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PII: S1469-0292(17)30150-4
DOI: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.03.007
Reference: PSYSPO 1201

To appear in: Psychology of Sport & Exercise

Received Date: 8 May 2016
Revised Date: 7 March 2017
Accepted Date: 9 March 2017

Please cite this article as: Morela, E., Hatzigeorgiadis, A., Sanchez, X., Papaioannou, A., Elbe, A.-M., Empowering youth sport and acculturation: Examining the hosts’ perspective in Greek adolescents, Psychology of Sport & Exercise (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.03.007.

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Empowering youth sport and acculturation: Examining the hosts’ perspective in Greek adolescents

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Empowering youth sport and acculturation: Examining the hosts’ perspective in Greek adolescents
Abstract

Objectives: Research on the role of sport as a context for the acculturation of young migrants has mainly focused on migrant populations. Considering that acculturation is a two-way process involving both the migrant and the host populations, research investigating the perspective of the hosts will enhance our understanding of the acculturation process. The purpose of the present study was to explore acculturation attitudes and perceptions of adolescents from the host population as a function of sport participation. Furthermore, for those adolescents participating in sport, the role of the sport motivational climate and its relation to acculturation attitudes was investigated.

Design and Method: A cross-sectional quantitative design was adopted. Participants were 626 (316 girls) Greek, high school students (13.88±1.01 years of age). Among them, 271 (92 girls) were athletes competing in individual and team sports. While all participants completed measures of acculturation attitudes, the athletes additionally completed measures of motivational climate, basic need satisfaction, and controlling coaching behavior.

Results: Athletes scored higher than non-athletes on attitudes towards multicultural contact. Analysis of structural models revealed that a motivational climate characterized by a mastery climate, supportive of the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, was positively linked to attitudes favoring migrants’ maintenance of their culture and development of interaction with the host culture, whereas a motivational climate characterized by a performance climate and controlling coaching behavior was negatively linked to such attitudes.
Conclusion: These findings provide useful insights concerning the perspectives of the host population regarding migrants’ acculturation and the role motivational climate play in promoting integration.

*Keywords*: multiculturalism, social integration, motivational climate, receiving culture, migrants
Empowering youth sport and acculturation: Examining the hosts’ perspective in Greek adolescents

Within the field of sport psychology there has been a growing interest in the social mission of sport (Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012). This mission has been described as processes and actions aiming at improving the lives of individuals and groups in relation to various contexts, such as health and well-being, youth development, and intercultural exchange (Schinke, Stambulova, Lidor, Papaioannou & Ryba, 2015). Within this area, an important focus has been placed on the socio-cultural aspects of sport and specifically on acculturation processes. The development of cultural competencies is among the priorities identified by the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP Position Stand; Ryba, Stambulova, Si & Schinke, 2016) and it is recommended that sport and exercise psychology professionals focus more on cultural awareness (ISSP Position Stand: Ryba, Schinke, Stambulova & Elbe, 2017).

The recent cultural sport psychology literature has mainly focused on two different research perspectives. One perspective spotlights the experiences of (elite) athletes who migrate to pursue or develop their sport career. Studies have, for example, highlighted the athletes’ experiences in the acculturation process like upsets, problems, their coping strategies and the adaptations that take place (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Ryba, Ronkainen & Selänne, 2015; Schinke, Blodgett, McGannon, & Ge, 2016). This literature has also been recently accommodated within a new framework, the cultural praxis of athletes’ careers (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). These studies, which predominantly apply a qualitative methodology, have promoted the study of athletes as multidimensional identities within and outside the athletic context, but also address the influence of the receiving culture on migrating athletes’ development. A second line of research places more focus on the sport context rather
than the individual athlete and investigates the role of sport as an acculturation agent within a sport for all rather than a competitive sport context. This second perspective explores the potential of sport as a context wherein effective acculturation can take place, and examines the dynamics of cultural interaction within sport for the promotion of social integration (e.g., Allen, Drane, Byon & Mohn, 2010; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). Although the two perspectives have different foci they share ideas and grounds surrounding the understanding that acculturation is a dynamic process reflecting cultural and psychological change following intercultural contact (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). In addition, both perspectives share the common assumption that the interaction between migrating and host individuals is of great importance in order to understand the acculturation process. The present investigation adopts the acculturative role of sport perspective and focuses on the sport context rather than the individual athlete. This focus allows us to address the sport context as a means for acculturation which has been identified as an issue of particular importance for the functioning of contemporary societies.

