

BUILDING RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH SPORTS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DIALECT PROJECTS

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1. Introduction

We live in a constantly evolving world where technological advancements and natural disasters shape the ways individuals act and react within broader social transformations. These societal challenges have an intergenerational impact, presenting significant research opportunities for academic and scientific communities while also highlighting the necessity of research-based evidence for policymakers. To foster a more cohesive and resilient society, it is essential to prioritize youth education, instilling universal humanitarian values such as resilience, inclusiveness, and social equality.

For the past five years, the National Centre for Social Research has participated in three research projects coordinated by ActionAid Hellas, aimed at contributing to a more resilient society for children and adolescents in Europe through sports. Today, the need for positive paradigms and best practices that promote a more sustainable and inclusive society—rooted in humanistic and democratic values—is imperative not only in Europe but worldwide.

In the sections that follow, we build on the experiences gained over the past five years and propose policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders. These include government ministries, social

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actors operating at the intersection of formal and informal sports education, and the broader educational ecosystem, along with the family and societal structures that shape contemporary youth.

To support our analysis, we have drawn on a range of primary and secondary sources, including relevant literature, policy guidelines, and resources (documents, videos, and podcasts) from international organizations such as the EU, UN, and UNESCO. Additionally, we synthesize the outcomes of the three projects, focusing on policy recommendations and implications for a more coherent and inclusive European society. This synthesis incorporates insights from a round table discussion¹ involving representatives from educational authorities, ministries, academic institutions, physical education teachers, trainers specializing in the football3 methodology, and researchers associated with the projects. These recommendations reflect the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders at the national level.

For a more holistic approach, we also integrate policy outcomes from the two previous project, project DIALECT3², which collected empirical data through a roundtable discussion on combating youth radicalization. This discussion emphasized the role of community-building football, combined with media and digital literacy skills, in fostering resilience among European youth. In addition to leveraging insights from prior research, we include the Roadmap for Public Authorities and Guidelines for the Policy Decision-Making Process,³—a public policy recommendation report that

1. The transferability workshop was held in Athens on 12th December 2024, within the frame of DIALECT3 “ADdressIng intersectionAL stEreotypes, building sChool communities of Tolerance through physical education”, WP5: – Dissemination and Sustainability, spreading the message of “Football for ALL-Changing the Game” addressing racism and intersectional stereotypes at secondary schools through physical education”

2. DIALECT3 “Combating youth raDicalizAtion: Building communities of toLEranCe combining fooTball with media and digital literacy” within the frame of WP5: Dissemination, Sustainability and Exploitation, spreading the message of enhancing adolescents’ resilience to extremist views and attitudes related to sports, through media and digital literacy in the context of football3 activities. The Erasmus project (101050782 Grant Agreement) has been implemented during 2023-2024.

3. The first project entitled DIALECT1: Disrupting polarisAtion: buiLding

offers guidance on building tolerant communities and disrupting polarization among European youth.

The conceptual axes that cross the three projects seek to promote and facilitate the building of all-inclusive tolerant communities, through football and more specifically through football³. This chapter draws on insights from three projects that applied the football³⁴ methodology—an innovative approach that uses sports to promote inclusion, dialogue, and conflict resolution.

The first project DIALECT1 sought to use football values to empower young people in the fight against polarization, racism, and xenophobia in European countries. The second project, DIALECT2, placed greater emphasis on implementing training activities and awareness campaigns aimed at enhancing adolescents' resilience to extremist views and attitudes related to sports, integrating media and digital literacy within the context of football³ activities. The third and most recent project, DIALECT3⁵, capitalized on previous experiences and applied them to the national context, addressing the untapped potential of physical education professionals as agents of inclusive education. It specifically aimed to combat structural racism and intolerance in lower secondary schools in Greece, adopting an intersectional approach to fostering a comprehensive strategy for preventing and countering discrimination.

communitiEs of toleranCe through football was funded by Justice Programme & Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, Grant Agreement number: 848445, implemented during 2020-2022, by a Consortium of partners in four European countries, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Serbia and coordinated by Action Aid Hellas.

