

Soccer's key role in helping migrants to adjust

August 1 2014, by David Ellis

New research from the University of Adelaide has for the first time detailed the important role the sport of soccer has played in helping migrants to adjust to their new lives in Australia.

The research has uncovered a range of benefits for individuals and the wider community that are still not fully recognised by immigration policy makers today.

For his PhD in Geography, Environment and Population, student Justin Civitillo looked at the impact of amateur and semi-professional [soccer](#) on migrant groups in South Australia, and changes in the links between [migrants](#) and soccer since the Second World War.

Soccer is currently the second most played form of football in South Australia.

"Much has been written on the experiences of postwar migrants to Australia and their economic, social and cultural adjustment. However, the impact of sport on the migrant experience should not be overlooked," Mr Civitillo says.

The results of his study confirm that participation in soccer clubs has been a major influence on the settlement experiences of new arrivals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, many originally from Europe.

"Of the first generation immigrants we interviewed, 44% believed that their involvement with a soccer club had directly helped them to adjust to life in Australia. Participating in soccer helped them to develop their English language skills, and to build relationships with other migrants and the broader community. This has helped to increase their rate of integration into Australian society," Mr Civitillo says.

"Soccer clubs also helped participants to gain employment through contacts made at the club and to improve their personal self-confidence and wellbeing."

Mr Civitillo says soccer clubs provide some immigrants with their only opportunity to socialise regardless of English language skills, and that more recent arrivals, such as people from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, are being drawn to soccer for reasons similar to those of previous generations of Europeans.

He says this research has implications for policy makers who are looking to maximise the opportunities for migrants to settle in Australia.

"Sport is not currently a component of the Australian government's structured Onshore Orientation Program for migrants. Considering the significant influence sport can have on social participation and mental and physical wellbeing, this is a missed opportunity.

"With soccer being the world's most widely played sport and its growing in popularity in Australia, encouraging migrants to participate in soccer may provide many benefits at an individual and social level," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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