The process of acculturation has always been considered to be of fundamental importance for both intergroup relations and migrants’ adaptation to the society of settlement, and has attracted significant research attention (see special issues by Berry & Sam, 2013; Leong & Liu, 2013; Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006). The potential of sport to contribute positively to a range of social issues is widely acknowledged (Bloyce & Smith; 2010; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2012), and this has generated a growing policy interest to encourage the use of sport as a vehicle to promote social integration and intercultural dialogue (Schinke et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, a review of the relevant literature (Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Elbe, Kouli, & Sanchez, 2013) has revealed contradictory findings. On the one hand, research has
identified potential benefits of sport participation for minority groups, such as cultural adaptation and effective coping with acculturation stress (Stack & Iwasaki, 2009), and the development of social networks with host majority members (Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan, Guerin, 2003). On the other hand, it has been argued that sport may be a field in which discrimination may evolve (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Schinke et al., 2015), and that the potential bridging effect of sport is almost fully countered by the tensions arising from outside sport (Krouwel, Boostra, Duyvendak, & Veldboer, 2006). Hatzigeorgiadis and colleagues’ (2013) review concluded that sport participation per se may not be sufficient to facilitate fruitful acculturation and that research should explore the features of the sport environment that may help towards reaching the goals of integration. In addition, the review identified that only a small number of studies were based on solid theoretical frameworks, stressing the need for theoretically driven research (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013).

Theoretical framework and relevant research

Berry’s (1997; Berry & Sam, 2013) acculturation model provides a suitable framework for the study of migrants’ acculturation. The model suggests that there are two independent dimensions underlying the acculturation process, based on the distinction between orientations towards one’s own group and those towards other groups. These are cultural maintenance, and cultural contact and participation. Cultural maintenance refers to the conservation of one’s ethnic heritage and cultural traditions, while cultural contact and participation refer to the interaction and exchange of experiences between members of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The prevalence of these orientations determines the strategies that members of both the migrant and the host populations adopt (Berry, 2008). Among the migrant
groups, these preferences are described as acculturation strategies, and have been identified as *integration*, reflecting high orientations towards both maintenance and contact (identification with both cultures); *assimilation*, reflecting high orientations towards cultural contact and low towards cultural maintenance, (identification mostly with the host culture); *separation*, reflecting high orientation towards cultural maintenance and low orientations towards cultural contact (identification mostly with one’s own heritage culture); and *marginalization*, reflecting low orientations for both cultural maintenance and contact (low identification with both cultures). Among the members of the host society the preferences are described as acculturation expectations and have been respectively identified as multiculturalism, in which cultural diversity maintenance and equitable participation are an accepted feature of the host community society (corresponding with integration); melting pot, in which host members are resistant to migrants’ cultural maintenance and wish for their absorption in the host community (corresponding with assimilation); segregation, when host members accept migrants’ cultural maintenance but at the same time feel that interaction should be avoided (corresponding with separation); and exclusion, when host members deny migrants’ cultural maintenance as well as their integration into the host society (corresponding with marginalization) (Berry, 2010). The bidimensional model of acculturation was further extended by Bourhis, Moise, Perreault and Senecal, (1997) who highlighted the importance of the fit between the goals of the two populations, and suggested that acculturation orientations of the host population can influence the orientations adopted by migrants (Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrette, & Montaruli, 2009). Bourhis et al. (1997) described the interactive acculturative model, which emphasizes the role of the host majority members’ expected acculturation orientations towards migrant groups.
The role of the sporting environment

Adopting the framework developed by Berry, two studies have explored aspects of the sport environment in relation to ethnic and cultural identity in migrants. In these studies ethnic identity was conceptualized as a composite of preferences migrants hold to preserve their ethnicity, whereas cultural identity refers to their preference to be involved with the larger society (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Morela, Hatzigeorgiadis, Kouli, Elbe and Sanchez (2013) investigated young migrant athletes in Greece, who participated in sport teams comprising mostly members of the host culture. They found that team cohesion could negatively predict feelings of fringe and lack of interaction with members of the host culture. A similar study by Elbe et al. (2016) found that the motivational climate and particularly mastery climate and autonomy support were linked to an adaptive integrative profile in male adolescent migrants.

With regard to the motivational climate, there is considerable evidence that the climate created by the coach can facilitate socially desirable outcomes. From an achievement goal perspective, a mastery climate, i.e., a climate fostering learning, promoting cooperation, and focusing on effort and personal improvement has been linked to prosocial attitudes and behavior. In contrast, a performance climate, i.e., a climate fostering superiority over others and focusing on outcomes and normative criteria of success, has been linked to antisocial attitudes and behavior (Kavussanu, 2006; Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen 2004). In addition, from a self-determination perspective, autonomous motivation has been shown to be positively linked with prosocial behaviors such as volunteering (Gagné, 2003) and helping others (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Self-determined motivation is defined as being intrinsic and satisfying the three basic psychological needs; the need for competence, i.e., a sense of mastery.
through effective interaction within their environment; the need for autonomy, i.e.

perceptions of choice and an authentic sense of self-direction and volition; and the

need for relatedness, i.e., a sense of mutual caring and connectedness with others

(Deci & Ryan, 2000). Supporting evidence regarding the importance of the

motivational climate for the facilitation of acculturation has been provided by a study

conducted in the physical education context. Kouli and Papaioannou (2009) studied

ethnic and cultural identity in relation to achievement goals and motivational climate,

and found that sport activities taking place in physical education classes with mastery

climates were linked to integration and assimilation, whereas a performance climate

was linked to separation and marginalization.

