the 21st century, but others reject it as absurd. Both sides justify their position with meaningful arguments.

These conflicting views show how complex this area is. Global citizenship is an idea, a campaign, a movement, and a sense of belonging to a broader/global society that transcends geographical, political, and national boundaries (Haque, 2023). In the past (e.g., in the Roman Empire), dual citizenship was recognized. Among the empire’s population, citizenship was associated with dual loyalties – one to the city and one to the state. This could cause unresolved conflicts (Follesdal, 2002). Perhaps certain parallels can be seen in relation to current discussions about the ideas of multiculturalism. Some argue that this is the future of humanity and the world, while others point to the failure of multiculturalism. But again, on the one hand, multiculturalism protects the diversity of the world, people, and their roots (cultural, geographical, etc.), while on the other hand, we see the danger of conflicts arising from this very diversity.

As Toukan (2018, p. 58) states, global citizenship does not refer to legal status. Rather, it refers to a sense of belonging to a wider community and shared humanity, promoting a ‘global perspective’ that connects the local with the global and the national with the international. It is also a way of understanding, acting and relating to others and the environment in space and time based on universal values, through respect for diversity and pluralism. In this context, every person’s life has an impact on everyday decisions that connect the global with the local and vice versa. In connection with this definition, we would like to emphasize the aforementioned aspects of universal values and respect for diversity and pluralism.

To understand global citizenship, which we could call the ‘highest’ form of citizenship, we find Toukan’s (2018) explanation of this concept useful. She analyzed UN and UNESCO documents focusing on the topics and principles of civic education.

She cites the work of Schultz (2007), who suggests that efforts toward global civic education often implicitly correspond to one of three overarching ideological agendas: neoliberalism (stressing the market economy, liberalism, capitalism, technology), radicalism (based on recognition and critique of existing inequalities and injustices and necessary moral responsibilities), or transformationalism (globalization is multifaceted along cultural, social, environmental, political and economic lines). In our opinion, these possible characteristics concern not only education in global citizenship, but also in citizenship in general. The last-mentioned ideological agenda speaks about the global citizen who ‘understands herself or himself as intricately connected to people and issues that cross national boundaries’ (Schultz, 2007, p. 249).

The existence of some universal global citizenship can be considered as very complicated and multifaceted. Simply said, global citizenship today is more of an idea than a reality, an idea that is essential for a peaceful and prosperous world. This idea wants to encompass the whole world and its various human communities, from the global, through the continental and national, to the local level, including, for example, sports associations. However, these communities may establish their own ideologies and values, which may not be entirely consistent with those that are globally recognized. This is because they are based on different histories, religions, cultures, etc.

## **BELONGING AS BASIC COMPONENT OF CITIZENSHIP**

We can say with certainty that every person belongs to some community, large or small, with various attributes that are determined by different aspects. Belonging is connected with the lives of all people. It is also understood as a synonym for social identity or a sense of belonging. Raman (2014) defines belonging as ‘the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment that makes people feel that they are an integral part of that system or environment’. It includes the feeling, belief, and expectation that an individual belongs to a group and has a place in it, feels accepted by the group, and is willing to sacrifice for it.

These groups and communities are established and exist according to various criteria, such as social, spatial, or professional. McMillan and Chavis (1986) propose defining a sense of belonging primarily from a psychological perspective. They state that it is based on four elements: membership, influence, reinforcement, and shared emotional bond. Simply put, being a member of a community means having a sense of belonging or sharing a feeling of personal affiliation (relatedness) with others. The second element is a sense of mutual importance between the group and its individual members. The third element is based on so-called reinforcement, where members’ needs are met by resources they obtain through their membership in the group. The shared emotional bond expresses the determination and conviction that members share and will continue to share history, common places, common time, and similar experiences.

Allen et al. (2021) discuss this topic in the same vein, citing the views of other authors that ‘belonging is a fundamental human need that almost all people seek to satisfy’. At the same time, however, they point out that there is no consensus in the literature on the concept of belonging. They explain this by the different perspectives of the various scientific disciplines that deal with belonging (psychology, sociology, economics, and political science).

In summarizing these perspectives, belonging is rooted in the biologic nature of humans, represents a dynamic, emergent construct, and is usually associated with struggling to belong. The need for a sense of belonging may be just as important as food, shelter, and physical safety for promoting health and survival in the long run (ibid., p. 88). The authors continue their overview by noting that belonging exists within broadly defined dynamic social milieu, which provides an orientation for individuals to determine who and what is acceptable. Allen et al. (2021) also state that belonging is situational and emotionally influenced, can be variable depending on individual's experience, values and norms of a group where individual belongs or is struggling to belong. Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 199) takes a similar view when he says that people can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachment and that a sense of belonging can be defined as a feeling of well-being, security, connectedness, and respect.

But individuals do not always feel a sense of belonging. People can suffer from social isolation, a lack of contact with others, and loneliness. In today's society, social isolation is a trend across many developed cultures, caused by factors such as social mobility, technological advances, broken family and community structures, and the fast tempo of modern life. The desire to be part of a group that is 'mine', that accepts me and in which I feel comfortable, is particularly typical of minorities such as indigenous peoples, immigrants, but also other groups that do not belong to the majority (e.g., new members of a sports team). They preserve their culture, values, customs, and space and create their own groups and communities, which they perceive as 'us' versus 'them'.

Similarly, Haim-Litevski et al. (2023) analyze the literature on social belonging and community membership. They argue that every person has a basic need to be part of a larger group of individuals, and this feeling is based on the perception of how one relates to others or to the community. The quality of the relationship and the nature of mutual trust and reciprocity are emphasized. As a generalization of their findings, the authors state that the feeling of belonging and connectedness is a universal phenomenon that can be achieved in different ways in different communities.

Belonging and connectedness are thus understood as universal phenomena. However, we know that in human society it is common for people to belong to more than one social group; they can be members of many communities that differ according to various criteria (space, values, interests, etc.). These groups may honour even conflicting values, and conflicts of values may emerge both at the individual level and between groups.

Allen et al. (2021) consider belonging to be a dynamic feeling and experience that consists of four interconnected components and is supported by the environment in which individuals reside. The four components are (ibid., p. 91): '1) competencies for belonging (skills and abilities); 2) opportunities to belong (enablers, removal/reduction of barriers); 3) motivations to belong (inner drive); and 4) perceptions of belonging (cognitions, attributions, and feedback mechanisms – positive or negative experiences when connecting)'.

The terms we are discussing here, i.e. belonging, sense of community, and social connectedness are also closely related to concept of social cohesion. Šafr et al. (2008) examined theories, concepts, and analytical frameworks of social cohesion. They dis-

cuss accelerating social fragmentation in developed countries. Its manifestations can be observed in everyday life, whether it be a decline in voter turnout, civic engagement, membership in voluntary associations, growing cynicism in public affairs, or a decline in interpersonal trust. Membership and interpersonal trust represent some of the belongingness features we referred to above. In connection with this, we can also find one of the current reasons for the decline in interest in volunteer work in sports.

The lack of social cohesion (manifested in weak social ties, low solidarity, and weak roots in local communities) causes social problems and is more or less at the center of political attention. The decline in social cohesion and civic engagement and the increase in atomization are also caused by suburbanization or problematic urban areas. On the contrary, it leads to increased social cohesion within such communities. We can find very homogeneous communities, some of which are characterized by poverty and/or populated by immigrants and people who are returning to their original culture, with values, customs, and lifestyles that differ from those of the majority of the society that has accepted them. On the other hand, we find some protected residential areas for wealthy people who distance themselves from others not only with physical fences, but also with their lifestyle, which symbolizes, among other things, their closed-mindedness towards other groups of people. Both of these tendencies and others like them promote cohesion within these communities, but weaken cohesion at higher social and geographical levels, up to the level of the state or continent.

Today's society is very heterogeneous and diverse. Individuals belong to more groups at the same time, terminate their membership in some groups, or join other groups. This means that relationships within a group may not be as strong and lasting. In recent decades, we have witnessed large-scale migration around the world. The Declaration of Human Rights essentially states that people have the right to freely choose where they want to live. Thanks to the possibilities offered by today's transport infrastructure and the dynamic and constantly changing needs of the labour market, it is now possible to realize this choice. Many people take advantage of these opportunities, in particular to ensure greater security for themselves and their families, to improve their economic situation, or simply to change their environment and way of life.

In international terms, migration can be simply defined as a change of country of residence for an extended period of time. The United Nations (2024) reports, that relative migration is growing relatively slowly and is approaching 4% of the world's population. However, over the last three decades, the absolute number of migrants has doubled to 304 million worldwide (the world population is growing significantly, now exceeding 8 billion). People can live in a new country and retain their original citizenship, or they can obtain citizenship of the new country in which they reside. Whether they are granted new citizenship depends on many circumstances, both subjective and objective.

Many authors say (see above) that belonging is an integral part of citizenship. It can therefore be summarized that citizenship has very similar characteristics to belonging. We know that people can belong to different communities at the same time or over time, but they can also be excluded from some of them. Returning to the question of what citizenship means, it is important to consider what type of community we are talking about and which characteristics of belonging we are taking into account. Con-

cepts such as global citizenship, active citizenship, European Union citizenship, national citizenship, and city/municipality-level citizenship must be taken into account. This leads us to an understanding of citizenship as a multifaceted phenomenon that needs to be viewed from different angles.

## **DIMENSIONS OF CITIZENSHIP**

Authors and institutions dealing with citizenship usually approach this topic with regard to its multidimensionality. Especially after World War II, the meaning of citizenship became broad and very complex. The specific questions that authors address from many different perspectives offer a range of explanations of what citizenship is and what characteristics express its essence. In the following section, we will present some of these views, which we consider sufficient to explain this concept.

Stokke (2017) pointed out that citizenship means not only legal status, but also cultural, social, and political status. He distinguishes four interconnected dimensions of citizenship: membership, legal status, rights, and participation. Membership is based on belonging to a particular community, on the distinction between insiders and outsiders, us and them; we briefly explained this in the previous text. Legal status includes both rights and obligations, confirmed by a contractual relationship between the individual and the state. We note that, in principle, it is expressed in the highest rule of the state, the constitution. The dimension of membership is particularly evident in relation to the state and the community. The author deals with direct and indirect participation of citizens in public affairs and active participation within civic communities. In our opinion, the author focuses primarily on the formal aspects of citizenship without including the diversity of belonging.

As stated by the Council of Europe (CE): ‘Traditions and approaches to citizenship vary throughout history and across the world, according to individual countries, histories, societies, cultures, and ideologies, resulting in many different understandings of the concept of citizenship’ (Council of Europe, 2023, p. 444). The document discusses four dimensions of citizenship, but in a different composition from Stokkes. In addition to the political/legal, social, and cultural dimensions, CE also includes the economic dimension.

Veldhuis (1997), who proposed taking these four dimensions into account in the above-mentioned document, based his approach on a number of definitions of citizenship. First, citizenship concerns the integration of individuals into the political framework and the participation of citizens in legal institutions; it is a contract between the individual and the state. Whether someone is a citizen or acquires citizenship depends on the political opinion of those who decide on it and set the relevant rules enshrined in legislation. Veldhuis, like other experts, draws on Marshall’s concept. This British sociologist is considered one of the first to include socioeconomic rights in addition to legal and political rights.

