

# Cultural and Sporting Characteristics of Countries Participating in Sports Competitions

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## Abstract

*Sports competitions represent not only a form of physical expression and performance but also a field of intense intercultural interaction. When athletes, officials, and fans from different countries come together, a complex panorama of cultural exchange emerges. Sports competitions highlight not only athletic performance and competition but also facilitate dialogue and understanding among the cultures of the participating countries.*

*Teams from regional/territorial or participating countries in competitions bring together athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds, making the management of cultural differences crucial for effective communication during games, training, and competitions.*

*By supporting and encouraging dialogue and respect among athletes /nations/cultures, competitions become bridges between cultures, nations, and races.*

*Interethnic Education is crucial as it fosters discourse among pupils hailing from various nations, ethnicities, and faiths, thereby enriching sustainable and inclusive communities.*

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## 1. Introduction

Interculturality is a dynamic process of a social nature in which participants are positively encouraged to be aware of their interdependence. Authentic dialogue between cultures demands mutual knowledge and coexistence between people and groups from different cultures capable of assuming the wealth and tensions inherent to this social dynamic. It is about welcoming a different person as just different, neither inferior nor superior. Interculturality implies different cultures, which introduces the multiculturalism notion.

Multiculturalism is the coexistence of diverse cultures in the same territory or context. A society where people from different cultures coexist, regardless of their chosen way of life is a multicultural society (Barabas, 2014).

Modern society's characteristics are diversity and a strong trend towards equality. One significant aspect of this trend is granting regional autonomy, which involves different countries in economic, social, and political macrostructures. An

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example of this unity in diversity is the European Union, which has been instrumental in promoting cooperation across the continent. This approach not only promotes unity but also enables countries to address common challenges collectively while retaining their unique characteristics.

Each culture has distinct and identifiable traits that define its members (Halualani, Nakayama, 2023). However, the reality is that cultures are often diverse and complex, and individuals within a culture can have different experiences, values, and perceptions, even if they belong to the same cultural community. This internal diversity is important to consider in the study of interculturality, as it can influence the understanding and interpretation of interactions between different cultures.

There is a growing trend towards social equality, where individuals are distinguished by their abilities and personal growth, rather than their ethnicity or financial status. Due to these premises, education at all levels is considered the primary means of ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens.

Physical education as part of general education should maintain its important place in the curriculum, despite the various sedentary free time spending opportunities available nowadays. Participation in physical and sports activities is known to reduce tensions and promote better group relationships more than any other activity. This is the path to integration, and group cohesion and should be supported by encouraging participation by all decision-makers.

Sport is a way of bringing people together, reducing social imbalances, promoting equality among citizens, and fostering habits that encourage social integration (Molina, 2009). Team sports, especially, promote solidarity among individuals. Additionally, sport is a key element in ensuring a high quality of life and promoting active, participatory use of leisure time in modern society.

Participation in such competitions and sports demonstrations can bring benefits to all participants: in addition to maintaining good physical condition and improving self-image and self-confidence, as well as personal satisfaction (Ciomag, 2023).

## **2. Content**

Sports competitions represent not only a form of physical expression and performance but also a field of intense intercultural interaction. When athletes, officials, and fans from different countries come together, a complex panorama of cultural exchange emerges. Sports competitions highlight not only athletic performance and competition but also facilitate dialogue and understanding among the cultures of the participating countries.

### *Nonverbal Language*

The gestures and expressions of athletes—joy, enthusiasm, disappointment, satisfaction, courage, emotions, fear, shyness—vary significantly depending on



culture, and interpreting them requires an understanding of the specific cultural context.

Nonverbal cues, such as eye contact, body language, and hand signals, play a significant role in on-field communication. Team members often develop an understanding of each other's nonverbal signals over time.

Nonverbal language plays a crucial role in sports, contributing to communication, teamwork, strategy, and even psychological aspects of the game. Using nonverbal communication in sports can lead to improved teamwork, coordination, and overall performance.

#### *Rituals and Traditions*

The opening and closing ceremonies of sports events (European, world, university, Olympics) serve as occasions to showcase the traditions and customs of the host countries: traditional dances, artistic presentations, unique performances, and glimpses of the culture and history of the native country.

These rituals and traditions can range from pre-game routines to post-game celebrations, and they contribute to the overall experience and camaraderie of athletes.

These rituals and traditions contribute to the rich tapestry of sports culture, creating a sense of continuity, shared identity, and emotional connection among athletes, coaches, and fans alike.

#### *Team Communication*

Teams from regional/territorial or participating countries in competitions bring together athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds, making the management of cultural differences crucial for effective communication during games, training, and competitions.

Many teams use technology, such as communication headsets or hand signals, to convey information quickly and discreetly during games. Video analysis tools are also used to review and discuss game footage.

Before a game, coaches may emphasize specific strategies, goals, or areas of focus. After the game, there's often a debriefing session to discuss performance, analyze mistakes, and plan for improvement.

Effective communication is a dynamic process that evolves as teams develop greater cohesion and understanding. It's not only about transmitting information but also about building a shared understanding and a strong sense of unity among team members.