Considering the motivational climate from a more global perspective, Duda

(2013) argued for the importance of integrating the tenets of achievement goal theory

(Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and introduced

the terms empowering and disempowering motivational climate. An empowering

climate is described as having a mastery climate and being autonomy and socially-

supportive (Duda & Appleton, 2016). Such a climate is ideal for the satisfaction of the

three basic psychological needs as described by the self-determination framework

(Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast, disempowering coaching is described as a

performance oriented and controlling environment, perceived as coercive, pressuring,

and authoritarian that undermines athletes’ psychological needs and sense of self-

determination.

Research has shown that empowering coaching is related to enjoyment and

quality of life variables such as subjective vitality, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and

health; whereas disempowering climate is related to anxiety and intention to drop out

(Papaioannou et al., 2013). More closely related to the purposes of this study,
Kolovelonis, Keramidas, Krommidas, and Goudas (2015) examined relationships between motivational climate in elementary school physical education and aspects of social competence. The results showed that an empowering motivational climate was positively related to empathy and cooperating skills, whereas a disempowering motivational climate was related to quick-temperamentness and disruptiveness.

Considering the restricted relevant literature on the socially valued outcomes of the sport environment, we expected that adopting the approach of combining the two motivational theories would maximize the potential of the study of sport and integration, and contribute to a better understanding of the factors contributing to positive acculturation outcomes.

**The role of the host culture**

In addition to the need for theoretically driven research, and the examination of the sport context factors that facilitate effective acculturation, a look into the relevant literature within the sport for acculturation research area reveals that research has largely focused on migrants, thus neglecting to a large degree the perspective of the host population. The important role of the host population has been identified within research on the acculturation of migrating athletes. Schinke and McGannon (2014) argued that our understanding of the role of the social context within which acculturation takes place is limited, and put forward the idea of shared acculturation (Schinke, McGannon, Battochio, & Wells, 2013). The term shared acculturation implies that acculturation is a two-way interaction and that both individuals from the migrating and receiving culture should show interest in intercultural exchange and thereby actively facilitate positive acculturation experiences. It is assumed that shared acculturation which involves all partners in the acculturation process is more fruitful than solely placing the burden on migrants for achieving a successful acculturation.
Within this approach two interactive processes were identified, namely the limited reciprocity and the immersed reciprocity (Schinke & McGannon, 2014). The limited reciprocity refers to the provision of encouragement and support from members of the host culture, such as the coach and teammates, to help migrants understand the host culture and assimilate, without however considering the person’s cultural identity and heritage. In contrast, immersed reciprocity refers to a mutual understanding, from hosts and migrants, of the responsibilities involved in the acculturation process, accepting that sport contexts are culturally diverse, and attempting to learn, understand, and share each other’s cultural values. The adoption of such processes provides the greatest potential for social integration.

Two studies that have partly involved members of the host culture seem to confirm the ambiguity of the findings. Krouwel et al. (2006) reported that sport participants from The Netherlands were interested in the social dimension of sport participation, including the contact with people from other cultural groups; however, they also desired to distinguish themselves from other groups. In addition, the authors argued that competitions between homogeneous teams of different origins (teams consisting exclusively of athletes from the host culture versus teams consisting exclusively of migrant athletes) may evoke tension and result in incidents of violence. Muller, Van Zoonen and DeRoode (2008) on the occasion of a multicultural football tournament for migrants, which aimed at enhancing cultural interaction in The Netherlands, collected data from several sources. Among members of the host population, the organizers of the tournament viewed the tournament as a means to enhance contact, mutual understanding and respect across cultures; and spectators reported that they attended the tournament to socialize with friends, but also to interact and enjoy other cultures. In summary, research on the role of hosts regarding
migrants’ acculturation within the sport context is limited, and the findings are ambiguous.