According to Giubboni (2013), Marshall’s classic definition of ‘social citizenship’ is based on the fundamental idea that social citizenship must be understood as the recognition of a ‘universal right’ to a real income that is not proportional to the market value of the applicant, and at the same time as a system of industrial citizenship based on organized collective work. Another characteristic of the social dimension concerns

relationships between individuals in society, which require loyalty and solidarity. His model also addresses the issue of social cohesion.

In her article on European citizenship, Mindus (2014) discusses the dimensions of citizenship. She also draws attention to the problem of marginalized or excluded persons who are foreigners or politically powerless. These people remain in an intermediate position between full integration and complete exclusion, which is called 'limited' citizenship. However, if we take into account social life and people's natural need to belong somewhere, we must consider this gradual dichotomy in the process of integrating individuals into the community or, conversely, in cases where the community considers some of its members to be undesirable. An individual may not be fully accepted by a group/community or may have problems respecting the values, rules, and norms of the group. The author concludes that since contemporary democracy is based on three pillars: the rule of law, the democratic state, and the social state, there are three dimensions of citizenship: legal, political, and social. We can conclude that her opinion is relevant primarily for lawyers, of which she is one.

The work of Velthuis (1997) and the Council of Europe (2023) highlights two further dimensions: cultural and economic. Cultural citizenship refers to an awareness of a shared cultural heritage. From a global perspective, however, we do not have a single world culture, a unified view of values, or the same emotional relationship to the geographical place where we live, which has its own history and significance. Today, multiculturalism is gaining ground in the world, significantly affecting some countries and continents. This is closely linked to migration, particularly when addressing issues of immigration from politically troubled and low-income countries. Society/the state must provide a set of values and rights that are not based on race. Immigration and the cultural dimension of citizenship are at the forefront of political activities aimed at integrating people from other cultures into society.

According to the Council of Europe document, the final dimension of citizenship, the economic dimension, concerns the individual's relationship with the labour market and the consumer market and includes the right to work and a minimum standard of living. Vocational qualifications and vocational training play a key role in fulfilling this economic dimension.

Cinalli and Jacobson (2021) reflect on the migration of people from countries with different cultures and religions to the West and its impact on the understanding of citizenship in these liberal societies. They state that, on the one hand, there are scholars (we could also add politicians/rulers) who consider the promotion of cultural differences to be compatible with national citizenship, but on the other hand, there are also those who argue that the cultural characteristics of newcomers are incompatible with a truly liberal understanding of citizenship (p. 33). They point to the consequences of the colonial era and postcolonialism as factors that strongly influence current approaches to citizenship issues. Many other authors address the relationship between citizenship and migration in order to understand this dynamically evolving phenomenon and contribute to its resolution in everyday practice (e.g. Castles & Davidson, 2000; Cinalli & Jacobson, 2021; Davidson, 2002; Kofman, 2005).

Although we have analyzed only a few sources dealing with citizenship, it can be summarized that the authors cited approach the issue of citizenship and its dimensions in a similar way. The legal dimension is usually presented as the basic starting

point. The political component is closely related to the previous one and is viewed in the context of political ideologies and types of public policy. The social dimension of citizenship represents the extent and manner in which an individual belongs to a community, which may vary in size and characteristics. This component is evident both at the level of larger social groups and, in particular, in smaller communities such as municipalities, sports clubs, and civic initiatives. This diversity can lead to certain controversies, which are then reflected in individuals' attitudes toward their own concept of citizenship or in how others perceive them as citizens and how they are accepted (integrated, isolated, excluded).

In the following section, we will look at how this is reflected in sport, whether it be elite sport or the sport of ordinary people in their everyday lives.

## **CITIZENSHIP AND SPORT**

For the purposes of this document, we understand sport in the broadest sense, as defined in the White Paper on Sport (European Commission, 2007). European sports policy attributes to sport, among other things, a role in building and strengthening active citizenship: 'Participation in a team, principles such as fair play, compliance with the rules of the game, respect for others, solidarity and discipline, as well as the organization of amateur sport based on non-profit clubs and volunteering, reinforces active citizenship' (ibid., p. 6).

Theories of belonging consider participation to be its fundamental characteristic. Participation is inseparable from sport. Belonging to a group of people who play sports, are members of a sports club, or just spend time with fans of their favourite team – all of this stems from a sense of belonging, from the activities of people who form more or less formal groups. Theories of belonging consider participation to be its fundamental characteristic. Participation is inseparable from sport. Membership can therefore be very free and informal (fans) or it can take the form of an economic (professional athlete) or social (member of a voluntary association) contract.

Two levels of citizenship play an important role in sport. The first level concerns representing the state at international sporting events. These athletes are recognized citizens of the state and compete under its flag. The second level of citizenship concerns sporting communities, particularly those operating at the municipal level.

### **Legal/political sports citizenship**

Most work in this area focuses on elite sport, particularly the legal level of sports citizenship. Oonk (2020) examines the relationship between nationality, citizenship acquisition, and migration. He focuses on the question: who can represent a nation? He notes that this question has been at the forefront of interest for the past 30 years. Given the changing perceptions of citizenship around the world and how it is rooted in the UN Charter on Civil Rights, it has been necessary to introduce new approaches to citizenship, migration, and identity in sport.

There are several ways to become a citizen of a particular country. Three interrelated paths to citizenship play a role here: *jus sanguinis*, *jus soli*, and *jus nexi* (e.g., Mindus, 2014). *Jus sanguinis*, or right of blood, is based on family ties (the citizenship of the athlete's parents or grandparents in various combinations). *Jus soli* refers to the

place of birth. Both forms are traditionally recognized symbols of citizenship and nationality. Oonk (2020) calls this ideal 'strong' citizenship. The combination of these two options offers the possibility of dual or multiple citizenship, allowing athletes to choose which country they want to compete for. Author gives examples of athletes competing for two countries in different sports during the same period or changing their national flag more times.

The last method of acquiring citizenship, *jus nexi*, reflects a specific person's ties to society. In sports, as in general, this means that athletes (applicants) have no prior relationship with the country they represent. Oonk (2020) calls this 'thin' citizenship. There are a number of reasons that lead to the acquisition of a new passport, other than that of the country of birth. Thin citizenship most often applies to migrants or athletes who have switched to another citizenship mostly for money.

There are many examples of athletes with high competitive abilities who have left their native countries and wear the national jersey of their new homeland. This is beneficial for both the state and the athletes. The state seeks to strengthen its international image, national pride, or promote interest in sports in its country. To this purpose, these countries have developed specific procedures for granting citizenship to foreigners in high demand, especially top athletes. The naturalization of elite athletes can be expedited by the state beyond the usual conditions set for other applicants by irrevocable legal requirements (length of stay and work activity, etc.). By acquiring new citizenship, athletes gain advantages, particularly economic and social ones (higher financial rewards, better training conditions, easier qualification for top sporting events). In some cases, athletes leave their country of origin for security reasons (they feel threatened by the political system or ongoing armed conflict) or for more prosaic reasons, such as marriage to a citizen of the new country. However, the naturalization of elite athletes does not necessarily lead to their identification with their new country or nation. On the other hand, the inhabitants of their new homeland may not accept these new representatives due to ethnic and cultural differences. For example, Han et al. (2023) analyzed Chinese nationalism and national identity in the case of naturalized elite soccer players for the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup.

The three proposed categories of sports citizenship (Oonk, 2020) are not mutually exclusive and may overlap. The strongest form is based on the right of birth, origin, and contribution to the state through political activity, work, and compliance with the country's rules. This is followed by two 'intermediate' levels. The stronger form requires either ancestors or place of birth in the country. For ordinary migrants and persons interested in resettlement, the situation is more complicated because they must live in the country for a certain period of time, usually 5, 7, or 8 years depending on the legislation of the new country, participate in integration courses, etc. Thin citizenship in sport abolishes all these criteria and is simply a business.

In the case of sports citizenship, the borders defining a country's territory still play a dominant role. But tendency to switching sport nationality is growing (Jansen, 2018). International sports organizations must therefore address the definition of citizenship and require athletes to meet certain conditions in order to represent a particular country. An interesting situation arose, for example, after the collapse of the former socialist bloc countries. New states were established, new laws on the granting of citizenship were adopted, and citizens had to choose a new citizenship. Newly established national

sports organizations had to apply for membership in international sports organizations (Slepičková, 2011). This has led to an increase in the number of national teams and greater competitive pressure among elite athletes and states at international sporting events.

### **Community sports citizenship**

When we talk about legal citizenship, we see that not all citizens necessarily identify with their country and are willing to accept and fulfil their responsibilities towards the whole. This is closely related to today's issues of migration or citizens with a migrant background, especially in some Western European countries. Ethnic reasons and historical contexts may also play a role. Identification with the state is weaker than identification with a community defined culturally, religiously, geographically, or politically. Belonging to this community may therefore play a stronger role than holding a state passport. In sports, for example, the national soccer teams of Wales, Scotland, and England compete separately at the international level; there is no team for the entire United Kingdom. Similarly, autonomous regions such as the Basque Country protect their identity. The Athletic Bilbao soccer team consists exclusively of players from the Basque Country, which means that they must be born there or have Basque parents. Examples show that the strength of the sense of belonging can thus decline from the state level and intensify to individual communities or social groups operating at the regional and local levels.

Many authors have addressed the topic of belonging, its essence and characteristics, as we mentioned in one of the previous sections. In general, an individual should be an acceptable and accepted member of a particular community or social group, respecting its norms, values, and formal and informal rules. We agree with Allen's (Allen et al., 2021) distinction between the components of belonging when discussing citizenship. These include competencies, opportunities, motivation, and perceptions of belonging. People in sports groups, whether formal or informal, whether actively participating in sports (athletes) or just watching (fans), join sports communities, seek acceptance and participation in group activities, form social and emotional bonds, share successes or defeats, and enjoy the time spent with other members.

Having national citizenship gives an individual the right to also be a citizen of a specific municipality, since almost everyone has a permanent residence somewhere. Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 20 attributes to people the right to peaceful assembly and the formation of associations (UN, 2015). The primary place for practicing sport is the municipality/city, which supports sport not only in developed but increasingly also in developing countries, e.g. South Africa (Burnett, 2006). In Europe, sports associations/clubs are the main promoters of sport as civic organizations committed to contributing to the public good. Associations create space not only for sporting activities, but also for social gatherings. Thanks to the values shared by people involved in sport, they understand each other better and are then able to engage constructively in other issues related to community life. Sport at the local level is thus one way in which people learn citizenship and put it into practice.

People can become members of the local community by participating in civic activities, including sports. This principle applies to the integration of citizens in general, but especially in relation to socially marginalized groups and migrants. For many years, inclusive programs have been developed and implemented, especially in Europe, and specifically for immigrants (Ehnold et al., 2023; Mignon, 2000; Stone, 2018 and oth-

ers). Sometimes even top athletes coming from abroad or of different cultural/ethnic background have difficulty gaining recognition from and integrating into the local or national community, as demonstrated by Bant and van Lankveld (2025) using the example of Dutch Caribbean migrants playing baseball and softball, who are in fact Dutch nationals by birth.

