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## **‘Intelligent investment’? Welsh sport policy and the (in)visibility of ‘race’**

### **Authors**

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In this paper we draw on research conducted in Wales to consider reasons for participation and non-participation in sport and physical activity among Black and minoritised ethnic (BME) groups. This study exposes the challenge at the heart of sports policy in relation to ‘race’ and ethnicity in Wales that, if not addressed, may lead to the marginalisation of attempts to increase BME participation in sport and physical activity despite good intent. It points to a disjuncture between supply and demand and leads us to question the extent to which such policies resonate with the interests, needs and lived experiences of people from different BME communities in Wales. We draw on testimonies of policy-makers and implementers, as well as individuals from various BME communities in five regions of Wales, to consider the extent to which national sports policy encourages strategies to increase participation among different ethnic groups. We suggest that increasing participation among BME communities and other ‘hard-to-reach’ groups must go beyond accounting for the *supply* aspects of sport and physical activity to consider more critically the plethora of barriers and exclusions facing many BME communities. We conclude by arguing that for racial inequalities to be reduced, and promises such as ‘sport for all’ to be realised, then the analysis of policy needs to be related to broader relations of power in the culture of both sport and society.

**Key words:** Black and minoritised ethnic (BME); Race; Sport participation; Sport policy; Wales

## Introduction

Sport policy at a national level has become increasingly politicised, used by successive governments as a tool to achieve a variety of both sport and non-sport policy goals related to education, health, social inclusion/exclusion, crime prevention, community development and building national identity (Carrington et al., 2016; Meir and Fletcher, 2017; Piggitt & Hart, 2017; Lindsey, 2018). Within the United Kingdom (UK) increasing devolution has enabled national governments, such as the Welsh government, to create their own sport and leisure policies, which are contingent on regional priorities (Sabbe et al., 2019). Sport Wales is the government agency responsible for distributing National Lottery and Welsh government funding, and for advising the Welsh government on matters relating to sport and physical activity. Sport Wales' vision is 'to unite a proud sporting nation, where every child is hooked on sport for life and Wales is a Nation of Champions' (Sport Wales, 2012). This vision reflects the broad, multifaceted goals of Welsh sports policy that encompass national pride and unity, as well as the health and educational benefits of sport, for children in particular.

The proportion of people from Black and minoritised ethnic groups (BME<sup>1</sup>) living in Wales is markedly lower than for the UK as a whole, yet they still amount to approximately 145,800 out of a population of just over 3.1 million (StatsWales, 2019). They are most prominent in the major cities: e.g., Cardiff (16.1%), Swansea (9.5%) and Newport (8.6%). In recent years, small numbers of people from BME groups have also become established in some areas that had previously had very few living there, for instance on the North Wales coast. 'Race'<sup>2</sup> is one of nine 'protected characteristics' under the UK Equality Act (2010) so Sport Wales has a statutory duty to consider racial diversity and equality issues within their policies and practices. In this paper we draw on research conducted on behalf of Sport Wales to consider reasons for participation and non-participation in sport and physical activity among BME communities. We discuss how competing policy priorities may lead to the marginalisation of attempts to increase BME participation in sport and physical activity in a country like Wales, which has a relatively small proportion of BME communities.

Sport Wales has a dual policy agenda: to increase participation in sport and physical activity (particularly with young people), and to achieve more elite success on the international stage (Sport Wales, 2012). This is similar to that of a variety of other sports councils in western countries, reflecting a longstanding concern with elite sporting achievement (Green, 2006; Green & Collins, 2008; Grix & Phillpotts, 2011) running alongside a desire to increase participation in active leisure. Over recent years Wales can show success among its elite performances. When calculated in relation to medals won per population, Wales was ranked

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<sup>1</sup> Black and minoritised ethnic (BME) is a popular acronym used in policy circles in the UK, used to denote the diverse positions and identities of racialised ethnic groups not included under the label of White British. We acknowledge that the term includes much internal diversity..