The cultural context of this study

Our study was conducted in a specific cultural context, namely the Greek one. Greece has recently received a large number of migrants and today, more than 10% of the students enrolled in Greek public schools are of immigrant origin (Motti-Stefanidi, Masten, & Asendorpf, 2015). The legislative framework of Greek educational policy guarantees schooling for all children, citizen or foreign (regardless of the legal status of residence) from the age of 6 to the age of 15. To meet the increasing schooling needs of migrants, the Greek authorities established intercultural schools aiming at providing an educational platform for contact between native and migrant students. These schools, in addition to the typical curriculum, offer to migrant students Greek language support courses, but also courses on the language of their country of origin. Thus, migrant children in Greece can choose to either join general schools (mostly comprising native students), or intercultural schools (mostly comprising migrant students). Intercultural schools in Greece have been strongly criticized for being unable to manage diversity proactively and for marginalizing foreign students (Damanakis, 2005), as the vast majority of these schools have turned into migrant schools. The reasons for this is that Greek parents refrain from sending their children to these schools because they are afraid that the cultural and linguistic identity of the students will negatively affect the level of their children’s learning (Paroutsas, 2013). Nevertheless, research has shown that students who coexist in the classroom with foreign students show greater respect and acceptance of differences compared to students who do not mix with children from other cultures (Damico & Sparks, 1986). This reinforces the view of the positive influence of intercultural contact (Unicef,
Data for this study were collected from typical high schools in Greece (intercultural schools were excluded from the study) with an average of 14.6% migrant students, which is representative of the Greek school population. The majority of the migrant students in these schools were from Albania and the former USSR countries, which are the largest groups of migrants in Greece (Aspridis & Petrelli, 2011).

Intercultural contact influences both minority groups and host community members and sport teams may offer a suitable context for developing cultural interaction and promoting intergroup relations in culturally diverse societies (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013). Previous research has shown that in some cases migrants have opportunities to choose to either take part in sport activities with the people from the host culture, attempting to enhance interaction with the mainstream population, or to participate in sports with individuals coming from the same ethnic and cultural background, attempting to strengthen their ethnic identity (Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). However, in Greece migrants who wish to participate in organized sport have to join sport teams where the vast majority of athletes are native Greeks, since pure ethnic sport teams do not exist (Elbe et al., 2016), thus maximizing the opportunities for cultural interaction with the host population. However, this reduces the chances that sport can be a field for strengthening their ethnic identity, since it is not likely to socialize with members of their own culture, which is equally important for achieving integration.

Objectives and hypotheses

Regardless of its political and social significance, research-based evidence on the social-facilitating role of sport, in particular with regard to acculturation, has not received the required attention. In addition, research has almost exclusively focused
on the migrants’ perspectives, thus disregarding the important role of the host society in the acculturation process. Based on the conceptualization of Berry’s (1997) acculturation model and taking into consideration the emphasis placed on the role of the host population by Bourhis et al.’s (1997) interactive acculturation model, the present study aimed at investigating the hosts’ perspective regarding migrant’s acculturation in relation to sport participation and the sport motivational climate.

Summarizing the above, the purpose of the present study was to (a) explore acculturation attitudes and perceptions of adolescents from the host population as a function of sport participation, by comparing adolescent athletes with non-athletes, and (b) investigate the role of the motivational climate, within those participating in sport. For the first research objective, given the existing inconsistent findings, no hypotheses were formulated. For the second research objective, a mastery climate and the satisfaction of basic needs in sport were hypothesized to form an empowering motivational climate that would relate positively to acculturation attitudes reflecting multiculturalism, whereas a performance climate and controlling coaching behavior were hypothesized to form a disempowering motivational climate that would relate negatively to acculturation attitudes reflecting multiculturalism.

Method

Research Design

This was a cross-sectional, quantitative study, assessing young Greek high school students’ attitudes towards migrants as a function of sport participation.

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 626 (13.88±1.01 years of age) native Greek high school students (316 girls), who were living either in Thessaloniki (a large city in Northern Greece, n = 136) or Trikala (n = 490; a medium size city in Central Greece).
Regarding family income, 42.5% reported low income (up to 1000 euros), 46.6% moderate income (between 1000 and 2000 euros), and 10.9% moderate to high income (more than 2000 euros). Regarding parental education, 22% of students had fathers who completed primary education, 40.5% secondary education, and 37.5% higher education. In addition, 12.5% of the students had mothers who completed primary education, 42.7% secondary education, and 44.8% higher education. Among all the participants, 271 (92 girls) were athletes competing in either team (n = 175) or individual sports (n = 96). The average length of sport participation was 4.13 (±2.42) years and the average length of participation in the current club was 3.38 (±2.34) years.