There are also cases where immigrants distance themselves from their new community (municipality, state). They create their own closed ethnic communities and prioritize the values, customs, and norms of their country of origin. Different cultures and ideologies can clash through sport. In Australia, for example, it was necessary to address violence between fans from hostile states of the former Yugoslavia who supported their 'national' players in rival Australian teams (Hallinan et al., 2007). A similar example is the strong Turkish community in Germany. In recent decades, many Turks have moved to Germany for work and obtained German citizenship. Nevertheless, they probably still retain a strong sense of belonging to their country of origin and its culture and express this in their sports fandom. After Turkey defeated the Czech Republic 2-1 in the 2024 European Football Championship in Germany, Turks celebrated throughout Germany and chanted the name of the Turkish president [eyewitness account]. International soccer matches often became the scene of clashes between spectators supporting their national teams, who thus expressed their national solidarity. This was the case, for example, in the war between El Salvador and Honduras in the late 1960s (Slepíčka et al., 2010).

In this context, it is interesting to note that fans usually have a very strong connection to their team and are proud to be citizens of the city where their team plays. On the other hand, in today's professional sports, we are witnessing significant turnover among top sports employees. Clubs are very actively selling and buying athletes and changing the composition of their teams in order to achieve the greatest possible success. Many athletes, especially in team sports, move from club to club. Such frequent changes in sports social groups or transitions from a different cultural environment do not contribute to building lasting relationships with other team members; they do not promote a sense of belonging to the place where they are currently employed. Such situations can also weaken the fans' sense of belonging. It depends on the club's marketing how fans will accept these changes (Crossan, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This article was not based on a systematic analysis of knowledge about citizenship and sport. The aim was to identify what we consider to be the main key topics and to emphasize the multifaceted nature of both concepts – citizenship and sport.

We see that sport reflects the global situation of increasing migration of people from one country to another. It is not just about the movement of people, but also the movement of goods, money, and capital associated with sport; all of this shows the current state of sport. Especially when commerce became involved in elite sport in the 1960s (Diegel, 1995), the issue of changing athletes' citizenship began to gain importance. In elite sport, this has primarily become a legislative issue.

In accordance with the International Olympic Committee, international sports federations approve and enforce rules that determine the conditions under which

athletes can change their citizenship and participate in the world's top competitions. When it comes to sport for ordinary citizens, other aspects of citizenship based on a sense of belonging are particularly important, although to some extent they also occur in elite sport. Many people participate in sport in various sports communities, formal and informal, temporal and permanent. Members of these groups also spend time together outside of sport and share other common experiences. Sport thus provides an opportunity for integration into community life.

On the other hand, it can also lead to the establishing of groups that are significantly different from each other, with different cultures and values. We mentioned programs that help integrate migrants into the majority society through sports, but also that they can lead to results opposite to those intended. However, differences between groups, their complete separation from one another, can also be found, for example, among fans of two rival teams from the same city (in Czech football, FC Sparta Praha versus SK Slavia Praha) or in clubs with high membership fees that only wealthy people can afford (e.g., golf). The relationship between citizenship and sport reflects the complexity of both concepts. However, it is important to note that this relationship is still shaped by geographical aspects, border aspects, whether these are national borders or borders defining cities or municipalities.

The issue of citizenship and nationality in elite sports has attracted considerable interest from researchers and sports policymakers. In our view, however, it is necessary to explore the role of citizenship in sports within communities and municipalities more deeply, not just among groups of migrants or people living on the margins of society. Overcoming controversies should lead to fulfilling the ideal of citizenship expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to active citizenship in today's dynamically changing world.

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# Cultivating sport citizens

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## ABSTRACT

This article considers the potential role of citizenship in sport. The International Olympic Committee has displayed a limited commitment to democratic principles via the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance. While top-down reforms may be necessary, the stakeholder groups (e.g. athletes) seeking more power also ought to be conceived of in the context of a more democratic system. The tendency to focus on democracy in relation to the governance of sport without efforts to educate sport stakeholders, especially athletes, has resulted in a system heavily reliant on institutional authorities to address concerns. By shifting attention toward the experience of athletes, a different view of the sport system comes into focus – one that centres the development and education of athletes. The aim of this work is to determine the most significant factors in the cultivation of citizenship, in addition to exploring the potential role of education in citizenship cultivation. A more comprehensive understanding of these aspects can serve as a foundation for how citizenship in sport can effectively be cultivated. I conclude by suggesting methods of education reform in sport, grounded in theories of education *for* sport, education *by* sport, and education *through* sport.

## KEYWORDS

sport; good governance; democracy; citizenship

## DOI

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the International Olympic Committee released its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (IOC, 2008) there has been a steady output of critical works focused on institutional reforms and top-down efforts (Frawley & Schulenkorf, 2017; Henne, 2015; Harris et al., 2021; Pielke, 2013; Thibault, 2021). While the IOC and other institutional actors can improve their approach to be more reflective of the good governance principles such as responsibility, transparency, accountability, and

democracy (Geeraert, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022), there are also developments to be made on the part of non-institutional stakeholders such as athletes. The relevance of democracy for the governance of sport is well established (Chappelet, 2018; Geeraert, 2021; Minikin, 2015; Parent, 2016; Thibault et al., 2010). However, less has been said about citizenship in sport.

The use of 'democracy' throughout this article refers to the concept in a more expansive way, not limiting democracy to political contexts. It will be argued that the international sport system is already democratic in some ways and subsequently makes a case for further democratisation to address prevalent issues in the sport system. The international sports system in question is an ideal of sorts. I acknowledge that sport is embedded in authoritarian contexts that do not seek to uphold democratic principles. This article seeks to address the Olympic sport system or international sport system at its best, in an ideal sense. The international sports system is already partially aligned with democratic principles via its commitment to good governance principles. However, democracy is an ideal, meaning that no system could be considered entirely democratic.

All systems seeking to embody democratic ideals are on a spectrum. This is not referring to a singular continuum or scale ranging from one point to another. Instead, democracy should be thought of as having multiple dimensions, each with its own continuum, measuring a variety of elements associated with democratic principles. Different institutions have different criteria regarding what constitutes democracy. As an example, the European Label of Governance Excellence lists 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance: participation, representation, and fair conduct of elections, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, openness and transparency of law, rule of law, ethical conduct, competency and capacity, innovation and openness to change, sustainability and long-term orientation, sound financial management, human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion, and accountability (COE 2008). Each of these principles can be understood as a dimension of democracy with its own continuum. Each time improvements are made regarding any of the dimensions, the process of democratisation is occurring.

There is much work that international sporting bodies, such as the IOC, can do in support of the democratisation of the sports system, including incorporating stakeholders in the governance of sport. However, the work of non-institutional stakeholders is just as important, if not more important, than that of institutional stakeholders. A democratic system is reliant on both the institutions and the citizens for its well-being and sustainability (Dewey, [1916] 2001). The focus of democracy is on the procedures and infrastructure necessary for the system, while the focus of citizenship is on the experiences and behaviours of the members in the system. Citizenship and democracy are interwoven with democratic principles grounded in citizenship rights (Zilla, 2022, p. 1529). The transition in focus from the institutions to non-institutional stakeholders reflects the transition from democracy to citizenship. Citizenship requires a sense of responsibility to maintain the democratic system by respecting the status of others as free and equal. Citizenship requires 'learning of a capacity for action and for responsibility ... learning of the self and of the relationship of self and other' (Delanty, 2002, p. 64). The term 'sport citizen' will be invoked throughout and rhetorically serves to emphasise the rights as well as responsibilities associated with democratic principles.

The characterisation of citizenship in sport will focus on the athlete population, limiting the scope of potential sport citizens and excluding most groups currently considered ‘stakeholders’ in the current sport system. There are many other stakeholder groups, such as local communities impacted by sport-related decisions, sponsors, and media personnel, among others. The manner in which these additional stakeholder groups are impacted by democratic principles is beyond the scope of this article. This decision is partially for simplicity in addition to athletes as a stakeholder group arguably already holding citizenship status within the current system (whether they recognise this or not). The IOC’s Athletes’ Rights and Responsibilities Declaration (IOC, 2018) is demonstrative of the treatment of athletes as citizens.

Athletes, in particular, have been dissatisfied with the current system and are advocating for more decision-making power, as indicated by the constitution of organisations such as the World Players Association, Global Athlete, and the Professional Tennis Players Association. Additionally, a number of lawsuits have been filed against institutional authorities in sport during the last few years, calling into question monopolistic practices and exploitation of athletes (James & Duval, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024). Although athletes have been fighting for more of a role, the focus on internal stakeholders within the governance of sport (Geeraert, 2021) has resulted in a sport system that is unable to accommodate the participation of athletes. If athletes are to leverage their influence for greater impact, they will need to recognise themselves as sports citizens, which will require education.

The focus of this article is the interplay between democracy, citizenship and education and what the relationship means for sport. Considerations for each of these topics will be explored throughout the article, including the aims of civic education, active and passive citizenship, and the factors which inform different categories of citizenship. Understanding these factors is important for their application to the cultivation of citizenship in sport.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article aims to identify those aspects necessary for cultivating citizenship before considering their applicability to sport. The primary methods utilised are conceptual analysis and critical reasoning. The article is informed by published research, theoretical frameworks, and logical argumentation. Specifically, the study primarily relies on Eichberg and Jespersen’s (2009) framework detailing education for sport, education by sport, and education through sport as well as Turner’s (1990) typology with respect to citizenship theory.

## **CIVIC EDUCATION, DEMOCRACY AND SPORT**

The section will address the ‘challenging of authority’ as a democratic principle that can be improved upon via education<sup>1</sup>. As opposed to decisions being made with mass

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<sup>1</sup> Due to space constraints, not all principles can be examined. The ability to challenge authority will serve as the primary example of a democratic principle throughout while principles such as participation, representation, transparency and election procedures will be excluded.

public participation-democratic authority in more modern and large societies relies on the possibility of challenging authority (Enslin & White, 2003; Warren, 1996). Challenging authority may consist of an array of behaviours such as holding representatives accountable during elections or utilising court systems. Athletes have been able to push back against some of the standards set by international sport institutions via lawsuits; however, they are unable to do so within the international sport system.

The behaviours necessary to challenge the system are not innate; they need to be taught or nurtured in some way. Civic education is one of the tools intended to help citizens understand their civic rights and responsibilities within a democratic system. Dewey, who understood democracy as political, moral, economic, and educational, placed special emphasis on the role of education in promoting deliberative democracy and preparing future citizens who will one day be expected to engage in the governance of their society (Dewey, [1916] 2021). The aim is not to convince them of how they should feel on certain issues (Garrison & Neiman, 2003), but to develop the skills necessary for deliberation and other skills necessary for tending to one's civic duty. Such skills include reasoning, critical thinking, and communication skills. Educational institutions should prepare citizens to engage in critical thinking for reasoning when confronted by political issues and matters of public policy (Bailin & Siegel, 2003).

Aside from the significance that school curriculum could have, Dewey also believed that school as an institution has a social life of its own, which offers additional education (Darling & Nordenbo, 2003). This includes navigating relationships with authority figures such as teachers and staff, in addition to opportunities to build social capital and develop relationships with peers. Similarly, Tyrš, the founder of the Czech Sokol movement, held the belief that national education coupled with physical training was necessary to prepare Czechs for the challenges they faced in the mid-19th century (Jandásek, 1932). The Sokol movement was intended to foster democratic behaviour, including civic responsibility, self-governance, and communal living – behaviours that would foster bonds amongst participants and prepare them for impending challenges (Jandásek, 1932). A holistic approach to education undergirds Tyrš's philosophy, incorporating multiple strategies in the pursuit of civic education.