<sup>2</sup> Warmington's (2009) *scare quotes* surrounding much use of the term is to acknowledge and problematise its everyday use in rudimentary and inchoate vocabularies, and prompt continued critical challenges to racism drawing on a more complex and political lexicon.

number two in the medal table for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, second only to New Zealand (Abbandonato, 2016) and won a record 36 medals at the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games (BBC, 2018). The other policy priority, increasing participation, has proven to be more challenging for some groups than others. The goal of increasing BME participation fits within this agenda, however the low population of people from BME communities in Wales suggests that increasing BME participation in sport and physical activity will have a very small impact on the wider policy goal of increasing participation figures more broadly. It is easy to see how, in an age of austerity and prolonged reductions in public spending, resources might be directed to areas where the biggest increases in participation can be achieved. Unfortunately, as we discuss below, in the case of Wales, this may limit the investment in initiatives to increase participation in sport and physical activity among people from BME backgrounds.

Many of the reasons for non-participation in sport and physical activity among people from BME communities are similar to those experienced by other groups: low incomes, limited time, limited facilities and limited mobility (Hylton et al., 2015; Widdop et al., 2018). However, such considerations may disproportionately affect people from BME communities, who may experience additional factors, including racism, language barriers, and cultural and religious restrictions (Fletcher et al., 2014; Ratna, 2017; Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018). If participation is to be increased among BME communities in Wales, an appreciation of these barriers and investment to overcome them will be crucial. Many other groups would also benefit from such investment in areas like sporting facilities and transport. However, as we argue in this paper, low levels of public funding<sup>3</sup> may inhibit the ability of policy makers and implementers to tackle these and other barriers, especially when the policy 'win' in terms of the numbers participating may be relatively low compared to strategies for increasing participation among other groups; women and girls for instance. The complexity of understanding and tackling non-participation in sport and physical activity across a wide diversity of different BME communities, with different levels of engagement and prior levels of involvement, different interests and different barriers, makes the task even more challenging. It is understandable, to some extent then, why BME groups often find themselves marginalised by policy. As we go on to argue, however, the case for changing this perception is not only pragmatic, but one of social justice.

We begin the paper with a discussion of in the goals of sports policy in Wales as represented in six key documents: Sport Wales' 'A Vision for Sport in Wales' (2012), 'Community Sports Strategy 2012-2020' (2012) and 'Strategic Equality Plan' 2012-2016 (2013) and 2016-2020 (2016), and the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Climbing Higher: Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity' (2005) and 'Creating an Active Wales' (2009). In particular, we highlight the (in)visibility of 'race' and ethnicity within each document. We then draw on interviews with policy makers and implementers, and individuals from various BME communities in Wales to

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the research the 'austerity' policies of the UK government preoccupied the minds of policymakers, and they have now been in place for a decade.

consider the extent to which national sport policy both encourages strategies to increase participation, and resonates with the interests, needs and lived experiences of people within different BME communities in Wales. We argue that 'race' and ethnicity are low priorities in sports policy in Wales due, among other things, to the low numbers of people from BME communities, the complexity and intensity of resources needed to tackle non-participation, and limited understanding of the varying needs and diversity of people from different BME communities within Wales.

### **'Race', ethnicity and sports policy in Wales**

While the UK government provides overall direction, the Welsh Assembly Government has devolved responsibility for many areas affecting the daily life of people in Wales. Two key policy documents set out the government's vision and goals for sport and physical activity: 'Climbing Higher' (2005) and 'Creating an Active Wales' (2009). Climbing Higher's 20 year strategy for sport and physical activity makes no mention of 'race' and ethnicity, and therefore sets no specific objectives for encouraging participation within BME communities. Similarly, in setting out the government's 'ambition for a healthier future for all' (p.1), 'Creating an Active Wales' contains only two very short mentions of 'race' and ethnicity in 66 pages: one in relation to a list of 'issues' cited under a section on 'Inequities' (p.19); and one action to use evidence from a pilot community regeneration project to inform policy and practice in targeting BME groups (p.23). The Welsh Assembly Government retains the language of 'Sport for All' within this policy document and states a commitment to take action to reduce some barriers to participation, such as cost, child care and lack of self-belief (pp.48-51), but there seems to be an assumption that BME groups will be reached via other interventions aimed at women/girls and those who are generally 'disadvantaged'.