The study was approved by the Institution’s Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Education. Permission was granted from the local education authorities, which also informed the schools regarding this research. The school principals were then contacted by the researchers, agreed to their school’s participation, and informed the teachers. During a first visit a group meeting took place where the principal and the teachers were informed about the procedures and were asked to distribute and collect the consent forms addressed to parents. In a second visit arranged after the consent forms were collected, students completed anonymous questionnaires in their classes in the presence of a researcher who provided explanations if required. The questionnaires were numbered and participants were instructed to complete the parts of the questionnaires that corresponded to their athletic status. Completion of the questionnaires took approximately 20 min.

Instruments

**Hosts' attitudes and perceptions.** All participants completed the Host Community Acculturation Scale (HCAS; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001) which
comprises 12 items assessing two dimensions of in-group attitudes (cultural maintenance and cultural contact) and two dimensions of out-group perceptions (cultural maintenance and cultural contact). In-group attitudes reflect personal attitudes towards migrants maintaining their culture (3 items; e.g., “I don’t mind migrants maintaining their own way of living”), and interacting with the host population (3 items; e.g., “I think it is important that migrants have Greek friends”). Out-group perceptions reflect perceptions regarding migrants’ desire to maintaining their culture (3 items; e.g., “I think migrants wish to maintain their culture”), and interacting with the host population (3 items; e.g., “I think migrants wish to have Greek friends). Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Hatzigeorgiadis, Morela, Sanchez, and Elbe (2014) provided sufficient support for the psychometric integrity of the Greek version of the HCAS in adolescents through evidence of factorial validity and reliability.

Motivational climate. Actively competing athletes (n = 271) completed additional instruments assessing the team motivational climate, in particular, the Perceptions of Coach’s Emphasis on Goal Orientations questionnaire (Papaioannou, Ampatzoglou, Kalogiannis, & Sagovits, 2008), the Basic Need Satisfaction in Sport Scale (Ng, Lonsdale & Hodge, 2011), and the Controlling Coach Behaviours Scale (Bartholomew Ntoumanis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The Perceptions of Coach’s Emphasis on Goal Orientations questionnaire (PCEGO; Papaioannou, et al., 2008) was used to assess mastery climate (4 items; e.g. “The coach pays particular attention whether I improve myself in the training”), performance approach climate (4 items; e.g. “The coach insists that we should compete to prove that we are better than the others”), and performance avoidance climate (4 items; e.g. “The coach often makes me worry about how others see my
sporting abilities”). Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

The Basic Need Satisfaction in Sport Scale (BNSSS; Ng, Lonsdale & Hodge, 2011) was used to assess the satisfaction of participants concerning the psychological needs of competence (7 items; e.g. “I can overcome challenges in my sport”), relatedness (8 items; e.g. “In my sport, I feel close to other people”), and autonomy as reflected in choice (5 items; e.g. “In my sport, I get opportunities to make choices”), internal perceived locus of causality (4 items; e.g. “In my sport, I feel I am pursuing goals that are my own”) and volition (5 items; e.g. “I feel I participate in my sport willingly”). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (very true).

The Controlling Coach Behaviors Scale (CCBS; Bartholomew et al., 2010) was used to assess athletes’ perceptions of four controlling motivational strategies in sport domain. The questionnaire comprises four subscales: controlling use of rewards (4 items; e.g. “My coach tries to motivate me by promising to reward me if I do well”); negative conditional regard (4 items; e.g., “My coach is less friendly with me if I don’t make the effort to see things his/her way”); intimidation (4 items; e.g., “My coach shouts at me in front of others to make me do certain things”); and excessive personal control (3 items; e.g., “My coach tries to control what I do during my free time”). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (very true).

Data Analyses

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the factorial validity for all psychometric instruments. In addition, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were computed to estimate internal consistency. Analysis of variance was conducted to test for
differences in attitudes towards acculturation as a function of athletic status, sport type and competition level; whereas correlations were calculated to identify relationships with age, years of sport experience, years in the current team, and percentage of non-Greek players on the team. Finally, a structural equation path model was tested to investigate the degree to which an empowering and disempowering motivational climate could predict attitudes towards multiculturalism.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis testing the integrity of the factor structure for all psychometric instruments yielded satisfactory results. In particular, the CFI and RMSEA indices were as follows: for HCAS .963 and .055, for PCEGO .942 and .056, for BNSS .938 and .045, and for CCBS .938 and .055. Analyses of internal consistency also supported the reliability of the scales. For most scales Cronbach’s alpha values were satisfactory (above .70), and for three of the scales they were above .65 which is considered acceptable (DeVellis, 1991). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics and correlations for all psychometric variables are presented in Table 1. Participants scored moderately on the dimensions of the Host Community Acculturation Scale. Athletes scored relatively high on mastery climate, moderately on performance approach, and moderately to low on performance avoidance climate. They also scored moderately to moderately high on need satisfaction, and moderately low for controlling coaching behavior.