### **Formal, non-formal, and informal education**

Different techniques can be called upon for civic education. One way of understanding learning techniques is through the employment of formal, non-formal, and informal techniques. Formal education is structured by learning objectives, time, and space. Such learning occurs in institutionalised contexts and is hierarchical, with the flow of knowledge travelling from teacher to pupil. Non-formal education generally occurs outside of institutionalised contexts, and while it can be structured, the 'main goal is not learning per se, but doing something worthwhile, often in non-educational settings as the workplace or a club' (Eichberg & Jespersen, 2009, p. 429). Informal education occurs during daily life and leads to mutual learning. There is no fixed hierarchy, and parties learn from each other. The education that traditionally occurs within school classrooms would be an example of formal education, while the education that comes from participation in the social dynamics within the school would be more indicative of non-formal and informal education.

When applying the different ‘configurations of learning’ – formal, non-formal, and informal – to sport, Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) refer to them as education ‘for’, ‘by’, and ‘through’ sport. According to the authors, education *for* sport is ‘mostly of a technical character, and normally linked to well-defined sport disciplines and competitive activities’ (Eichberg & Jespersen, 2009, p. 435). This is what likely comes to mind for most when they think of education in a traditional sense: learning about a specific sport or technique in order to better engage with that sport or technique. Education *by* sport serves a more functional role with sport ‘regarded as a tool for certain “functions”, which are good for the individual or for society as a whole’ (Eichberg & Jespersen, 2009, pp. 435–436). The main outcome of education by sport is social welfare with examples from Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) including healthy lifestyle, social and ethnic integration, and sport for peace. Lastly, education *through* sport is a way of developing oneself through the practice of sport, with Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) stating that ‘the way is valued more than a certain result or product’ (p. 436). The outcome of education *through* sport includes enabling and empowering participants and learning about others.

Education *through* sport points to the educational nature of sport and is emblematic of shared values between sport and democratic principles. As is the case with schools, sport is also a setting that sees participation from many young people, and sport is arguably better able to address the development of citizens than traditional school settings. Coubertin writes ‘sport would seem an excellent preparatory school for our lives these days, and an excellent peacemaker, too. Note that these principles of competition and mutual assistance are linked closely to the egalitarianism we were discussing earlier – an equality not of conditions, but of relationships’ (Coubertin, 2000, p. 216). Sport would be better suited for the non-formal (education *by* sport) and informal (education *through* sport) education techniques than traditional school settings.

The more rigid the hierarchy is in a system, the less democratic the educational activity will be. The hierarchical relationships in school settings are more entrenched with the teacher and other staff as the authority figures, while students are expected to adhere to the rules enforced by the school officials. There are also limited opportunities for multifaceted relationships with peers since students are not in competition with each other and may not even have to work with each other unless a teacher assigns group assignments. Most peer interactions revolve around social bonds, which are important, but not sufficient for civic education. Alternatively, sport provides more opportunities for participants to navigate relationships with peers, and the role of the coaches and other authority figures can be minimized without harming the activity much.

### **Educational nature of sport**

The educational nature of sport is also a significant feature of Olympism. Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympic Movement, viewed Olympism as a philosophy of life (Müller, 2000). The revival was not an homage to the past, as there was an ideological agenda attached to it (Gruneau, 1993). Coubertin viewed education, more specifically peace education, as the key to addressing the ills of the world and having peace amongst nations (Müller, 2000). Therefore, Olympism is more of an educational

tool that can be used to better the world (Müller, 2000; Kidd, 1996). The notion that Olympism is an educational philosophy has been carried forward and remains an aspect of the modern Olympic Movement. An excerpt from the 2025 iteration of the Olympic Charter states that:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for internationally recognized human rights and universal fundamental ethical principles within the remit of the Olympic Movement (IOC, 2025, 8).

The Olympic Games are used as a means to present ethical sport to the world (Parry, 2020). Durántez et al. (2010) refer to sport as ‘the transmission belt of [Olympism’s] fundamental formative, peacekeeping, democratic humanitarian, cultural, and ecological principles’ (p. 4). In addition to Olympism and sport acting in the service of peace education, Olympism is also emblematic of a commitment to democratic egalitarianism (Durántez et al., 2010). The values associated with Olympism are those which, according to Parry (2020, p. 144), ‘are already, necessarily, in sport’. De Coubertin recognised that those values inherent to everyday sport were also present in communities aspiring to embody liberal humanism around the world (ibid.).

In 1919, Coubertin declared that ‘the athletic group is, in a way, the basic cell of democracy. The only inequality that continues to exist in that group derives from nature while the artificial inequality introduced by men is banished’ (Coubertin, 2000, p. 739). The dynamics amongst athletes make sports activities a medium for civic education because the nature of sport shares similarities with democracy. Sport inherently shares many of the values associated with democracy as they are both agonistic social practices (McCoy & Martinkova, 2022). Agonistic social practices provide an arena for our polemical nature to enact itself. *Polemos* (i.e. struggle or strife) is an aspect of our humanity that drives us to challenge ourselves and achieve something. Though *polemos* leads to us being in competition with others, it is also a uniting force since it impacts everyone. This sentiment is echoed by Coubertin, who wrote that ‘sport calls for an intense spirit of competition and solid camaraderie... Thus, sport is based on mutual assistance and competition. These same principles serve as the foundations of modern democracy’ (Coubertin, 2000, p. 216).

As agonistic social practices, both sport and democratic politics have internal characteristics (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, and winning while risking defeat) (Loy & Morford, 2019; McCoy & Martínková, 2022) and external characteristics (openness, fairness and justice) (Daqing, 2010; McCoy & Martínková, 2022). An example of education *through* sport, these internal and external characteristics are indicative of shared values inherent to democratic engagement in political life and sport that are not inherently present in other institutions, such as schools.

Coubertin’s linking of sport to democratic principles appears to have been limited to sporting practice. However, the sports system as a whole can also be considered to exist on the democratic spectrum. In some ways, athletes can currently be understood as citizens within the sport system. If some of the democratic principles are present (e.g., there is a possibility of challenging authority), then the system can be understood as democratic to an extent. The democratic education gleaned from sport

participation could also be applied to the preparation of athletes regarding their future participation in the governance of sport. Sport and democracy may be naturally inclined toward particular behaviours, but there is a way to engage with the activities that reinforce particular values or mute them. These variations can be better understood by examining different types of citizenship and how they are cultivated.

## **CULTIVATING CITIZENSHIP**

The educational techniques can have a role in the process of preparing athletes to participate in the governance process, particularly as it relates to nurturing relationships with teammates and competitors, and gaining a better understanding of their sport. However, citizens ultimately are able to choose what type of citizen they are (active or passive) based on how they view external influences from the public/private sphere and influences from above/below. The influences impact how citizens believe concerns should be handled and whether they will initiate action for said changes or if they rely on institutional actors to lead.

### **Active and passive citizenship**

In addition to the types of education that can be pursued, the different forms of citizenship should also be considered. Two common forms of citizenship have been described as passive and active. A passive perspective of citizenship is a more 'thin' conception of 'citizenship-as-legal-status', while the active perspective holds that the 'extent and quality of citizenship is a function of citizens' participation in the community' (Zilla, 2022, p. 1527). There are differing notions regarding the rights and responsibilities that accompany such a status. Enslin and White (2003) present two conceptions of citizens: citizens as passive bearers of rights and citizens of robust republican virtue.

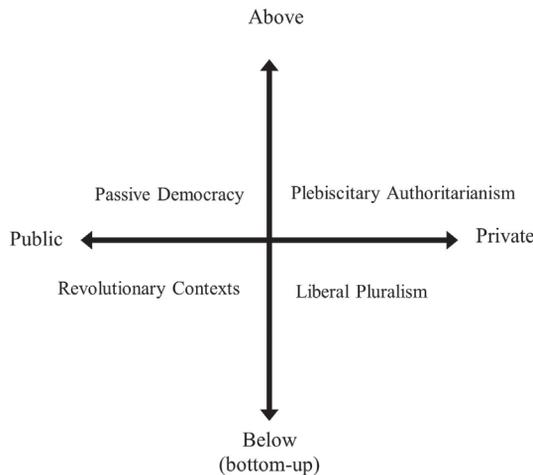
Enslin and White (2003) describe the former as 'one aspect of a person's life [that] may be variously weighted by different individuals, and that in the end exists, as does politics, to support individuals in their personal and shared projects' (p. 113). The latter is marked by a belief that 'participation in political affairs has an intrinsic value and playing an active part in the political life of one's society is held to be superior to the private pleasures of family, personal relationships, and work' (Enslin & White, 2003, p. 113). The distinction is not being made to suggest that one form is superior to another. It is reasonable to assume that citizens would exhibit behaviours more in line with passive or active citizenship depending on how they feel about the state of affairs during a given period. There is no right or wrong way to be a citizen. However, it should be a conscious decision, which implies that citizens should be made aware of the different forms of citizenship and how they are cultivated.

How civic education is approached in a society will also impact the relationship to citizenship. Those citizens who are passive bearers of rights would be less active in the civil sphere and rely more on existing democratic institutions and pressure groups like NGOs and the media (Enslin & White, 2003). Education for this citizenry would likely focus on awareness of rights and responsibilities and may encourage citizens to act if democracy is in danger. In contrast, citizens of robust republican virtue would prioritise citizenship as one of the most, if not the most, important facets of their lives

and would need to be prepared for democratic vigilance in addition to consistently engaging in the public sphere (Enslin & White, 2003). An understanding of civic virtues becomes more significant for the latter case. The curriculum can be shaped to reflect the characteristics of either passive or active citizenship, and should be considered carefully. It is ultimately up to the individuals in a society to decide what type of citizen they aim to be, but they should be presented with the various options so that they can make an informed decision.

**Turner’s typology**

Other external factors that impact citizenship behaviours include how the democratic society came into being. Based on the history and context in a given society, citizenship was shaped differently. In response to Marshall’s (1981) idea that full citizenship consisted of the civil, the political, and the social, Turner (1990) argued that there are two noteworthy dimensions of citizenship; the private/public dimension<sup>2</sup> and the above/below dimension (the latter of which will be henceforth referenced as top-down and bottom-up). Turner delineates the passive/active dichotomy based on whether citizenship was fought for from below or granted from above (Turner, 1990). The other dimension’s tension lies between the ‘private realm of the individual and the family in relationship to the public arena of political action’ (ibid., p. 207). The dimensions should be regarded as existing on a continuum: public/private being viewed from left to right and above/below being viewed from top to bottom. Any system that purports to be democratic would be located in one of the quadrants, though no two systems would be exactly in the same place.



**Figure 1** Author’s interpretation of Turner’s (1990, p. 200) Heuristic Typology of four political contexts for the creation of citizenship rights.

<sup>2</sup> The language is similar to that which was used above when citing Eichberg. Turner’s private/public division is not the same as Eichberg’s market and state spheres given the latter are in references to areas of life and activities within the societies while the former refers more to the approach of citizens.

Turner examines how citizenship arose in France, Germany, England, and the United States to illustrate his typology. According to Turner (1990), *revolutionary citizenship*, as seen in France, places an emphasis on the public arena while regarding the private world of individuals as suspicious and is driven by bottom-up forces. According to Turner, it often collapses into totalitarianism and leads to 'forms of public terror' (1990, p. 200). *Liberal pluralism*, which he associates with American liberalism, stems from interest group formation, which results in bottom-up movements for rights. However, these movements are somewhat contained due to a commitment to the cultivation of virtues in private. The emphasis is placed on 'the rights of the individual for privatised dissent' (ibid., p. 200) and there is fear that mass movements will result in a trade-off of individual freedoms for broadened equality.