A further two documents set out Sport Wales' strategy for sport and physical activity: 'A Vision for Sport for Wales' (2012) and 'Community Sport Strategy' (2012-20). In 'A Vision for Sport', the organisation's vision is described as 'unashamedly bold' (p.10), and underscores the importance of sport for all people. This inclusive vision necessarily incorporates people from BME communities, but does not mention them specifically. The only aspect of this document which refers, albeit obliquely, to 'race' and ethnicity is the statement that '[t]he provision of activities is not always conducive to people from a particular cultural or religious background' (p.18). The 'Community Sport Strategy' does not mention 'race' and ethnicity at all. There is mention of 'hard to reach groups' but primary focus is given to tackling poverty. Neither policy document identifies the existence of lower participation levels among people from a BME background as a strategic concern. Both documents mention the need to make 'intelligent investments' to prioritise scarce resources. The lack of explicit mention of 'race' and ethnicity within these documents suggests, therefore, that targeting BME communities *does not* represent such an 'intelligent investment', a point we return to below.

The first document where Sport Wales identified BME groups as a strategic priority was in its 'Strategic Equality Plan (2012-16)' (2013). In addition to the attention given to participation by women and girls and people with a disability, this strategy sought to increase participation in all aspects of sport among BME communities. These objectives demonstrated a much greater level of nuance and clearer focus on diversity. In relation to 'race' and ethnicity, the strategy sets out four clear goals to: (1) increase the number of children and young people taking part in regular sport and physical activity from a BME background; (2) increase the number of people from a BME background who are members of a sports club; (3) increase the numbers of coaches and volunteers from a BME background; and (4) increase investment into BME specific clubs, groups and sessions.

Unfortunately, its next iteration, 'Strategic Equality Plan (2016-2020)' shows a marked shift in focus, whereby objectives are no longer focused on protected characteristics and target groups. Instead, the organisation has a broader and more all-encompassing aim to 'lead the development of sport for all communities' (p.7). Failure to name 'race' in these outward facing, public documents is, in our view, demonstrative of a backward step. The plan does cite our research conducted into participation and non-participation in sport amongst BME groups in Wales which underpins this paper (Long et al, 2015), but the equality objectives are focused around 'achieving the greatest impact' (p.18), mirroring language used in previous policy documents around 'intelligent investment', rather than the language of social justice apparent in its predecessor. Although Sport Wales states a continued commitment to meeting its required duties with respect to all protected characteristics it states that it is likely that most attention will be paid to poverty and Welsh language, as these are areas where the greatest impact (meaning increased participation) may be achieved. As suggested above, some people from a BME background may well be reached by this approach, but only by virtue of them occupying socio-economically disadvantaged positions. We argue that the lower visibility given to 'race' and ethnicity as strategic/policy priorities will likely mean that BME communities lose out in the battle for scarce resources.

The policy documents discussed here suggest that, while an important statutory consideration, 'race' and ethnicity are by no means priorities. However, it is worth emphasising that, although the Assembly Government and Sport Wales may set the direction of sports policy and indicate areas that will be prioritised in terms of funding, they do not directly make provision. Researchers have highlighted the gap between national government sports policy and the delivery by National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and often largely volunteer sports clubs (May et al., 2013; Rowe, 2015, 2017; Harris & Houlihan, 2016). In the case of Wales, NGBs, local sports clubs, councils and community groups may all be involved in operationalising and delivering sports policy. The extent to which such organisations (and, even more so, individuals within those organisations) understand or are even aware of national sports policy will vary considerably. Devolving responsibility for issues of racial inequality away from government by effectively placing equality at the discretion of individual

sports organisations and clubs poses a number of significant questions about whether such organisations really want racial equality and whether they are motivated and equipped to achieve it (Carrington et al., 2016). If neither the Assembly Government nor Sport Wales prioritise BME communities within sports policy and strategies for development, and those charged with trying to implement policy also interpret the importance of this issue differently, increasing participation among BME groups and overcoming racial inequality within sport and physical activity will be a long-term failure.

## Methods

The research underpinning this paper was designed to help Sport Wales ‘understand the reasons for non-participation’, help enhance ‘access for protected groups’, allow Sport Wales to be positive in ‘challenging partners on their contribution to providing opportunities for all’ and assist Sport Wales in driving ‘a culture of inclusiveness both internally and in the wider sporting world’ (Sport Wales Strategic Equality Plan 2012-2016, 2013). Rather than gathering statistics about participation, Sport Wales suggested the goal should be to inform policy by offering insight into daily family life among the various BME communities in Wales and their participation in sport and physical activity. Following discussion with Sport Wales, ‘sport’ was taken to encompass physical recreation, exercise and fitness, and to involve all dimensions of participation: playing, coaching, officiating, administration and spectating. It was therefore, interpreted to resemble *leisure*. Following our guidance, Sport Wales was keen for the research to be exploratory and qualitative. Representatives from Sport Wales afforded us the autonomy to undertake this research as we felt would best achieve the identified goals. We were encouraged to be critical and we were buoyed by this as it suggested Sport Wales was committed to learning from the findings, rather than, as much previous literature attests, being motivated by a mandatory box-ticking exercise (Long and Spracklen, 2011b).