Acculturation attitudes as a function of sport participation

A MANOVA was conducted to test for differences in the dimensions of host community acculturation attitudes as a function of athletic status. A number of demographic and socio-economic variables that could potentially influence the
dependent measures were included in the analysis as independent factors: sex, family income, parents’ education, and size of city. The analysis revealed a significant multivariate effect for athletic status, $F(4, 407) = 2.40, p<.01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.

Examination of the univariate statistics revealed that (a) athletic status had a significant effect on attitudes towards migrants’ contact with the host community, $F(1, 419) = 6.66, p<.05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, with athletes scoring higher than non-athletes. No significant differences were found for attitudes towards migrants’ cultural maintenance, $F(1, 419) = 0.01, p=.98$, perceptions regarding migrants’ attitudes towards cultural maintenance, $F(1, 419) = 0.43, p=.51$, and perceptions regarding migrants’ attitudes towards contact with the host community, $F(1, 419) = 1.43, p=.23$. The mean scores are presented in Table 2.

To control for the potential effect of differences related to participants’ sport involvement a number of sport variables was considered. Correlations were calculated to test the relationships between acculturation attitudes and athletes’ characteristics: age, years of sport experience, years in the current team, and percentage of non-Greek players on the team. The analysis revealed low and non-significant relationships ($r$ ranging from -.09 to .11).

A two-way MANOVA was conducted to test for differences in the dimensions of host community acculturation as a function of sport-type and competitive level. The analysis revealed a non-significant multivariate effect for sport-type, $F(4, 209) = 1.54, p=.19$ and level, $F(8, 420) = .65, p=.73$ and a non-significant sport-type by level interaction, $F(8, 420) = 1.34, p=.22$. The mean scores for the different groups are presented in Table 2.

**Acculturation attitudes and motivational climate**
A structural equation path model was tested to investigate the degree to which an empowering and disempowering motivational climate could predict host community acculturation attitudes. Composite factors were used to represent the different subscales. Mastery climate, supportive of competence, relatedness, and autonomy formed a latent factor for empowering motivational climate. Performance approach and performance avoidance climate, along with controlling coaching behavior formed a latent factor for disempowering motivational climate. Finally, in-group attitudes towards cultural maintenance, in-group attitudes towards contact, out-group attitudes towards cultural maintenance, and out-group attitudes towards contact, formed a latent factor for the host community acculturation attitudes. The two latent motivational climate factors were hypothesized to predict acculturation attitudes. The analysis revealed a good fit for the hypothesized model (CFI = .92, RMSEA = .06). A positive significant path was revealed between empowering motivational climate and acculturation attitudes, whereas a negative significant path was revealed between disempowering motivational climate and acculturation attitudes. The model predicted 9% of the acculturation attitudes variance. The structural model is presented in Figure 1.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the role of sport for the acculturation process and, particularly, the perspective of the host population regarding migrants’ acculturation. To that end, the attitudes and perceptions of the host population as a function of sport participation were explored. In addition, for those participating in sport, the role of the motivational climate in relation to acculturation attitudes was investigated. Overall, our findings suggest that participation in organized sport may be linked to attitudes favoring an adaptive
acculturation attitude, but this also depends on the climate wherein the activities take place. These results can contribute to the discussion about social missions through sport, in particular with regard to cultural competencies (Ryba et al., 2016; Ryba et al., 2017).

The results showed that adolescents participating in sport scored higher than those not participating on in-group contact, thus showing more accepting attitudes for the development of interaction between migrant and host populations. Previous research regarding intercultural relations between Greek students and students with a migrant background revealed that Greek students’ attitudes towards migrants were negatively biased (Dimakos, Spinthourakis, & Tasiopoulou, 2011). Contact among members of different cultural groups may reduce negative intergroup attitudes and enhance mutual acceptance (Amir, 1969) especially when pursuing common goals (Brown, Vivian, & Hewstone, 1999). Sport, a field that provides both contact with and the pursuit of shared goals, seems to offer a context for fruitful contact, thus supporting Niessen’s (2000) suggestions that sport is suitable for reinforcing the respect for cultural diversity and overcoming existing prejudices. Sport is also a context in which cooperation and competition take place. Cooperation within a team and the feeling of unity when pursuing common goals may enhance the understanding of similarities between people from different cultures. Morela et al. (2013) in a sample of young migrant athletes reported that perceptions of team cohesion were related to integrative strategies. Engaging in competition teaches important values that youngsters can benefit from when the emphasis is not placed on winning but on the enjoyment of the competition (Hellandsig, 1998) and on striving for achievement with respect for the sport and the people (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). In such a context, competition may teach participants that cultural characteristics do not really matter in
attaining one’s, or a team’s, goal, thus fostering the development of links within, but also outside, the sport context. Developing positive attitudes towards migrants is significant because it facilitates interaction, but also because migrants will seek interaction more comfortably when they perceive that hosts are open for such interaction. Yet, as identified in the introduction, sport that includes cooperation and the enjoyment of competition, may lead to desirable outcomes when the environment is appropriate.