### *Expression of Emotions*

Athletes, as well as their supporters, manifest differently when they achieve victory or face defeat. Some cultures are characterized by modesty, while others express their enthusiasm without reservation. Therefore, the interpretations and perceptions of spectators can vary.

The emotional aspect adds depth and richness to the experience of sports.

The emotional aspect of sports adds a human dimension to the competition, making it relatable and compelling for participants and observers alike. Whether it's the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, or the resilience in the face of challenges, emotions are an integral part of the sports experience.

### *Religion - Embracing and Supporting Competition*

Competitions around the world are often accompanied by religious manifestations. Both athletes and their supporters may wear clothing specific to their religion and bring images or statues of their favorite saints or gods to the stadium or arena.

Muslim women, for example, often run on tracks with their heads and bodies covered, respecting their religious beliefs.

In Arab countries, during Ramadan, a sacred month for Islam, sporting activities have special hours to allow believers to pray and observe fasting.

They also have the freedom to pray on the field after a goal or victory.

In countries with a strong Christian history, there may be religious expressions during sporting events.

In countries like Italy and Spain, religious ceremonies or prayers may take place. International sports competitions are not just moments of athletic excellence but also arenas for subtle cultural exchanges. Intercultural communication in such circumstances highlights sensitivity, openness, and adaptability to the diversity of cultural expressions.

By supporting and encouraging dialogue and respect among athletes/nations/cultures, competitions become bridges between cultures, nations, and races.

**USA** - Offers a multitude of popular sports with established competitions and teams: the Super Bowl (American football), the World Series (baseball), and NBA Finals (basketball), which attract and engage large audiences. All these competitions are supported and animated by concerts, shows, and various forms of entertainment. The country's sports culture is often influenced by a competitive spirit and a strong emphasis on athleticism.

**Japan**- a country renowned for numerous traditions in many aspects of life, including sports. It identifies with traditional sports such as sumo and kendo. The 2021 Olympic Games, hosted by Japan, were impressive with ceremonies and events that highlighted Japanese culture. Before the start of competitions, Japanese athletes begin and end with a bow to their opponents and the audience. Japanese athletes are often known for their discipline and respect for the sport and opponents.



**Brazil** - football is known worldwide in this country, being a national passion and an integral part of the culture. The country comes alive with events like the Copa America and the FIFA World Cup, championships of exceptional importance. Brazil is renowned for its football culture, producing some of the greatest players in history. The country's playing style is often associated with flair, creativity, and skill.

Football championships unfold in a passionate and enthusiastic atmosphere, and during match breaks, the atmosphere is colored with samba and traditional dances. Brazilian culture is celebrated for its vibrant festivals, such as Carnival, which often reflects in the enthusiasm and energy of Brazilian athletes

**Spain** - beloved sports in the country include football and basketball, with matches supported by fanfare and songs performed by supporters. The national basketball team is recognized for its fast and technical playing style.

**Germany** - Recognized for its values of discipline and efficiency, attributes that can be observed in the beloved sports of this nation: football and motorsports. The Bundesliga (German football league) is known for its high level of competition. German athletes are known for their methodical and disciplined approach to training and competition. Matches are supported by fans who prepare with elaborate songs and choreography.

**Italy** - Football is recognized as the king of sports, with matches characterized by tension and dominated by an atmosphere of passion and emotion. Cycling and Formula 1 are also highly appreciated and loved in the country.

Italian cyclists have achieved success in prestigious events like the Giro d'Italia.

**France** - Football, rugby, and tennis are the most popular sports. Matches are accompanied by a festive atmosphere, and rugby is recognized for displays of power, strength, agility, and coordination. The 1998 FIFA World Cup was hosted in France. The French gastronomic culture, appreciated and recognized worldwide, leaves its mark on the elegance and organizational style of sports events.

**India** - Cricket is practically a religion in this country, and one of the most important cricket tournaments globally is the Indian Premier League (IPL). Another sport with a rich tradition and high popularity is field hockey. Matches are watched by millions and are accompanied by traditional dances and songs. In certain regions of the country, other sports such as yoga and bullfighting are also practiced.

**Australia** - is a country with a robust sports culture marked by competitiveness and team spirit. Given its geographical location, Australia has a strong tradition in outdoor and water sports, such as surfing, swimming, and cricket. Australian rules football and rugby are highly popular sports in the country. All these sports contribute to the country's sporting identity.

**China** - Individual sports are favored, such as gymnastics, table tennis, and weightlifting, but not exclusively. The strong support from the country's leadership is a direction that has yielded remarkable results across various sports.

E-sports and online gaming have exploded in popularity in China. The country hosts major e-sports tournaments, and professional gaming has become a lucrative career for many Chinese players.



Table tennis is one of China's most successful and popular sports. The country has consistently dominated international competitions, producing numerous world champions.

Badminton is another sport where China has excelled. Chinese badminton players consistently perform well in international tournaments, winning numerous medals at the Olympic Games and World Championships.