*Passive democracy*, arising from top-down influences and an emphasis on the public sphere, results in citizens who are subjects rather than active participants in society. Such was the case in England, as the citizen was merely a subject. While the legitimacy of representative institutions is recognised, there is 'no established tradition of struggles for citizenship rights' (Turner, 1990, p. 200), and this relegates citizenship as a strategy for the institutionalization of class conflicts controlled by governmental agencies. The authoritarian form of democracy, which Turner refers to as *plebiscitary authoritarianism*, also results from a top-down approach to citizenship wherein 'the state manages public space, inviting the citizens periodically to select a leader, who is then no longer responsible on a daily basis to the electorate' (Turner, 1990, p. 201). This results in citizens viewing private life as a sanctuary from the tyranny of state regulation. He associates this form with a fascist brand of citizenship that emerged in Germany. The more a democratic system skews above and to the right, the more passive the citizenry is. More active citizenship would result from systems that skew farther down and to the left. Most systems would be between these two extremes as is the case with sport (without its embeddedness in political systems).

## CULTIVATING CITIZENSHIP IN SPORT

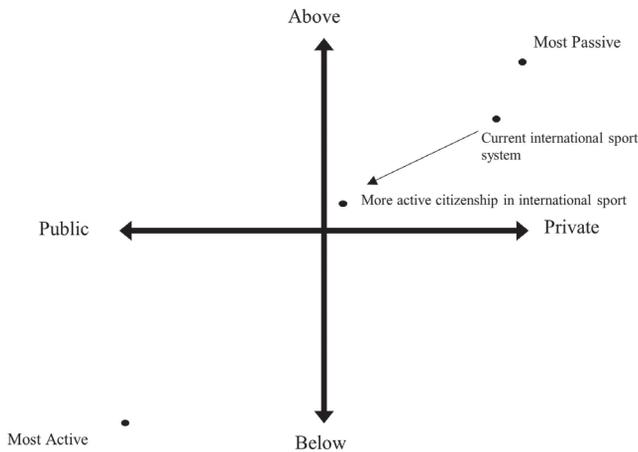
The cultivation of sport citizenship is influenced by both education techniques and external factors shaping individuals' relationship to citizenship. A characterisation of citizenship in the international sport system would also include the two dimensions. The top-down (above)/bottom-up (below) distinction in sport can be understood as the governing institutions in sport being all-powerful, and athletes are the recipients of rights and protections, as opposed to acting more like sovereign actors who are not reliant on the state. The public/private distinction is more about space or the athletes preferred sphere when cultivating virtuous behaviour or dealing with injustices: do they utilise the public arena (e.g. protests, petitions, unions) or do they rely on the private realm (e.g. individual, family). Sport exists somewhere between the end points on both continuums, though it does lean closer to one end for both dimensions.

Citizenship rights would be granted from above in sport since there is a reliance on governing institutions, and athletes function more as subjects. Within the Olympic Movement, athletes are subject to the decisions that governing institutions (e.g., IOC) and regulatory bodies (e.g., World Anti-Doping Agency) put into place. There are limited opportunities for athletes to participate via committees, but athletes are

not typically involved in setting rules or standards. Further, sport appears to prioritise the private end of the spectrum, placing emphasis on the individual commitment to development and preparation. There have been occasions when stakeholders unite and fight against dominant structures such as coming together to ensure the exclusion of apartheid South Africa (Booth, 2003; Nixon, 1992) or athletes and fans coming together to ensure the downfall of the football ‘Super League’ (Hamilton, 2021) or referendums in cities regarding the hosting of mega-events (Kassens-Noor & Lauer-mann, 2017; Könecke et al., 2016; Morgan, 2019).

All of the aforementioned influences are necessary for a functioning sporting system. However, with the way that sport is currently approached, there is more of a reliance on the influence from the top-down and private side of the continuum, which would make it a *passive democracy*. This is not a criticism of athletes. The category of citizenship associated with a system has little to do with the current citizenry; who are inheriting factors that shape their relationship to citizenship. The public/private and above/below distinctions can serve as examples of factors to be considered when the goal is to shift power. Though sport may be inclined toward influences from the private sphere and from above, an effort can still be made to engage with behaviours which are more associated with the public sphere and from below if the goal is to challenge authority and shift power.

Challenging those regulations that they consider to be unfair would be a way in which athletes could engage with the public sphere and bottom-up side of the continuum, though such behaviour is sometimes discouraged by the rules. The Olympic Charter Rule 50.2 states, ‘No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas’ (IOC, 2025, p. 94). In reaction to the IOC’s stance on the matter, it is reasonable to expect athletes to be more focused on the cultivation of excellence in private, developing a mindset that benefits training and competitions at the elite level instead of engaging the policy development process or challenging the system. Such a perspective is important



**Figure 2** Author’s re-interpretation of Turner’s (1990) Heuristic Typology of four political contexts for the creation of citizenship rights with the addition of most passive and active points and an illustration of citizenship in sport becoming more active as the arrow demonstrates.

in sport, and the internal characteristics associated with sport as an agonistic social practice (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, and winning while risking defeat) are all indicative of the athlete's engagement in the private sphere.

This has been the outcome without much active effort to approach sport in a manner that produces sport citizens who are able to participate in its governance or cater to issues that arise in sporting clubs or on the field of play. A sport system that exhibits the characteristics of a *passive democracy* is not inherently negative because a range exists regarding the public/private distinction and the above/below distinction.

The figure above was created using Turner's (1990) typology, and the points added in the far-right upper corner and the far-left lower corner indicate hypothetical systems that would develop the most passive behaviors and the most active behaviours. With regard to sport, a hypothetical international sport system nearing the most passive point would entail a system that leaves athletes completely vulnerable to the tyranny of the IOC and other governing institutions and relies on the private sphere to ensure success and address issues. A hypothetical sport system nearing the most active point on the figure would see athletes as active drivers regarding decision making, and the IOC would serve to implement those decisions, and redress would be pursued together in the public sphere. In reality, the behaviours within most systems are more 'mild', which is why passive and active citizenship should not be thought of in absolutes. The current sport system is located in the passive democracy quadrant, though it is not at the most passive point; while the system is very reliant on the role of institutions, there is still some role for other actors. The private sphere is also preferred over the public sphere, but there have been occasions when athletes come together on an issue. As denoted in Figure 3, while the sport system may be in the *passive democracy* category, *more* active citizenship in sport is possible. This can be pursued within the current system by working to cultivate the bottom-up approach and engaging more with the public sphere in sport. Utilising different education techniques in sport is one way of attempting to engage with the below and public influences in sport.

### Education reform in sport

If seeking to approach education in a way that prepares athletes to actively participate, the following changes could be made using education *for*, *by*, and *through* sport as a framework for understanding how they may one day be active sport citizens. In addition to the rules and technical competence for a particular sport, education *for* sport could also include education about sport as an agonistic social practice, values in sport, and the significance of categorisation of athletes. This would likely involve formal instruction, though it does not have to be limited to formal settings. Education *by* sport would include those efforts to use sport as a means to cultural integration (e.g. sport for development programs) or to reinforce social bonds and charitability (e.g. volunteerism in sport). These efforts are generally intentional, though they extend beyond sport itself. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is an example of advocating for sporting participation to reinforce religious values, while the Sokol movement in Slavic societies is an example of sport reinforcing cultural principles related to strengthening minds and bodies (Jandásek, 1932; Pavlin & Čustonja, 2018). Education *through* sport might consist of approaching sport in a manner that facilitates horizontal relationships as opposed to reinforcing vertical relationships.

This could involve athletes having larger roles in their nutrition and training plans or even determining the frequency of training collaboratively as opposed to the coach deciding. According to Butterworth (2014), it is problematic that ‘athletes are largely expected to think passively, as a part of a team that overrides any individual convictions’ (p. 879). Challenging traditional approaches to the athlete-coaching (as well as other authority figures) dynamic could serve as an example of education *through* sport.

Some strategies could also be a hybrid of these educational modes presented by Eichberg and Jespersen (2009). Based on the characterisation by Mareš (2023), philosophical consultation could serve as an example of a hybrid approach that prioritises goals related to education *for*, *through*, and *by* sport. Mareš writes ‘the main purpose of philosophical consultation with an athlete is to challenge and clarify his/her thinking and deepen his/her understanding of the self and the (sporting) world’ (Mareš, 2023, p. 193). A number of strategies could be employed to cultivate behaviours which are indicative of more active citizenship, so they are fostering a sense of community and learning more about themselves and the activity that they are engaging in.

Education *for* and *by* sport can support the effort, but it is education *through* sport that has the capacity to facilitate athletes’ engagement with the bottom-up and public influences in sport. As expressed by Eichberg and Jespersen (2009), education *through* sport leads to philosophy through sport, and given the understanding of sport, philosophy, and democracy as agonistic social practices (McCoy & Martínková, 2022), education *through* sport would also lead to ‘democracy through sport’. The capacity to morally educate and prepare participants for democracy in institutional contexts is inherent to sport. The difference between a sport system that yields participants who experience moral development and better understand themselves and others (education *through* sport) is a matter of mindset and opportunity to develop in such ways. Institutions are more likely to recognise formal education as ‘real’ and set aside funds to support such education. However, with small changes and a willingness for authority figures in sport to facilitate more horizontal interactions between participants, non-formal (education *by* sport) and informal (education *through* sport) educational opportunities would be plentiful.

Sport, like democracy, is relational, and when approached in a particular manner, fosters a culture of trust and mutual understanding. Such qualities are more likely to be exhibited in active citizens than passive ones. While education *for* sport or formal education techniques can be employed (e.g. Olympic Education, knowledge of sport as an agonistic social practice), it will mainly require a shift in mindset regarding the approach to sporting practice (i.e., education *by* sport, education *through* sport).

## CONCLUSION

The sports system can be characterised as democratic (to an extent), given the Olympic Movement’s commitment to upholding good governance principles. Consequently, athletes function as citizens within the sport system. Whether they are aware of their status as citizens is unclear, though there are at least some who are fighting for additional rights and responsibilities. This is illustrated by the rise of athlete associations or unions and lawsuits that have been filed against International Federations. The current sport system is reflective of a *passive democracy*, per my interpretation of

Turner's (1990) typology. While passive citizenship is not inherently bad, citizens in such a system are more reliant on institutions to act on their behalf. Behaviours associated with active citizenship would lead to citizens taking more action on behalf of themselves as well as the system as a whole.

Cultivating more active citizenship amongst athletes requires a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions that contribute to passive versus active citizenship as well as various educational techniques. Efforts to engage with the system from the bottom-up and engage with the public sphere would result in athletes being less reliant on institutions to cater to their needs and less focused on their own individual experience. Various education techniques – education *for* sport, education *by* sport, and education *through* sport – can also impact the cultivation of citizenship. Education *through* sport is particularly useful for the cultivation of citizenship because of the shared principles amongst sport and democracy as an approach to life. While institutions are responsible for education *for* and *by* sport, athletes themselves have a lot of control regarding education *through* sport. If athletes are looking for additional rights and responsibilities, then they are interested in cultivating more active citizenship. This article presents factors that should be taken into consideration regarding citizenship in sport.

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There is no potential conflict of interest to disclose.