Importantly, valuable findings emerged regarding the structure of the sport motivational climate. An empowering motivational climate, characterized by a mastery climate, supportive of autonomy, competence and relatedness, was positively linked to what is described by Berry (2010) as multiculturalism attitudes, favoring cultural maintenance and cultural contact between migrant and host populations from the host perspective. In contrast, a disempowering climate characterized by a performance climate and controlling coaching behavior was negatively related to multiculturalism attitudes. The results coincide with previous findings conducted with migrant populations that identified links between factors of the sport climate, and in particular mastery climate and autonomy supportive coaching, and ethnic-cultural identity in young migrant athletes (Elbe et al., 2016). Papaioannou, Zourbanos, Krommidas and Ampatzoglou (2012) argued for the beneficial influence of a mastery motivational climate for both the individuals and society. Previous research has revealed positive links between a motivational climate and socio-moral attitudes within (Kavussanu, 2006; Miller et al., 2004) and outside (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) sport. A sport climate that places emphasis on learning and improvement, thus promoting a more controllable sense of competence, provides options and decision making roles to support autonomy, and encourages fruitful cooperation and
meaningful interpersonal relationships, enhances the quality of the sport experience
and may help develop socially constructive attitudes, including multiculturalism. In
contrast, an climate fostering social comparisons and placing emphasis on outcomes
(e.g. winning), accompanied by a controlling interpersonal coaching style, may
overemphasize rivalry and values related to status (Lee, Whitehead, Ntoumanis, &
Hatzigeorgiadis, 2008), thus introducing conflict and undermining socially facilitating
outcomes.

The important role of the sport environment has also been investigated with
regard to the acculturation of transnational athletes and applying qualitative
methodology (Schinke, McGannon, Battochio, & Wells, 2013; Ryba, Haapanen,
Mosek, & Ng, 2012). Ryba, Stambulova and Ronkainen (2016) outlined the ways in
which the psychological responses to cultural transition are embedded within
relational contexts in the sport environment. Their study acknowledged the
importance of the coach in creating a caring environment that helped the athlete’s
cultural adaptation through learning and co-construction of shared experiences and
norms. It also highlighted the teammates’ importance for making the athlete feel
secure. These findings are in line with the associations identified in the present study
between an empowering climate, characterized by mastery orientations and supportive
of the need for relatedness, and acculturation attitudes.

There are two limitations that need to be addressed with regard to this study.
First, it has to be acknowledged that the magnitude of the prediction was relatively
low, as only 9% of the multiculturalism variance was explained; however, its practical
significance may be important. Considering that an abundance of economic, social,
and geographical dynamics may influence acculturation attitudes, even a small effect
arising within the universally widespread sport context can be a useful starting point
for the development of targeted actions and policies aiming at utilizing sport for the
achievement of socially crucial goals, particularly in culturally diverse and conflictual
contemporary societies. Second, it should be stressed that the study adopted a cross-
sectional design which cannot support causal inferences.

**Future directions and implications**

Research to increase the strength of the predictions identified in the present
investigation is warranted, as our model predicted only a limited amount of
multiculturalism attitudes. Such research would enhance our confidence about the
meaningful role that sport plays towards migrants’ integration. In line with the
abovementioned limitation of the study’s cross-sectional design, longitudinal,
evidence-based research investigating youth sport interventions which provide the
chance for multicultural contact in the sport arena, within a climate promoting
mastery orientations, and satisfying individuals’ basic psychological needs, are
warranted. A further line of research should investigate why an empowering climate
may lead to socially valued acculturation outcomes. Brunelle, Danish and Forneris
(2007) reported that participation in a sport-based community service program
enhanced adolescents’ levels of empathic concern and social responsibility. Moreover,
Kolovelonis et al. (2015) found positive relationships between empowering climate,
empathy and cooperating skills. Sport in an empowering climate may be linked to the
development of such skills, which may in turn relate to multiculturalism attitudes.