Following the example of the project on poverty and BME communities in Wales that was conducted for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Holtom et al., 2013) we focused our enquiries ethnically and geographically, using five different ethnic classifications in five areas. In terms of ethnicity the groups selected were:

- Indian – the largest BME group in Wales;
- Polish – the largest European migrant group in Wales, enjoying some of the privileges of whiteness, but still ‘othered’;
- Chinese – the third largest BME group (excluding Irish) in Wales and commonly overlooked in sport research;
- African-Caribbean – a combination of census categories designed to encompass what are known to be large variations in sporting terms between ‘mixed-race’ groups and newer migrants from Africa;

- Other BME groups – an open category that allowed the incorporation of voices that are not usually accounted for.

The geographical areas included the three major urban centres of South Wales (Cardiff, Swansea and Newport), which all have relatively high concentrations of BME groups. To complement them in the north, Wrexham and part of Denbighshire on the North Wales Coast (Rhyl and Prestatyn) were added. Wrexham has a growing number of residents from BME communities, particularly more recent European migrants. The communities of the North Wales coast are more dispersed and have lower proportions of BME groups living there, thus being quite distinct from the other areas.

The investigations took the form of: an examination of published material; one-to-one interviews with adults (age 16+) from BME communities; focus groups with a younger cohort (recruited via schools and sports clubs); interviews with providers; and a case study of policy and provision. In each field area we used a system of repeated referrals, starting with our initial network of contacts, to identify people from the various ethnic groups who were prepared to discuss their engagement with, and attitudes towards sport and physical activity.

The one-to-one interview sample comprised 21 men and 22 women, aged 18-68 who had been living in Wales for periods ranging from five months to over 40 years. Although some were born in Wales, the majority were not. Younger people were involved in the research through small focus groups (between 4-8 participants) conducted in each field area. This approach involved 54 young people who variously described themselves as: South African, Libyan, Somali, Swahili, Arab, Persian, Tibetan, British Asian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bengali, Sri Lankan, Tamil, Chinese, Singaporean, Filipino, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Polish, Scottish Turk, Russian or Portuguese. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in a venue chosen by the research participants and included cafes, sport and community centres, schools and a Dojo and lasted between 45 minutes and two and a half hours.

Following Sport Wales' priorities, the research areas and topics we addressed broadly related to: engagement with and experiences of participation; family and other support networks; personal identity; and aspirations.

## **Findings**

The insights gained into (non-)participation in sport and physical activity inevitably threw light onto the strategies and practices designed to increase engagement.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper we are concentrating on findings that relate to competing policy priorities and the challenges of understanding needs and interests of diverse BME communities for those with responsibility for developing sport and physical activity among these groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Details of which are available in Long et al. (2015).



### ***Diversity within BME communities***

The challenge of increasing participation among BME groups is inevitably complicated by the variety inherent in the concept 'BME communities'. These communities show wide variation in relation to many important considerations, such as current engagement in sport, interest in different activities, level of integration into the local community, and practical requirements (such as sex-segregated facilities for Muslim women and girls) (Channon et al., 2015; Matzani et al., 2017; Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018). To this list can be added variations related to migrant status, gender, language and financial situation. Consequently, strategies and practical interventions aimed at increasing participation among BME communities need to be nuanced to take account of these wide variations, requiring a diversity of approaches and associated complexity in terms of resources and supporting structures.