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# Foreign players, coaches, and the politics of belonging: strengthening citizenship in Czech football

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## ABSTRACT

In a globalized world, the use of foreign players by elite sport clubs has become normalized, yet fan perceptions of this practice are not always positive. The top Czech football league has consistently included 100 to 120 foreigners per season, representing 22–27% of players, for more than 15 years. This article pursues two related aims. First, it examines Czech fans' views on the use of foreign players, drawing on survey data from 2018 and 2023. Second, it analyzes the case of AC Sparta Prague, where internationalization strategies under two foreign coaches, Andrea Stramaccioni in 2017 and Brian Priske in 2023, produced contrasting fan responses. While Stramaccioni's tenure was deemed a failure, Priske's multicultural squad secured the league championship and shifted perceptions toward greater acceptance. Complemented by interviews with club executives, marketing directors, and sport managers, the analysis highlights how foreign players and coaches can be integrated in ways that strengthen not only club performance but also broader forms of citizenship, understood as practices of belonging, respect, and inclusion within Czech football and society.

## KEYWORDS

fan perception; glocalization; internationalization; national identity; sport migration

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## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, elite sport clubs occupy a complex position at the intersection of local identity and global flows. While the use of foreign players

and coaches has become normalized across top leagues, fan responses often reveal an underlying tension between the embrace of competitive success and the preservation of local or national belonging. Nowhere is this tension more evident than in European football, where clubs historically rooted in national pride must negotiate the challenges and opportunities presented by internationalization (Crossan, 2024; Crossan et al., 2024).

In this article, citizenship is used in a broader sense than formal nationality. Citizenship here refers to cultural and social practices of belonging, enacted within the public sphere where shared values, identities, and responsibilities are negotiated (Ong et al., 1996; Spracklen, 2007). In the sporting context, scholars have emphasized “cultural citizenship”, where participation in sport, whether as athletes, fans, or institutions, becomes a site for teaching, contesting, and symbolizing social membership (Collins & Kay, 2014; Kidd, 2006). This extends to corporate citizenship in sport organizations, where clubs are expected not only to compete but also to embody civic values such as respect, inclusion, and non-discrimination (Matten & Crane, 2005). Thus, the integration of foreign players in Czech football can be understood as more than a labor-market strategy: it is also a process through which clubs negotiate belonging and contribute to the strengthening of citizenship behaviors in society.

The Czech Republic offers a compelling case study for examining these dynamics. Since the early 2000s, the top tier of Czech football, the Fortuna Liga, has seen a steady influx of foreign players, comprising between 22% and 27% of total players annually (Crossan, 2024). Despite the relative stability of these numbers over the past fifteen years, fan perceptions of the trend have not remained static. This became particularly visible in 2017 when AC Sparta Prague appointed Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni and rapidly expanded its foreign player roster (iDNES.cz, 2017). The backlash among fans was immediate and fierce, culminating in widespread skepticism about the viability of foreign leadership within Czech football (Filípek, 2017; Palička & Čermák, 2018). Yet by 2023, with Danish coach Brian Priske leading Sparta to the league championship and similarly utilizing a multinational squad, fan sentiments had shifted markedly toward acceptance (Vait, 2022).

This article investigates the evolving relationship between the internationalization of elite Czech football clubs and the construction of citizenship and belonging among fans. Drawing on fan surveys conducted in 2018 and 2023, as well as interviews with club management, marketing directors, and sports managers, we explore how the strategic use of foreign players and coaches influences perceptions of identity and national pride. The Czech case sheds light on broader questions relevant to semi-peripheral football nations: under what conditions does the globalization of sport reinforce, rather than erode, a sense of citizenship?

This inquiry is grounded in sociological theories that conceptualize sport as a critical site for the negotiation of identity in a global age. As King (2017) argues, football clubs are not merely sporting organizations but arenas where national, local, and global identities intersect and are contested. Rather than viewing globalization as a simple erosion of national identity, researchers have emphasized the processes of “glocalization” and hybridization, wherein local cultures adapt to global influences in ways that rearticulate rather than erase traditional forms of belonging (Andrews, 1996; Andrews & Grainger, 2007; Finn & Giulianotti, 2013; Giulianotti, 2015; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007).

Glocalization suggests that while elite clubs increasingly draw on international talent pools, they also localize these global influences to fit their historical narratives and cultural expectations (Giulianotti, 2015). In this way, clubs become vehicles for both global competitiveness and local meaning-making. This process often involves selective incorporation: not all foreign influences are equally embraced, and the manner in which players are integrated into the club's ethos plays a crucial role in fan acceptance (Andrews & Grainger, 2007; Maguire, 1999). Finn and Giulianotti (2013) further note that while globalization introduces new identities and practices, it also intensifies local attachments as a form of resistance or adaptation.

The relationship between sporting success and the acceptance of foreign players has also been well documented. Cleland (2015) demonstrates that fan hostility toward internationalization diminishes significantly when foreign players and coaches contribute to on-field success. Similarly, van Hilvoorde et al. (2010) argue that achievements in international competitions often bolster, rather than weaken, national pride, even when victories are secured by multicultural teams. Success, therefore, becomes a critical mediating factor in the tension between global personnel strategies and local identity narratives.

In the Czech context, anxieties about the use of foreign players have been compounded by broader historical and cultural factors. The nation's transition from a communist regime to an integrated member of the European Union brought about significant changes in economic, political, and cultural domains. Yet as Fialová et al. (2016) show, Czech media have often framed foreign players as a "threat" to national traditions, reflecting lingering ambivalence about globalization. Despite the formal political and economic openness associated with EU membership, Czech football fandom has retained strong nationalistic undercurrents, making the process of accepting foreign players and coaches particularly slow.

Building on these theoretical insights, this article examines how Sparta Prague's contrasting experiences under two foreign coaches, Stramaccioni and Priske, illustrate the conditional nature of fan acceptance toward globalization in sport. We argue that elite clubs can indeed strengthen notions of citizenship and belonging when they successfully integrate foreign players and align sporting success with narratives of local pride. However, this process remains contingent on strategic management, effective communication, and consistent performance on the field.

This article contributes to broader debates on sport, globalization, and identity by offering a detailed case study from a semi-peripheral European football context. It demonstrates that the internationalization of sport does not inevitably dilute national loyalty but can, under certain conditions, reinforce it in new and dynamic ways. Understanding these conditions has significant implications for how elite clubs manage their rosters, communicate with their fanbases, and navigate the politics of belonging in a globalized world.

## METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach investigating how the use of foreign players and coaches in Czech elite football influences fan perceptions of identity, belonging, and citizenship. Two sources of data were used: online surveys of football fans and semi-structured interviews with football leadership stakeholders.

Online surveys were conducted during the fall seasons of 2018 and 2023. The surveys were distributed through Facebook fan pages affiliated with each of the sixteen clubs in the Czech First Football League (Fortuna Liga). This approach enabled the inclusion of a geographically diverse and demographically varied group of respondents. The 2018 survey received 186 responses, and the 2023 survey received 194. The full sample was predominantly male (93%), with a concentration in the 19–39 age range. Approximately half of the respondents reported active involvement in football as players or coaches, and over 80% reported following foreign leagues in addition to the domestic competition. While Sparta Prague, Slovan Liberec, and Slavia Prague were the most represented clubs, responses were obtained from all league teams, and a notable number of respondents reported no specific club preference. Because the sample was not stratified and was based on voluntary participation, results are presented descriptively and are not intended to generalize to the full population of Czech football fans.

The surveys included both closed and open-ended questions. Respondents were asked to evaluate their views on foreign coaches and players, perceived trends in internationalization, preferred foreign nationalities, and attitudes toward league regulations concerning foreigner limits. All questions from the 2018 survey were included in the 2023 survey, allowing for direct comparison over time; the second survey also featured a few additional questions to capture emerging themes. The 2023 version included new questions related to the economic dimensions of internationalization, such as willingness to support clubs that invest in recognizable international talent. Survey data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentage shifts across the five-year period.

To supplement the fan perspective with organizational insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with football club personnel during late 2023 and early 2024. Six interviews were conducted with top-level executives, marketing directors, and sports managers from four teams in the top division. These individuals were selected based on their direct involvement in team building, public communication, and long-term strategic planning. Interviews were guided by a flexible protocol covering integration strategies for foreign players, communication with fans about internationalization, and the perceived relationship between globalization and club identity. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in person or via video conferencing. Interviews were recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and analyzed thematically. An inductive coding approach identified recurring themes, which were compared with survey results to highlight convergences and tensions in perceptions and management of foreign player integration.

All procedures adhered to ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. Survey responses were anonymized, and no personally identifying information was retained in either data set.

## RESULTS

### **League context: foreign player participation in Czech football**

Before turning to survey and interview findings, it is important to situate them within the broader context of foreign player participation in the Czech First League. League data from 2013 to 2023 reveal that the number of foreign players has remained

relatively stable at just over 100 per season, representing roughly 22–27% of total players. This consistency provides the backdrop against which perceptions of change must be understood, as many fans nevertheless believe the number of foreigners has increased. The gap between perception and reality highlights how visibility, whether through media coverage, club strategies, or the prominence of foreigners in key roles, shapes impressions even without significant numerical growth.

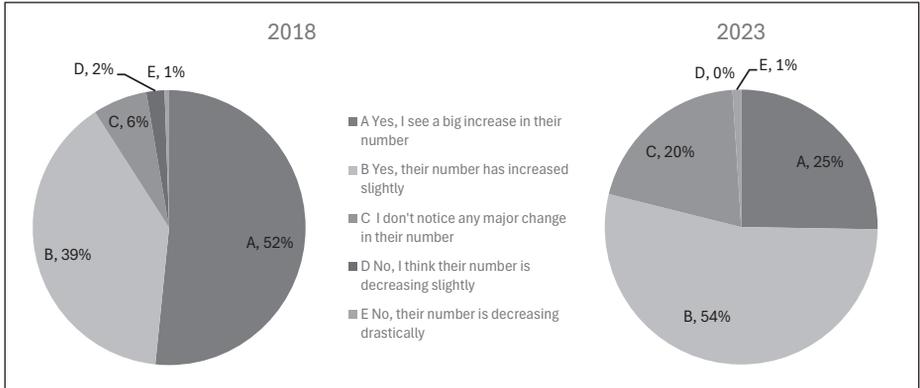


Figure 1 Has the number of foreign players in the Czech First League increased in recent years?

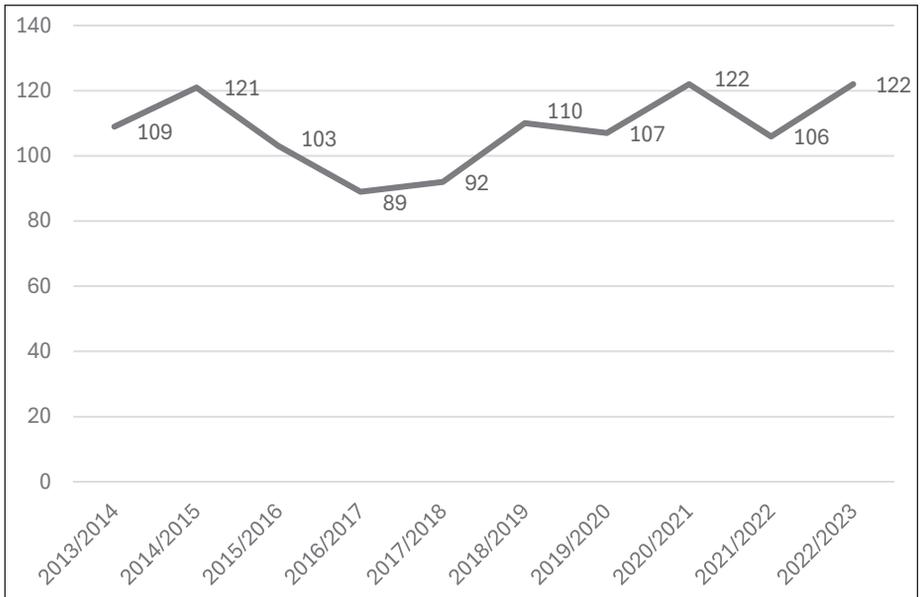


Figure 2 Actual number of foreign players in the Czech First League, 2013–2023

Several factors may explain this perceptual gap. Changes in team strategy, the visibility of foreign players in key roles, and media coverage likely contribute to fan impressions. Notably, although the league size briefly expanded from 16 to 18 teams in 2020–2021 due to pandemic disruptions, the average number of foreigners per team

has remained consistent. The small fluctuations illustrated in Figure 2 are primarily attributable to promotion and relegation rather than shifts in recruitment policy.