The findings yield useful insights on the perspective of the host population
regarding migrants’ acculturation and the role of sporting environments in relation to
multiculturalism. The climate of the sport experience is shaped primarily by the
coach. An empowering motivational climate that emphasizes skill development and
cooperation, where the athletes’ basic needs for autonomy, competence and
relatedness are met, could enhance positive interactions across individuals of different
ethnic origin and could facilitate the adoption of positive attitudes towards
acculturation. On the contrary, a performance oriented motivational climate, based on
comparative standards, emphasizing superiority, combined with a controlling
interpersonal coaching style seems detrimental for the promotion of acceptance and
mutual understanding regarding the goals of effective acculturation. Coaches can be
educated and trained in creating appropriate climates through programs such as
Empowering Coaching (Duda & Appleton, 2016) developed through the Promoting
Adolescents Physical Activity project (Duda, 2013), thus maximizing the potential of
sport as an integrative agent.

Finally, based on the above propositions and in relation to the particular
cultural context of the study some suggestions are worth mentioning. The Greek
context shows a lack of ethnic clubs which is not the case in other countries like
Spain, for example (Elbe et al., 2016). Ethnic clubs are sometimes more attractive for
migrants because they offer opportunities to strengthen their ethnic identity and
because migrants sometimes feel more comfortable in such clubs. This lack of ethnic
clubs in Greece means that those migrants who want to participate in sport have to
join sport teams dominated by members of the host culture; this could mean that some
migrants choose not to participate in sports at all. A suggestion therefore could be to
increase the availability of attractive sport environments where migrant adolescents
would choose and desire to participate in. These sport environments, however, would
also need to be attractive for members of the host culture so that they could offer
opportunities for intercultural contact. Educating sport organizations and sport policy
makers on which kind of sport environments facilitate positive acculturation could
ensure that the goals for acculturation are reached. This education and the following
implementation would also benefit coaches and athletes. Placing an emphasis on an empowering climate, for example, is ideal for the promotion of socio-moral values, such as cooperation, fair-play, empathy, altruism, understanding, and acceptance of differences (Gagné, 2003; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), and in line with the ISSP statements for considering and developing cultural competence within sport context (Ryba, et al., 2013). Moreover, the promotion of in-club and out-of-club social activities with cultural content where adolescents could satisfy their needs for autonomy and relatedness would further assist the development of links favoring the goals of shared acculturation (Ryba, 2009; Schinke et al., 2013). Finally, a challenging suggestion could be made in relation to the Greek context and the seemingly failure of intercultural schools to reach the objectives of acculturation through contact. Installing physical activity centers in these schools could eventually enhance their attractiveness and the possibilities for contact. Even if parents from the host society do not wish to send their children to such schools during the day, after school recreational sport activities open for both migrants and members of the host society, within an empowering climate fostering life-skills (Kolovelonis, et al., 2015), would provide a suitable platform for interaction between different groups.

Conclusion

The present study is to our knowledge the first quantitative study focusing on the role of the host population regarding migrant’s integration within the literature examining the potential of sport as an agent for acculturation. The findings suggest that sport is a suitable context to promote positive acculturation and that an empowering motivational climate that emphasizes skill development and cooperation, where the athletes’ basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met, could facilitate positive attitudes towards acculturation in members of the host culture.
This evidence encourages further research exploring additional sport attributes that can positively impact this important social encounter and promote the social mission of sport. Furthermore, this study lays the foundation for educating coaches, sport organizations and sport policy makers on which sport environmental factors are decisive when wanting to use sport as a tool to promote integration of migrants.
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Table 1

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, and correlations.

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<th>Descriptive statistics</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host Community Acculturation Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In-group cultural maintenance</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In-group contact</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Out-group cultural maintenance</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Out-group contact</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivational climate</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance approach</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance avoidance</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Need satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy – choice</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy – locus of causality</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy – volition</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>1.21</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Controlling coaching behaviour</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of rewards</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative conditional regard</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intimidation</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive personal control</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Mean scores for acculturation attitudes for the different groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-group</th>
<th>Outgroup</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultural maintenance</td>
<td>contact</td>
<td>cultural maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>3.55±1.08</td>
<td>3.27±0.56</td>
<td>3.60±0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-athletes</td>
<td>3.59±1.05</td>
<td>3.18±0.57</td>
<td>3.62±0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual sports</td>
<td>3.74±0.94</td>
<td>3.29±0.52</td>
<td>3.53±0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team sports</td>
<td>3.51±1.12</td>
<td>3.27±0.58</td>
<td>3.66±0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>3.53±1.11</td>
<td>3.25±0.56</td>
<td>3.63±0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>3.66±0.97</td>
<td>3.17±0.54</td>
<td>3.61±0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Path model describing the relationships between empowering/disempowering climate and acculturation attitudes and perceptions.
Highlights

- Athletes showed more accepting attitudes towards multicultural contact than non-athletes.
- Empowering athletic climate was positively linked to multiculturalism attitudes.
- Disempowering athletic climate was negatively linked to multiculturalism attitudes.
- Youth sports may induce desirable integration outcomes when the sport environment is appropriate.