Within the policy documents we analysed, 'BME communities' are often treated homogeneously and there is little recognition of the wide variation between and within groups. A striking finding of the research was that although in some parts of the country (such as North Wales) the overall BME community was small in total numbers, there was still considerable diversity. Very often the differences between groups can be large, and policy and practical interventions need to be sensitive to these inter- and intra-group differences, as this South African female explained:

*Now when we come to African people we are from the continent of Africa, but it's a very big continent and the language is not universal like English. So even with this group... One thing we have in common is that we are all black and we are all from the African continent, but when we're under the same roof, people start to sit around tables with the people they speak the same language with. So the point I'm making is, even though our commonalities are our African-ness and our blackness, it ends there, we are still separate people.*

One challenge is understanding differences in cultural attitudes to sport and physical activity, and how this may vary for different members of different BME communities. Within the traveller community, for example, it was suggested that traditional gender roles may deter women and girls from being physically active outside the home (Marcus, 2019), as this gypsy male told us:

*They're [traveller girls] just not interested in sports. Maybe out of 1000 travelling girls one of them would be interested in sports. They're more interested in – Travelling girls, when they're thirteen, fourteen years of age, they'll clean up, and they'll do their nails or get their hair done or that – they're just not interested.*

Attitudes may be linked to cultural and religious views on the body, which may limit some people's ability to take part in sport and physical activity in public spaces (Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018). Such attitudes vary within communities, where perceptions related to

continuity and change may be different for those from different generations (Fletcher, 2019), but can act as a powerful inhibitor to take part in physical activity, as explained by this teenage respondent:

*...the issue of revealing your body, that kind of links in with Tamils. Tamils don't really expect the girls to reveal their bodies. I mean, for example, a picture was posted on Facebook of me and my team, and one of my aunties saw it and she was... she pointed out, she was like 'Oh, she is in her netball kit, she's wearing a skirt.' My mum said 'Yes.' My auntie was like 'Oh, OK', because it was not something they would usually see. [Tamil female]*

The task is made increasingly difficult by the variation between and within different communities. The varied needs, attitudes, interests and challenges that will need to be addressed for them to be able to take part in activities makes tackling low participation in sport and physical activity amongst BME communities all the more difficult.

### **Barriers to participation**

Many of the factors limiting participation, such as money, time and family commitments are not unique to BME groups, but these may be exacerbated by others that are (Fletcher, 2019). Our findings show that challenges can arise in terms of lifestyle and competing commitments, which also vary between different groups. For asylum seekers, individuals who may be particularly vulnerable and who could benefit from the positive experiences of sport and physical activity, accessing such provision can be particularly difficult (Lewis, 2015; Spracklen et al., 2015). Surprisingly, asylum seekers within this study did not talk about past trauma, uncertainty about status, lack of security, temporary accommodation or getting messed around by bureaucracy as major barriers to participation (Dwyer et al., 2016), rather they focused more on poverty and its effects, as this Kenyan female stated:

*With all my experience as an asylum seeker, I've tried my best to do any sport that I can do, basically anything possible which is free, because I don't have any cash. I don't have any money given to me. I can't work. It's really hard with two children without money and to support myself and those children into sport, and to encourage them to do that ... A lot of these sports that I do I would love to do with the children, but I need money, so I can't access them as much as I would like because I don't have cash.*

Conversely, for migrants with more secure status, patterns of work (as is the case for other ethnic groups) can affect their ability to take part in organised activities. Those from BME groups who wish to take part in sport and join clubs may be frustrated by the nature of the work they undertake (commonly restaurant and factory workers, and taxi drivers for example) meaning that opportunities are restricted:

*I do shift work. It becomes very difficult for you to be able to be committed, even to play, to say 'OK, I will join a club where I can play tennis or play cricket'. It becomes very difficult because you don't have that consistency... Because of the work patterns it's so difficult to be able to meet and be able to do things.*  
[Zimbabwean male]

In this respect, our findings reinforced those from other studies which suggest that some people from a BME background prefer to take part in more informal sport and physical activity among their immediate contacts, who are commonly people from their own ethnic group (Burdsey, 2006, 2009; Fletcher and Walle, 2015; Spracklen et al., 2015). This may compromise idealised notions of the inclusive and integrative potential of sport and physical activity, but it also reflects feelings of isolation felt by many BME groups (ibid). Despite identifying a sense of isolation, many older participants in particular continued to exhibit a desire to take part in activities with people from their own ethnic group:

*The Chinese community are quite active in Cardiff. They have got an elderly group which is funded by charities, and they have got a venue, a church hall, and they try to do exercise there. I don't know why, but ethnic minorities like to stay together. They don't want to be mixing ...Maybe it's the language barrier.* [Chinese female]

This view is replicated elsewhere. For example, Burdsey (2006, 2009), Fletcher and Walle (2015) and Barrett (2019) have examined the emergence and growth of Asian football and cricket teams and leagues in the UK, Norway and America respectively, arguing that they act as symbols of community and cultural resistance, facilitate cultural integration and provide spaces for resisting racism and circumventing the normalisation of whiteness in mainstream sporting structures.