4. More information about football³ methodology can be found in previous chapter of the collective volume as well in the reports of DIALECT1, DIALECT2 and DIALECT3 projects. Information also available at <https://dialectproject.eu/dialect/project/>

5. The project DIALECT 3: “ADressIng intersectionAL stEreotypes, building sChool communities of Tolerance through physical education” is co-financed by the EU (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, EU GRANT AGREEMENT, Project 101084968 — DIALECT3 — CERV-2022 EQUAL). The project is managed and coordinated by ACTION AID HELLAS (AAH), while the National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) together with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) - Department of Physical Education are partners. To see more about DIALECT3 Project <https://dialectproject.eu/dialect-3/project/>

Building on the policy research results of the three consecutive DIALECT projects, this chapter presents a unified set of policy recommendations. Our goal is to outline a strategic pathway toward a more inclusive, resilient, and socially cohesive environment for young people in Greece and across Europe.

2. From research to policy: the DIALECT approach to combating discrimination and fostering social inclusion”

The existing literature underscores the persistent challenge of political polarization in Europe, which fosters an environment conducive to racism, discrimination, and intolerance. Social exclusion significantly contributes to these phenomena, with populist movements playing a key role in amplifying intolerance, particularly among youth. These groups exploit both physical and digital spaces to recruit and radicalize individuals, creating a sense of belonging to far-right affiliates who might otherwise experience social isolation. Digital platforms, especially far-right blogs, have facilitated the dissemination of extremist ideologies by leveraging fear and violence, often intertwined with religious narratives.

Conversely, sports, particularly football, serve as both a medium for political activism and a vehicle for fostering diversity and equality. Educational interventions within the football ecosystem aim to raise awareness of discrimination and integrate anti-discriminatory practices into organizational structures. The DIALECT projects contribute to these efforts by offering policy recommendations based on empirical findings.

2.1. DIALECT1: Fostering inclusive communities through sports

The DIALECT1 project developed a roadmap with policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of public authorities in fostering inclusive and tolerant communities through football-

based initiatives. This roadmap serves as an initial framework for countering intolerance and xenophobia through sports. Sustainable change requires long-term commitment, clear political will, and institutional mobilization at the local government level.

A related initiative, UNESCO's "Roadmap against Racism and Discrimination," emphasizes the necessity of action-oriented policies to combat rising discriminatory trends. Aligning with this, DIALECT1 underscores the importance of education grounded in solidarity and social cohesion, coupled with cultural shifts that promote gender equality and acceptance of diversity from early childhood. The football3 methodology is highlighted as a tool for fostering cultural collaboration and tolerance.

Research findings indicate that public authorities and local governments play a crucial role in driving change. However, structural weaknesses hinder their ability to promote inclusivity effectively. The key challenges identified include:

- › Bureaucratic barriers: State bureaucracy complicates and delays cooperative initiatives between local governments and institutions. The severity varies depending on a country's degree of centralization.
- › Weak stakeholder networks: Insufficient and unsustainable networking among key stakeholders at local and national levels impedes the implementation of innovative methodologies like football3.
- › Limited and unstable funding: A lack of sustained financial support for initiatives addressing intolerance and xenophobia—especially in sports—reflects low governmental prioritization and the absence of long-term social cohesion strategies.
- › Community mistrust: Disadvantaged minority populations, often facing discrimination and poverty, exhibit higher levels of mistrust and lower engagement in community-driven initiatives.
- › Shortage of public sports facilities: The scarcity of freely accessible sports facilities, particularly in Italy and Greece, significantly hinders youth development and the implementation of inclusion-driven sports programs.

2.2. *DIALECT2: Countering extremism through digital literacy and sports*

The rapid digitalization of European societies, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced new challenges in addressing discrimination and intolerance. Digital literacy (Nascimbeni and Vosloo, 2019) is increasingly critical, yet significant gaps leave young people vulnerable to online radicalization and exposure to extremist narratives.

Radicalization leading to violent extremism remains a pressing concern recognized by the United Nations and the European Union. Extremist ideologies—whether religious, ethnic, or political—threaten social cohesion by promoting exclusionary beliefs. While security measures are necessary for counter-extremism, long-term prevention strategies require fostering inclusivity, tolerance, and digital resilience.

DIALECT2 explores the evolving nature of digital literacy, shifting from a purely technical focus to a holistic approach that integrates cultural awareness and critical thinking. The project aims to empower youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate digital landscapes critically and responsibly.

Through four targeted workshops, DIALECT2 contributed to the development of anti-radicalization practices and media literacy interventions for football academies, focusing on:

- › Strengthening youth resilience against extremist ideologies with participatory action plans.
- › Encouraging inclusive digital engagement and democratic participation.
- › Addressing barriers to sports participation, especially for migrant and refugee youth.
- › Creating media literacy strategies to counter stereotypes and discrimination in sports.