### Fan perspectives on foreign players

The first aim of this study was to analyse how Czech fans view the presence of foreign players in their league. Survey data from 2018 and 2023 show significant changes in attitudes. When asked whether they would welcome more foreign players, fan attitudes in 2023 were notably more positive than in 2018. As shown in Figure 3, there was a 20.6 percentage point shift from negative to positive responses over the five-year period. This suggests that fans are increasingly able to reconcile the presence of foreign players with their sense of club identity, particularly when those players are seen as contributing to team success and the development of domestic talent.

In addition to increased openness toward foreign players in general, the 2023 survey revealed a growing willingness among fans to follow clubs that bring in internationally

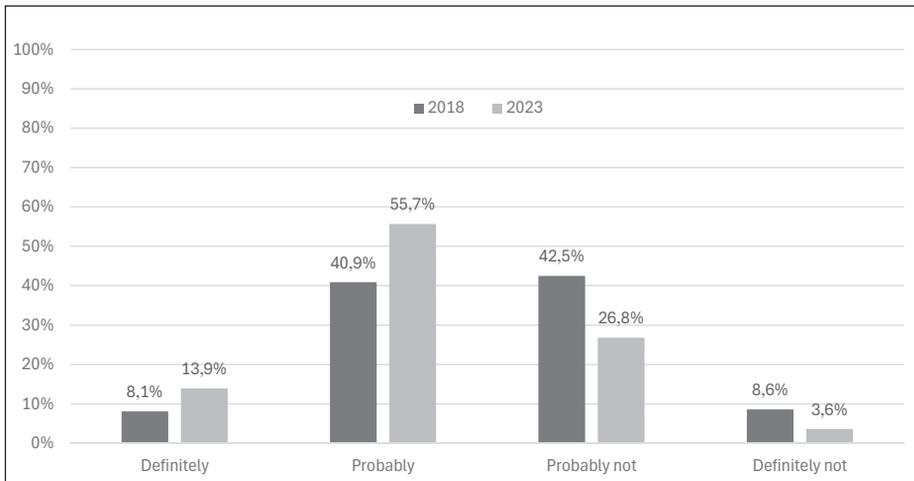


Figure 3 Would you welcome more foreign players in the Czech First Football League?

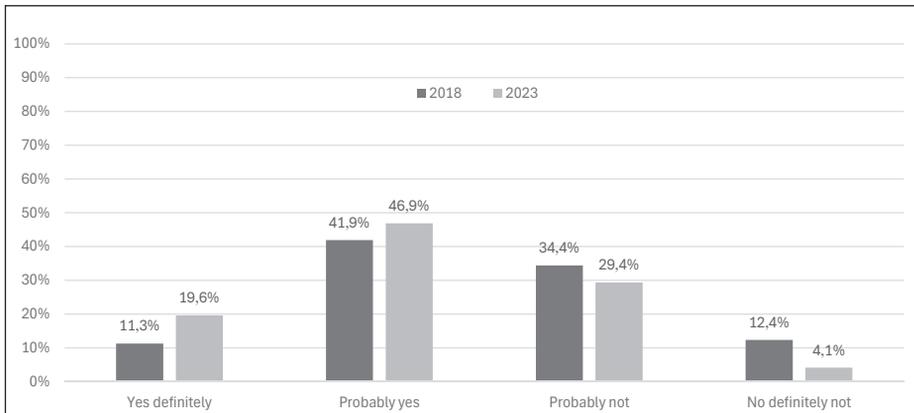


Figure 4 Would you start following the matches of a club that brought in a well-known international player?

recognized talent. While the Czech First League rarely attracts global superstars, the idea of clubs signing players with international name recognition is becoming more appealing to domestic supporters. As shown in Figure 4, there was a 13.3 percentage point increase from 2018 to 2023 in fans who indicated that they would be more likely to follow a club that signed a well-known international player. Although this shift is more modest than the general increase in openness to foreigners, it carries important implications for club marketing strategies.

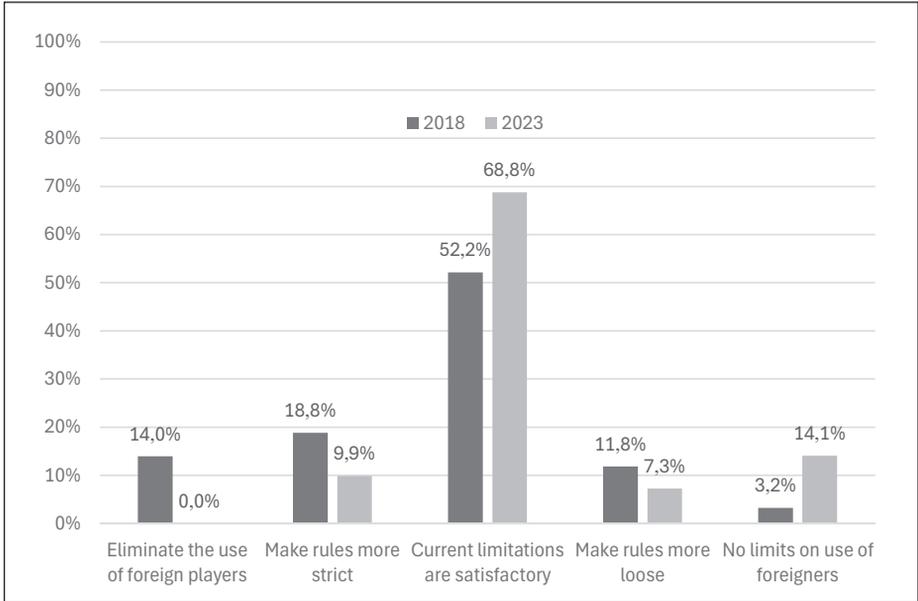


Figure 5 Should the football association tighten the criteria regarding the use of foreign players?

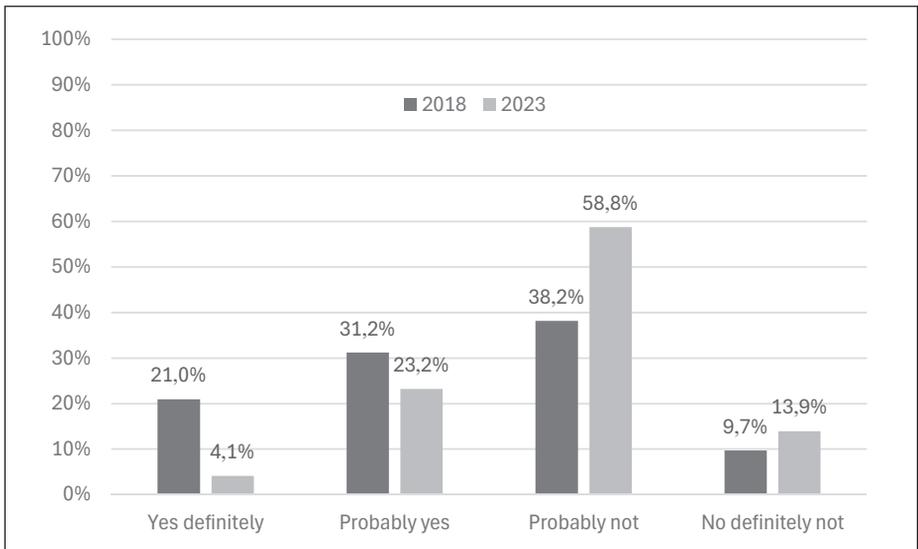


Figure 6 Do you think the arrival of foreign players can have a negative impact on domestic players?

This trend toward acceptance of foreign players appears to be grounded not only in performance outcomes, but also in the growing fan awareness of the economic logic behind such recruitment strategies. As shown in Figures 5 and 6, most fans in 2023 rejected the idea of stricter regulations limiting foreign players and acknowledged that recruiting foreigners is often necessary due to the limited availability of top-tier Czech players. As one club executive explained, “There simply aren’t enough top Czech players to go around. Everyone wants to build from the academy, but not every club has the resources or local talent pool. So we scout young players who can make an impact and later be sold”.

Beyond general attitudes toward foreign players, the survey data also captured fan preferences for specific nationalities. Table 1 presents the top ten most frequently mentioned nationalities in response to the open-ended question, “Which foreigners would you most welcome in the Czech First League?” Across both survey waves, Slovak players were by far the most popular choice, reflecting historical, linguistic, and cultural proximity. One football manager explained, “Slovaks are so close they’re not really foreigners – same language, same culture. You don’t need to integrate them. That makes it easier for everyone – coaches, players, and fans”.

**Table 1** Foreigner preferences for Czech fans

Nation	Preference %	Total from 2004–2022	Notes
Brazil	31.4	92	#5 in world
Slovakia	18.6	746	Neighbor, EU, Slavic language
Nigeria	13.9	33	
Croatia	13.9	68	#10 in world, EU, Slavic
England	13.4	4	#3 in world, EU
Spain	12.4	18	#8 in world, EU
Argentina	11.9	6	#1 in world
France	10.5	65	#2 in world, EU
Germany	9.8	8	Neighbor, EU
Portugal	8.2	2	#7 in world, EU
Denmark	7.2	6	EU
Serbia	7.2	113	Slavic
Netherlands	6.7	15	#6 in world, EU
Norway	6.7	4	EU
Poland	6.2	8	Neighbor, EU, Slavic
Ukraine	5.7	29	Slavic
Ivory Coast	5.2	40	

Note: World Rankings based on November 30, 2023 FIFA rankings

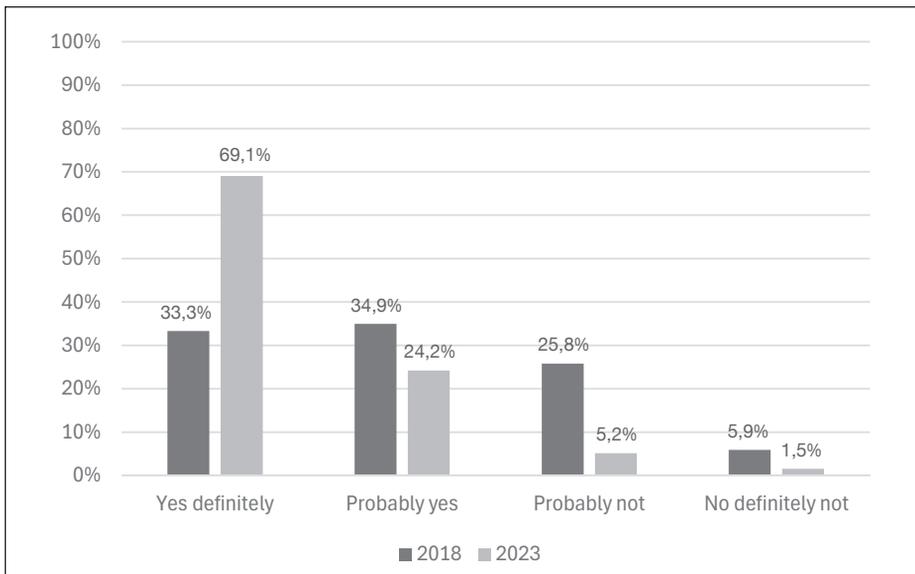
Other European nationalities such as Germans, Spaniards, and Italians also ranked highly, consistent with perceptions of technical quality and professional standards. As one club representative noted, “Some of the French and Spanish guys come here after failing elsewhere. But fans still like the idea of having someone from those countries, even if they’re not stars”. Interestingly, African players also received a notable number

of mentions. While responses were not uniformly positive, interview data and survey comments suggest a growing recognition of the athleticism and work ethic associated with African footballers. As one manager shared, “We don’t just sign African players for their potential resale value – though that helps. We have to support them to adapt or they won’t perform. It’s not about talent alone. It’s about connection.” Nonetheless, some concerns were raised in both surveys and interviews about whether African players could fully integrate into Czech football culture, indicating a more conditional acceptance. One respondent noted, “They [fans] want magic from African players but are harsher when they underperform. The expectation is higher, and so is the criticism. That’s where racism shows – not in whether we sign them, but in how they are judged.”