Identifying barriers and subsequently working towards eradicating them is clearly a vital social justice project, though we must not forget that many people from BME communities already take part in sport and physical activity. We need to be careful to distinguish between representation in sport and processes of social inclusion. Indeed, many of our participants who were already engaged in sport and physical activity reported being subjected to racism and/or generally feeling unwelcome, racialised and 'Othered' in mainly White (Welsh) spaces (Fletcher and Hylton, 2016, 2018). This Black African female's testimony refers to her uneasiness with the 'White gaze' in the context of swimming:

*What I've noticed most of the time is that when I go swimming in most places, everybody stops and stares at me... I don't know what they're thinking. I'll be thinking to myself, 'OK, are they thinking I can't swim, or are they thinking 'What's that Black woman doing here?'' It really does affect me, but that doesn't stop me.*

There was a view among respondents from different ethnic groups that this kind of racism often goes unnoticed or may even be tolerated by those in charge of organising sport, making

it very difficult for people who experience such abuse to challenge it. This pattern is not isolated to the study of sport. As Frankenberg (1993) previously noted, meaningful conversations with White people about 'race' are muted due to a denial of seeing 'race' and/or the polite distancing of the topic. Early studies of whiteness asserted that White people do not see themselves as 'raced', yet enjoy privileges as a result of their whiteness. These ideas have been supplemented by the unconscious defence of White privilege through colourblindness, learned ignorance, meritocracies and broader ideals of level playing fields, and notions of racism's demise emerging in post-race discourses (Gillborn, 2008; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Fletcher and Hylton, 2016, 2018).

Of course, barriers to participation vary for different people within different BME communities, ranging from practical issues with timing, to financial constraints, language barriers and racism. However, we also found a lack of clarity over who is actually responsible for ensuring policy goals and social justice agendas are being met. One of the key challenges to implementing sports policy is thus, the gap between funders/strategists (such as Sport Wales in this case) and those charged with making things happen on the ground (such as NGBs and sports clubs) (May et al. 2013; Harris & Houlihan, 2016).

### ***Participation vs. accessibility***

It is not surprising that many sports organisations, while identifying the need to help develop sporting involvement among BME communities, do not place great emphasis upon it (Carrington et al., 2016). As discussed above, engaging BME groups is only one of several challenges they are expected to address and it is rarely the one most important to the funding partners who, while perhaps it should not be the case, continue to judge success largely on overall participation figures and the competitive success of teams/individuals. However, the value of participation statistics is limited, as they are unable to provide insight into the experiences of those individuals (Hylton & Chakrabarty, 2011). Thus, it is important to shift the emphasis from judging the success of interventions purely by attendance, which is a necessary condition, to judging success by the quality of experience and outcomes (Rowe, 2015, 2017). Those who are keen to assist BME communities are not helped by the primacy of policy discourses which reify increasing participation, understandable though that is, over anything else. As one NGB officer noted, staff are already at capacity trying to meet existing demands:

*... so historically it has been difficult to justify the additional resource that is required to make a difference in BME communities and with other minority groups... It is far easier (and takes less resource) to develop [sport] in the middle class areas of Wales where parents are wanting their children to experience a wide range of activities and are willing to get involved to support clubs.*

As he observed, the Board of his organisation now recognised that *'growing the game'* is not the same as making it accessible:

*Had we just wanted to purely chase numbers we would develop [sport] in all the nice areas of Wales where the parents want their boys and girls to have a whole range of different experiences; be it the arts, sport or culture. When you actually state an objective of making [sport] accessible to everyone in Wales that means something very different, you have to do the real hard work in terms of 'difficult' communities; sometimes working with disability groups, areas of poverty, areas of ethnicity [sic] and that's more difficult work to sustain.*

