
The Council of Europe as a Normative Actor? Assessing the Promotion of Inclusion and Equality through European Sport Policy

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Résumé

Sport and physical education, while often celebrated as vehicles for personal and social virtue, have historically mirrored and reproduced societal inequalities, discriminations, and exclusions. This paper examines the role of the Council of Europe (CoE) in addressing these challenges and in shaping sport as a tool for social inclusion within the European context. As one of the oldest institutional actors in European sport politics, the CoE has developed a substantial policy framework – including the European Sports Charter (1975/1992), conventions, recommendations, and the work of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS). Yet, its specific contributions to fostering inclusion and equality remain underexplored. This contribution asks: How has the CoE, through its norms, instruments, and programmes, worked to mitigate inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, nationality, or socio-economic status, and to promote sport as a space for inclusion?

The paper is structured in three parts. First, it outlines the CoE's historical and contemporary role in shaping European sport as a cultural and political practice, with a focus on its mission to uphold human rights, democracy, and social cohesion. Second, it analyses key CoE instruments – such as Conventions, recommendations and programmes - assessing their design, implementation, and effectiveness in combating discrimination. Third, it evaluates the CoE's positioning and collaborative dynamics within the broader European multi-level governance of sport, considering its relationship with the European Union, member states, and sports organisations.

Drawing on document analysis and policy evaluation, this contribution aims to provide a systematic assessment of the CoE's efforts to align sport with principles of equality and inclusion. It concludes by reflecting on the CoE's achievements and potential as a normative actor in transforming sport into a tool for social inclusion.

Mots-Clés: Council of Europe, sport policy, inclusion, equality, European Sports Charter, evolution of sport governance

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