The role of digital influencers was also critically examined, recognizing their potential to both challenge and reinforce stereotypes. Collaborative initiatives between media outlets and sports organizations were proposed to combat racism and

discrimination through targeted media campaigns. The integration of inclusive methodologies such as football3 was identified as a promising approach, particularly in amateur sports settings.

2.3. DIALECT3: Embedding inclusion in education and the role of physical education

DIALECT3 builds upon the football3 methodology by embedding it within the Greek lower secondary school curriculum to promote inclusive education and address systemic racism. With an intersectional focus, DIALECT3 targets migrant, refugee, and Roma adolescents, fostering their inclusion through community-building strategies in school settings.

The project has trained physical education professionals and university students in diversity-sensitive educational practices, equipping them with the skills to implement football3 methodologies effectively. By establishing mixed-football teams in four regions of Greece, DIALECT3 has contributed to enhancing multicultural understanding and fostering a sense of belonging among adolescents aged 12-15.

The key outcomes that can serve for policy implications are summarized below:

- › Football3 as a social integration tool: The project demonstrated the effectiveness of football3 in fostering key life skills, leadership, and intercultural dialogue.
- › Empowering educators: Training programs for physical education professionals have enhanced their capacity to address discrimination and promote inclusivity.
- › Promoting gender equality: football3 has been instrumental in encouraging equal participation and challenging gender stereotypes in sports.
- › Advancing democratic participation: The project encourages youth engagement in community-building, reinforcing democratic values through sports.

The DIALECT projects collectively highlight the intersection between sports, digital literacy, and policy interventions in fostering

inclusive societies. While structural barriers persist, evidence-based policy recommendations emphasize the importance of sustained commitment from public authorities, educational institutions, and civil society actors. By fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and ensuring long-term financial investment in inclusion-driven initiatives, policymakers can enhance social cohesion and counter rising trends of discrimination and extremism in Europe.

3. Shaping inclusive policies: strategic recommendations from the dialect projects

The policy recommendations presented in this section build on insights gained from the three consecutive DIALECT projects — DIALECT1, DIALECT2, and DIALECT3. These initiatives have explored the integration of the Football3 methodology in fostering inclusion, particularly among vulnerable social groups such as children and adolescents, including adolescents of migrant background. The projects align with broader European Union (EU) strategies aimed at enhancing digital literacy, fostering critical thinking, and promoting democratic values. The EU's commitment to tackling intolerance and discrimination is reflected in initiatives such as the White Paper on the Future of Europe (2017), the Paris Declaration (2015), the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020–2025), and the EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online and related UNESCO documents (2015). These frameworks provide also a foundation for the policy proposals developed through the DIALECT projects, emphasizing the role of education, sports, and digital resilience in fostering social inclusion.

3.1. Integrating Football3 into public policy: DIALECT1 Recommendations

The DIALECT1 project has developed structured policy guidelines to institutionalize Football3 as a tool for social inclusion. The recommendations focus on:

- › Institutional Support and Bureaucratic Efficiency: Public authorities must streamline administrative procedures to facilitate the adoption of Football3, overcoming bureaucratic barriers that hinder implementation.
- › Stakeholder Collaboration and Networking: Strengthening partnerships between local governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations can enhance the visibility and impact of Football3.
- › Integration into School Curricula: Football3 should be incorporated into school education as a pedagogical tool to promote tolerance and intercultural dialogue.
- › Monitoring and Evaluation: A systematic framework is needed to assess the impact of Football3 on social cohesion and diversity.
- › Capacity Building: Public authorities should invest in training teachers, civil servants, and community leaders to implement Football3 effectively.
- › Trust-Building Measures: Confidence-building initiatives should be introduced to foster trust between local institutions and communities, particularly among disadvantaged groups.
- › Sustainable Funding: Long-term financial support must be secured to ensure the sustainability of Football3 initiatives.

By addressing these key areas, Football3 can be institutionalized as a mechanism for fostering inclusive communities through sports-driven social interventions.

3.2. Strengthening media literacy and digital resilience:

DIALECT2 recommendations

The DIALECT2 project highlights the role of media literacy in countering stereotypes and promoting inclusivity in sports. The key policy recommendations include:

- › Integration of Media Literacy in Education: Digital literacy should be embedded in school curricula to equip young people with critical thinking skills to navigate online spaces responsibly.