There is thus, some recognition of the incompatibility between different policy goals to, on the one hand, increase participation and, on the other, make sport and physical activity more accessible and inclusive. Set against a backdrop of public sector austerity and scarce resources, tackling low participation amongst BME communities and making sport truly accessible and inclusive becomes both challenging and, perhaps, even hard to justify against more quantifiable targets (Lindsey, 2018; Widdop et al., 2018). This is exacerbated by different understandings of what it means for sport and physical activity to be 'accessible' for different users. Accessibility is clearly multi-faceted. The assumption often made by providers is that if provision (e.g., facilities, coaching sessions) is in place in geographically accessible locations, at low or no cost, and at times to suit potential participants, that people will come (Meir and Fletcher, 2017; Richardson and Fletcher, 2018). And, if they do not, it is because they do not want to. Clearly, this view is simplistic and does not ensure accessibility to all, especially those currently not involved, as it does not consider other, more intangible, factors that enable or constrain participation, as discussed above. As one NGB officer explained, *'the biggest thing we've learnt is that we assume we're accessible, but we're not'*. Another respondent suggested that some successful sports clubs and their local communities *'might as well be on different planets'*.

The providers we interviewed accepted that their perception of their organisation's inclusivity and the perception of those they seek to include may be quite different. But there was also a tendency to dismiss their responsibility for this, attributing it rather to misapprehension. Providers saw the secret of success lying in *'think[ing] a bit more'* about *'making people welcome'*, and this may necessitate not being too prescriptive about the terms of participation – i.e., thinking *beyond* 'sport' (Fletcher et al., 2017). Sport Wales, as a national sports council, concentrates predominantly on 'sport', which is played and delivered through NGBs in formal facilities, clubs and leagues. While many from BME groups value this kind of participation, many others prefer activities more associated with leisure which may be beyond the more structured provision imagined by Sport Wales and its partners (Hylton et al., 2015; Stodolska, 2018). Evidence from this research suggests that women in particular prefer non-competitive activities, and those they can participate in informally and at their own pace, as this Nigerian female stated:

*Women from Zimbabwe, oh, they love Zumba. There was one time that they all came, they were just telling each other about Zumba, and I know most of them actually have registered for the dancing classes. Apart from that they are into... jogging or running... on their own.*

Accessibility is also related to confidence, and to having implicit knowledge of how a system works and having the cultural capital to really engage with sport (Rowe, 2015). Some people from BME communities, particularly recent migrants, lack this knowledge and may be prevented from accessing and taking part in sport and physical activity (Spracklen et al., 2015), as this Zimbabwean male explained in relation to wanting to join a club:

*You can't just walk in and say 'I want to play darts, I want to play pool, or I want to play...' whatever game they are playing. It's the confidence bit that comes into play – to say 'OK, who do I approach to become a member?'*

Issues related to accessibility, therefore, require careful consideration to enable those from different BME communities to feel confident and able to take part in activities including, but not limited to, those organised by formal clubs. Despite the availability of opportunities, some people from BME communities may find it difficult, if not impossible, to access these opportunities. This consideration requires providers to look beyond the opportunities on offer as a de facto symbol of accessibility/inclusivity to consider the broader barriers and exclusions at play.

## **Discussion**

The reasons for lower participation in sport and physical activity among BME communities are multiple, complex and, as Sport Wales recognised, not well understood by policy makers and many sports organisations, which inevitably limits the extent of positive change. Commissioning this research in itself suggests preparedness to address the needs and experiences of BME communities in Wales. The research was explicitly mentioned in Sport Wales' second Equality Plan (2016-20), and Sport Wales invested in four new development postsworking with BME communities in different parts of the country. So it was disappointing that only one of these appointments came from a BME community and the Equality Plan also stepped away from an earlier specific focus on BME communities, subsumed now under the heading of 'diversity', and contains no direct targets for improving participation and experiences amongst these groups. National sports councils, like Sport Wales, are clearly aware of some of the challenges related to engaging BME communities in sport and physical activity, yet appear reluctant to make tackling these issues a key policy priority. Failure to name 'race' and ethnicity in its policy documents is indicative of this.