This ordering of fan preferences reflects broader themes in how national identity and perceived cultural closeness shape openness to foreign players. Slovaks are seen as “almost Czechs”, while other European players are evaluated more on footballing merits. African players are often seen through a lens of athleticism, yet their perceived social distance and the potential for racialized bias highlight areas where clubs’ integration and communication strategies play a vital role.

### Expert perspectives and the Sparta case

The second aim of this study was to assess how internationalization strategies play out in practice, using AC Sparta Prague as a focal example. Fan perceptions of foreign coaches shifted dramatically between 2018 and 2023, and interviews with club officials help explain this transformation. In 2018, after Andrea Stramaccioni’s failed tenure, 32% of fans doubted a foreign coach could succeed, and only 33% expressed strong confidence. By 2023, following Brian Priske’s league title, only 7% held doubts and 69% were fully confident. Among Sparta supporters, belief in foreign leadership jumped from 57% in 2018 to 100% in 2023.



**Figure 7** Can a foreign coach succeed in the Czech league?

One manager reflected: “Analysts and fans said the Italian coach didn’t get the Czech dressing room. But in truth, there was no adaptation strategy at all. That was the real problem, not that he was foreign, but that the team acted like that didn’t matter.” Club leaders emphasized that Priske’s success was not only tactical but also cultural, involving clearer communication and more careful integration of foreigners while maintaining club traditions. As another manager observed: “The worst reaction from fans comes when the internationalization of the team is rushed and uncommunicated. They need to understand the why.”

Interviews further revealed that clubs see themselves as responsible for strengthening citizenship both on and off the pitch. Integration strategies included pairing new signings with bilingual teammates and connecting them with local communities. As one staff member explained: “We now try to help them get connected outside of football, even if it’s just a local church or some expat groups. It helps with mental health and retention.” Such practices align with broader understandings of corporate citizenship, where clubs act not only as competitive enterprises but as civic institutions fostering inclusion and social cohesion.

Clubs also acknowledged their broader role in shaping Czech cultural life. Rather than viewing globalization as a threat to national identity, several managers saw it as an opportunity to strengthen citizenship through intentional inclusion. One executive stated, “We’ve stopped thinking of ourselves just as a football team. The club is a part of Czech cultural life. What we do, who we hire, how we talk about players, shapes more than football.” This expanded sense of responsibility has led some clubs to develop initiatives aimed at reducing prejudice and promoting inclusion. One manager described creating workshops not only for fans, but also for staff and youth players, to address racism and cultural sensitivity: “Not many clubs do this, but we saw it as our duty.”

## DISCUSSION

This article has pursued two related aims: to examine Czech fan views on foreign players and coaches, and to consider how these issues are illustrated through Sparta Prague’s contrasting experiences under Andrea Stramaccioni and Brian Priske. In this article, citizenship has been used in a broader sense than legal nationality, but instead is understood in its broader cultural and civic dimensions. Following Habermas (1990), citizenship is embedded in the public sphere, where individuals and institutions negotiate belonging, recognition, and values. This approach resonates with work on cultural citizenship (Franks, 2009; Newman et al., 2021; Ong et al., 1996), which highlights how citizenship involves participation in shared cultural practices and the negotiation of inclusion, even by foreigners, within a community. Within sport studies, citizenship has also been examined as a set of embodied behaviors, acceptance, respect, solidarity, and non-racism, that can be fostered by organizations through participation and representation in sport (Collins & Kay, 2014; Laker, 2003; Spaaij, 2013). Thus, the use of citizenship in this article emphasizes social practices of belonging and responsibility rather than formal nationality.

At the league level, the relatively stable presence of foreign players over the last fifteen years underscores how Czech football is already embedded in global flows,

even if fan perceptions often suggest otherwise. This confirms King's (2017) contention that football clubs, and by extension leagues, are powerful sites for negotiating national identity. As Cleland (2015) has shown, sporting performance mediates the acceptance of globalization, but stability in numbers also points to deeper processes of normalization, where internationalization itself becomes an enduring part of the game. In this sense, Czech football provides an example of how global pressures compel even semi-peripheral leagues to engage in practices of corporate citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005), balancing international competitiveness with the civic expectations of local supporters.

Turning to fans, survey data from 2018 and 2023 reveal that perceptions of foreign players and coaches are far from static. Fans increasingly accept internationalization when it is tied to on-field success and national belonging, with success enhancing club credibility at home and abroad and underscoring the cultural dimensions of citizenship. The inclusion of Table 1 illustrates how national and cultural proximity continues to shape fan preferences, even within a globalized football context. Slovaks are viewed as "familiar foreigners", whose linguistic and cultural closeness positions them as extensions of local identity. Other European players are evaluated more in terms of footballing quality, while African players face conditional acceptance, shaped by higher expectations and harsher criticism when underperforming. These patterns echo van Hilvoorde et al.'s (2010) argument that while global success may enhance national pride, it can also provoke concerns about cultural cohesion and talent development.

Beyond these general patterns, the Sparta case provides a concrete example of how fan attitudes toward internationalization are shaped by coaching leadership and integration strategies. The success of Brian Priske's multicultural squad in winning the Czech league championship not only shifted fan attitudes but also expanded the club's credibility both domestically and abroad, aligning with Cleland's (2015) finding that sporting performance significantly mediates acceptance of globalization. Moreover, Sparta's internationalization strategy can be understood through the lens of Giulianotti's (2015) "glocalization", wherein local (Czech) identity adapts to global realities rather than being erased. Fans' shifting perceptions between 2018 and 2023 suggest a rearticulation of Czech football identity in line with Bairner's (2001) thesis that nationalism in sport evolves, rather than disappears, under global pressures.

The contrast between Stramaccioni's failed internationalization and Priske's championship season illustrates that scepticism toward foreign coaches can be overcome when leadership is integrated with a clear vision, a local connection, and effective communication strategies. Interviewees emphasized that rushed, poorly explained internationalization provokes the strongest negative reactions, while measured integration and clear communication foster acceptance.

Clubs have also adopted various integration strategies that demonstrate their dual role in strengthening citizenship both on and off the field. Pairing new signings with bilingual teammates, supporting connections to local communities, and offering cultural sensitivity training were all mentioned as ways to build inclusion. Such initiatives reflect the broader logic of corporate citizenship, where clubs assume responsibility not only for athletic success but also for fostering social cohesion within their communities (Matten & Crane, 2005).

Clubs further acknowledged their broader role in shaping Czech cultural life, seeing globalization not as a threat but as an opportunity to strengthen citizenship through intentional inclusion. Initiatives aimed at reducing prejudice and promoting respect, directed at fans, staff, and youth players alike, illustrate how football clubs can act as agents of both commercial success and civic responsibility. This aligns with previous research highlighting how organizational responses to racism in sport reflect deeper tensions between commercial interests and cultural values (Crossan et al., 2025).

From this perspective, the acceptance of foreign players by fans is not merely a matter of tolerance but reflects the cultivation of broader citizenship qualities. The negotiation of belonging, whether Slovaks are seen as “almost Czechs”, whether African players are judged fairly, or whether foreign coaches can embody club traditions, mirrors wider societal debates about inclusion, identity, and diversity. By mediating these negotiations within the public sphere of football, Czech clubs contribute to strengthening citizenship behaviors as a cultural practice. Success on the pitch and inclusive narratives off it demonstrate that local identity can coexist with global flows, reaffirming both belonging within the national community and participation in a wider global football citizenship.

Overall, the results suggest that internationalization, when guided by strategic planning and grounded in transparent communication, can enhance rather than diminish the sense of belonging and citizenship associated with Czech football. Clubs that acknowledge their role in shaping national identity and actively invest in the integration of foreign talent are more likely to earn sustained fan support and contribute positively to the broader social fabric.

## CONCLUSION

This study has pursued two related aims: first, to examine how Czech football fans perceive the presence of foreign players and coaches, and second, to consider how these issues are illustrated through Sparta Prague’s contrasting experiences under Andrea Stramaccioni and Brian Priske. Based on survey data from 2018 and 2023, complemented by interviews with club executives and staff, the findings demonstrate that while fan skepticism toward internationalization remains, it is neither fixed nor purely nationalistic. Instead, acceptance is closely tied to cultural proximity, on-field performance, and the presence of transparent, value-driven communication from clubs.

Sparta’s contrasting experiences under Stramaccioni and Priske illustrate that internationalization efforts succeed not simply because of results, but because of how those results are framed within narratives of identity and belonging. When fans see foreign coaches and players as contributing to, not replacing, the club’s traditions and values, resistance diminishes. This supports the idea that sport, as King (2017) and Bairner (2001) have argued, is a key site for the re-articulation of national identity under globalization. Priske’s success also shows how winning with a multicultural roster can broaden a club’s credibility at home and abroad, reinforcing Cleland’s (2015) argument that sporting performance is central to fan acceptance of globalization.

Importantly, the analysis also reveals differentiated perceptions among foreign players. Slovaks enjoy a uniquely privileged position, seen as nearly local, while other

Europeans are valued for footballing quality. African players, though increasingly appreciated, continue to face conditional acceptance shaped by racialized expectations. This highlights the importance of proactive integration strategies and the potential for elite clubs to serve not only as sporting institutions, but as civic actors contributing to the formation of inclusive national narratives.

In sum, elite clubs in semi-peripheral contexts like Czech can reinforce rather than erode a sense of citizenship, provided they approach internationalization with care, transparency, and a commitment to cultural integration. Future research could expand this analysis to compare club-level strategies across Central and Eastern Europe, or to examine the long-term effects of foreign player inclusion on youth development and national team identity.

*Note:* Portions of this article draw upon material originally published in Chapter 6 of the book *Czech Sport Migration: Push and pull variations between sports and cultures* (Crossan, 2024).

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