The famous "ping pong diplomacy" in the early 1970s played a role in thawing relations between China and the United States. Table tennis matches between Chinese and American players helped pave the way for improved diplomatic ties.

**United Kingdom-** Football is extremely popular in this country, with the Premier League being one of the most-watched and competitive leagues globally. Additionally, sports such as kayaking, canoeing, rowing, and sailing have a long tradition and have often been dominated by British athletes.

Football is a hugely popular sport in the UK it has deep cultural roots, and matches often bring communities together. Also, horseracing is a popular and historic sport here

**New Zealand** - The national sport, highly cherished, is rugby, which begins with the Haka, a traditional Maori dance, a ceremonial performance aimed at intimidating opponents and boosting the team's morale.

New Zealand hosts and participates in various multi-sport events, including the Coast to Coast race, which involves running, cycling, and kayaking, showcasing the country's commitment to multi-discipline sports.

Rugby is a major part of New Zealand's sporting culture. The national rugby team, the All Blacks, is one of the most successful and iconic rugby teams globally.

**Russia** - During the Soviet era, sports were a source of national pride and a demonstration of the country's power. This tradition has persisted to the present day, with a focus on winter sports, gymnastics, and football.

Russia has a strong tradition in artistic and precision sports, particularly in gymnastics and figure skating. Russian athletes often excel in these disciplines on the international stage.

**South Africa** - Rugby is an extremely popular sport here, with the national team, the Springboks, playing a significant role in the country's history, including the post-apartheid period.

Traditional dances and cultural celebrations often find expression in sports events. Spectators and athletes may incorporate cultural elements into their performances, adding a unique flair to competitions.

The history of South Africa, particularly the struggle against apartheid, has influenced the role of sports as a tool for social change and reconciliation. Iconic moments, such as Nelson Mandela's support for the Springboks during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, symbolize the power of sports in fostering unity.

**South Korea** - It is a global leader in the electronic gaming and e-sports industry. Games such as StarCraft and League of Legends have garnered a large fan



base. The culture of e-sports has become so strong that professional players are often treated like celebrities, and e-sports competitions attract millions of viewers.

South Korea has a vibrant sporting culture with a rich history and a deep connection to the country's identity.

**Kenya** - Renowned for its excellence in athletics, particularly in long-distance events. Athletes from this country have excelled globally in marathons and cross-country running. Their successes have roots in their lifestyle, rigorous training, and the natural geography that favors such disciplines. Kenyan athletes dominate in long-distance running events, such as marathons. The country's success is often attributed to factors like high-altitude training and a culture that values running as a way of life.

**Norway** - A country with a cold climate conducive to winter sports, renowned for its achievements in cross-country skiing and ski jumping. It has remarkable results at the Winter Olympics. Cross-country skiing and ski jumping are disciplines in which Norwegians excel, and these activities are deeply ingrained in their winter culture.

Norway's sports culture is influenced by the country's close connection to nature. Outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, and fishing are popular, reflecting a broader cultural appreciation for the natural environment.

Norway has been a proponent of gender equality in sports. Women's sports receive significant attention and support, with successful female athletes becoming role models for aspiring young athletes.

**Romania**- Intercultural communication in the context of sports in Romania involves the interaction and exchange of information between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds within the sporting environment. Romania has a rich sporting history, with a particular emphasis on sports like football, gymnastics, and handball. We have also a special sport called oina.

Romanian athletes and teams often participate in international competitions, and we have many important places and titles.

We have sonorous names like Nadia Comăneci, Gică Hagi, Ilie Năstase, Leonard Doroftei, Simona Halep and many others.

International sports competitions, such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup, or World Championships, provide a unique platform for athletes from diverse cultures to meet and interact. This promotes understanding and respect among various communities.

Sports teams and coaches come from various countries and cultures, bringing with them unique training methods, strategies, and perspectives. This leads to a diversity of approaches and practices in the world of sports.

### 3. Conclusions

Organizing sports events that incorporate diverse cultural elements can create a sense of community and promote diversity. Such festivals may include performances of traditional dances, music, culinary exhibitions, and more.



Sport is a socio-cultural phenomenon that can attract millions of spectators from different nations and cultures. It is far above other socio-political and economic events considered much more important for the life of countries. The sporting phenomenon relies on the symbolism of human motor skills that, regardless of cultural and social differences, are understandable by anyone. The best example of a major global sporting event is the Olympic Games. The huge interest of billions of people of all races, ages, and social positions, transforms the Games into an absolute global and democratic event (Pop, 2013). A sports event is usually associated with values and attitudes such as cooperation, dialogue, respect for rules, responsibility, fairness, or creativity.

Sports should be crucial in bringing people together and promoting social integration. It should provide a source of enjoyment, contribute to our overall health and well-being (Diaz, 2009), and encourage respect for diversity, including different nationalities and ethnicities. In sports as an educative or leisure activity, diversity creates a more inclusive environment that supports people with various backgrounds, shapes, and fitness levels to participate and compete. A sustainable coexistence also implies responsibility for environmental protection and respect for quality of life.

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