This is perhaps not surprising given the low proportion of the overall Welsh population currently identified as BME. Sport Wales is a public sector organisation, responsible for distributing public money, and must therefore demonstrate that money is being spent wisely

and in the public interest (Lindsey, 2018). As pointed out by NGBs in this study, it is much easier and more cost-effective to invest in well-established clubs in 'good' (we might read here to mean 'White') areas in order to drive up participation figures. Given the pressure to show quantifiable results, these 'quick' and arguably 'bigger' wins are a more 'intelligent investment' and are, therefore, more likely to be followed-up. Consequently, although there may be some willingness to understand the experiences of BME communities and look for ways to increase their engagement with physical activity, achieving this may not get near the top of a list of priorities for many sporting organisations.

These challenges are exacerbated by the gap that frequently exists between formulating policy and making provision (Hoerber, 2007; Rowe, 2015, 2017; Carrington et al., 2016). Sports councils, like Sport Wales, set policy and guide practice through allocation of funding, issuing formal guidance, advice, and setting sporting agendas. However, they do not deliver and rarely engage directly with end users, particularly 'hard-to-reach' groups not already physically active. They are reliant on partner organisations such as NGBs, local councils, clubs and community groups to do the 'hands on' work. Crucially, these partners themselves have varying levels of understanding of and engagement with, BME communities.

Indeed, in this research project we were frequently surprised by the limited knowledge of and contact many organisations had with BME communities in their local area. In a number of cases it seemed that representatives of these organisations (who were often senior development/strategy officers) thought that engaging with BME communities, where there had previously been very little, would be disproportionately labour and resource intensive. It goes without saying that meaningful change is unlikely (is perhaps an impossibility) while ever those views go unchallenged.

Beyond core issues like acting to challenge racism, the diversity we have highlighted suggests that Sport Wales might be better advised to concentrate on the *how* rather than the *what*: How can the needs of these disparate groups be addressed? Hence, our suggestions to support BME equality forums and the use of cultural intermediaries so that different views are brought to the decision-making table.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals a disjuncture at the heart of (Welsh) sports policy in relation to 'race' and ethnicity. As one of the nine 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act (2010), public sector organisations like Sport Wales have a statutory duty to consider 'race' and ethnicity within their strategies and practices. However, this does not always translate into targeted policy initiatives and associated investment. That 'race' and ethnicity are unnamed explains why processes of whiteness and White privilege are able to operate in plain sight, which is partly why they are so entrenched and pernicious.

What does seem to characterise most, if not all, sport development interventions, is their lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning to explain why the intervention is designed the way it is and the mechanisms it will engage to achieve its stated policy outcomes (Rowe, 2017; Lindsey, 2018). As a result, despite a stated commitment to proactively managing diversity and capitalising on and celebrating difference, many organisations limit their roles to complying with equality legislation and challenging overt discrimination (Kirton & Greene, 2015). This falls short of actively tackling the many complex challenges facing BME communities, including white privilege, and consequently is likely to have only limited impact.

That said, there is a growing recognition among policy makers and others that a progressive policy framework for eradicating racial abuse and inequalities in sport represents the start of the process rather than being an end in itself. Long and Spracklen (2011a) argue that if racisms are to be eradicated from sport those involved in the process need to have a nuanced understanding of the racism(s) to be contested. Their argument is based on the assumption that ‘anti-racism is essentially reactive’ because ‘it is defined by the racism it opposes’ (p.7). In other words, if the commitment to racial equality is to be more than a form of paying lip-service, then it is also necessary to engage with the deep-rooted cultural relations of power that sustain racially exclusive practices. Without such a shift, then the danger is that the campaign for racial equality in sport and physical activity may become little more than a managerial response by bureaucratic organisations compelled by law to show they have policies on equality in place, but understanding little and doing less about the place of whiteness and the entrenched cultures of racialised exclusion. Getting policy makers to contemplate legislative change – particularly changes that might compromise their own claims to power – ‘will need a systematic campaign of lobbying, raising awareness and offering solutions’ (Long & Spracklen, 2011b: 255).

Indeed, advocating that anti-racism is not solely for the benefit of people from a BME background is unlikely to sit well among those whose position is currently hegemonic – i.e. White people. As a result of this a focus on issues concerning whiteness remains a more challenging critical step for many policymakers, who do not necessarily see themselves as ‘raced’ and are therefore ‘raceless’. In such cases it is understandable why dominant policies and paradigms, organisational environments and social justice agendas in sport, physical activity and related areas, such as leisure reproduce epistemologies with blindspots to racialised power relations, hierarchies and intersecting forms of racialised oppression.

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