- › Promotion of Positive Media Narratives: Public authorities should incentivize media outlets to highlight success stories that showcase sports as a driver of social inclusion.
- › Support for Trainers and Coaches: Coaches and sports mediators should receive specialized training in inclusive methodologies and digital literacy.
- › Recognition of Sports as a Universal Right: Policies should formalize equal access to sports opportunities for all social groups.
- › Influencer Engagement: Adolescents should be educated about the impact of social media influencers on sports narratives and digital culture.
- › Cross-Sector Partnerships: Synergies between public and private actors can enhance anti-radicalization efforts and promote inclusive digital practices.
- › Awareness Campaigns on Digital Literacy: Targeted initiatives should raise awareness among adolescents about the importance of digital literacy and media consumption.
- › Transnational Cooperation and Sporting Events: Cross-border collaborations should leverage football as a platform for fostering unity and diversity.

These measures aim to create a media landscape that supports diversity, combats discrimination, and fosters an inclusive sports culture.

3.3. Institutionalizing inclusion in physical education:

DIALECT3 Recommendations

DIALECT3 focuses on embedding inclusion-oriented methodologies within the Greek physical education curriculum. The policy recommendations include:

- › Prioritizing Values and Competencies: Physical education should emphasize respect, tolerance, and equity alongside practical sports skills.
- › Recognizing PE as a Pillar of Inclusion: Physical education

should be elevated in educational policies as a primary vehicle for fostering social inclusion.

- › Leveraging Best Practices: Successful initiatives, such as training students in Football3, should be expanded and adapted to different local contexts.
- › Extending PE Hours and Cross-Disciplinary Approaches: Schools should allocate more time for PE activities and integrate them with subjects like social studies and arts.
- › Addressing Gender Inequalities: Equal access to sports facilities and resources must be ensured for all students, regardless of gender.
- › Infrastructure Investments: Public school sports infrastructure should be modernized, particularly in underserved areas.
- › Early Interventions: Inclusive sports programs should be introduced at the primary education level to instill values of teamwork and diversity from an early age.
- › Teacher Training and Professional Development: PE teachers should receive continuous training on diversity-sensitive education.
- › Encouraging Non-Verbal Communication in Sports: Activities that foster collaboration and inclusivity should be integrated into PE programs.
- › Supporting Refugee Students: Special initiatives should ensure that refugee children have access to sports programs that aid their social integration.
- › Strengthening School-Community Partnerships: Local organizations, parents, and schools should collaborate on inclusive sports initiatives.

By institutionalizing inclusive sports education, DIALECT3 contributes to shaping a more equitable and diverse learning environment.

Policy recommendations raised from DIALECT projects

The DIALECT projects collectively emphasize the role of education, sports, and digital literacy in fostering inclusive societies. The overarching policy recommendations include:

- › Embedding inclusion in education: Schools should incorporate sports and digital literacy as fundamental tools for social cohesion.
- › Strengthening institutional support: Governments and local authorities should facilitate the adoption of inclusive methodologies through policy frameworks.
- › Enhancing collaboration across sectors: Synergies between public institutions, civil society, and private stakeholders can drive impactful initiatives.
- › Securing long-term funding: Sustained financial investment is essential to support inclusion-driven policies in education and sports.
- › Encouraging Media literacy and positive narratives: Digital platforms should be leveraged to counteract discriminatory content and promote social inclusion.

4. Concluding remarks

Physical education and digital literacy are powerful instruments for fostering social inclusion and resilience. However, their full potential remains constrained by structural barriers, lack of teacher training, and insufficient intersectoral collaboration. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions can unlock their transformative impact on education and community cohesion.

While improving infrastructure and accessibility is essential, combating racism and intersectional discrimination within education systems requires a deeper cultural shift. Sports, particularly through methodologies like Football3, provide a unique opportunity to challenge prejudices and foster mutual respect among young people.

Higher education institutions also have a role to play in advancing inclusive policies by integrating diversity-sensitive curricula and training future educators in equity-focused methodologies. The expansion of the DIALECT3 philosophy into teacher training programs can contribute to a long-term shift in how inclusion is embedded in school and community settings.

The adoption of the new National Physical Education Curriculum in Greece, with its emphasis on inclusivity, represents a step in the right direction. However, effective implementation will require ongoing professional development for PE teachers, systematic dissemination of information, and structured collaboration between families, schools, and governmental institutions.

By fostering a culture of inclusivity and promoting policies that support tolerance and equity, physical education can serve as a key driver of social cohesion. Investing in well-structured, inclusion-focused sports programs ensures that future generations grow up with the values of respect, diversity, and active citizenship —laying the foundation for a more resilient and united society.

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