



Social Solidarity And Community Integration Through Sport: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract. Sport has an important role in strengthening social relationships amid the increasing individualism and fragmentation of modern society. In this context, this research was conducted to examine how sport contributes to the formation of social solidarity and community integration. The main objective of this study is to identify the social mechanisms formed through sports activities and understand their relevance to the development of social cohesion of the community. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method which refers to the PRISMA guidelines, by analyzing ten scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025. Data was obtained through a systematic selection from Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect databases, then analyzed using a thematic approach. The results of the study show that sports function as a means of forming social solidarity, a medium for cross-social and cultural integration, as well as a forum for the formation of social capital and collective identity. Sports activities have been proven to strengthen a sense of community, trust, and inclusive values that support social cohesion. In conclusion, sport has great potential as a social instrument to strengthen community integration and build harmonious communities. Further research is suggested using empirical and longitudinal approaches to measure the long-term impact of sport on social solidarity.

Keywords: social solidarity, community integration, sports, social capital, systematic literature review.

1 Introduction

Sport in the modern context is no longer seen as just a physical activity or recreation, but also as a social phenomenon that plays an important role in shaping human relationships and strengthening social bonds. In an increasingly complex society, sport serves as an effective medium to build social solidarity and integrate various groups of people from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The phenomenon of increasing community sports activities, such as running together, mass gymnastics, and community

leagues, shows that sports have become a social space that contributes to the formation of social cohesion and a sense of community.

In the midst of globalization and urbanization, society is experiencing a shift in values from collective life to individualism. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated social fragmentation due to limited face-to-face interaction. In this situation, sports activities act as a social bridge to restore connectivity between community groups. Many community sports-based initiatives have proven to be able to revive the spirit of mutual cooperation, support each other, and build a sense of belonging to the social environment. This reinforces the view that sport has broader social potential than its physical function alone.

Global trends show an increasing focus on sports as a means of social development. The "sport for development" program implemented in various countries shows how sport can be an instrument of social inclusion and strengthening solidarity between citizens. In Indonesia, the emergence of various urban and rural sports communities shows the enthusiasm of the community in making sports an open and egalitarian social meeting forum. However, a comprehensive scientific understanding of the social mechanisms behind the role of sport has not been systematically explored.

The main problem that arises in previous research is the lack of clarity in defining the concepts of social solidarity and community integration in the context of sport. Many studies have only highlighted the dimensions of physical participation without dissecting deeper social aspects, such as the formation of social networks, social capital, and a sense of belonging to the community. In addition, most of the existing studies are still descriptive and focus on local cases, so they have not been able to provide a strong theoretical picture of the relationship between sport and social integration.

Some recent research underscores the need for a more robust theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between sport and the social structure of society. Moustakas and Wagner (2023) emphasized that many studies on social cohesion in sport do not yet have adequate uniformity of concepts and measuring tools. Meanwhile, Räikkönen (2024) states that sport has great potential to create sustainable social connections due to its inclusive nature and being able to bring together individuals from different backgrounds. Coakley (2021) also emphasized that sport plays a role as a powerful socialization agent, as it teaches collective values and strengthens social structures at the micro and macro levels. This view confirms that sports are not only a means of recreation, but also a social medium that plays a role in the formation of identity and community integration.

From the perspective of the sociology of sport, Émile Durkheim's theory of solidarity became an important basis for understanding the role of sport as a social glue. Mechanical solidarity that is rooted in the same values and organic solidarity born from interdependence are two forms of social relations that can be found in sports activities. In addition, the theory of social capital put forward by Putnam (2000) is relevant to explain how the interactions that occur in sports are able to create beliefs, norms, and social networks that strengthen community cohesion. Thus, sport can be seen as a social arena where the values of togetherness, mutual respect, and social justice are practiced in real terms.

The research gap is also seen from the limitations of longitudinal studies and cross-contextual comparisons that examine the social impact of sport in depth. Most research still focuses on the short-term effects of sports participation, while few evaluate the sustainability of those impacts on social change in society. This condition shows the need for synthesis research that brings together various empirical findings to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of sport in building social solidarity and integration.

The urgency of this research is getting higher as the community's need for activities that can restore social relations after the pandemic increases. Exercise activities have proven to be an effective means of overcoming social isolation, reducing stress, and rebuilding trust and a sense of security between individuals in the community. In other words, sport serves as a social space that facilitates positive interactions and strengthens inclusive social structures.

Based on this description, this study aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize various scientific studies in the period 2015–2025 that discuss the role of sport in strengthening social solidarity and community integration. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was used to map the latest concepts, indicators, and empirical findings regarding the relationship between sport and the social structure of society. Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a more complete understanding of the social functions of sport in the modern context.

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to enrich the study of the sociology of sports by providing conceptual clarity regarding the role of sports in the formation of solidarity and community integration. Practically, this research is expected to be the basis for policy makers, coaches, and sports community managers in designing programs that are not only achievement-oriented, but also on strengthening social cohesion and harmonious community development. Thus, sports can be interpreted as a strategic means in realizing a more inclusive, solid, and socially empowered society.

2 Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with reference to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guide. This approach was chosen because it was able to provide a comprehensive overview of the results of previous research on the relationship between sport, social solidarity, and community integration. According to Kitchenham and Charters (2007), the SLR method allows researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize the literature, resulting in in-depth and accountable scientific understanding.

The literature search process was carried out in January–September 2025 through three main databases, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, which have a wide scope of national and international scientific publications. The keywords used included terms in Indonesian and English, such as "social solidarity," "community integration," "sports," "social solidarity," "community integration," and "sport sociology." Keyword combinations are performed using AND and OR logic operators to ensure relevant results. The selected articles are limited to publications in 2015–2025, in Indonesian or English, and have gone through a peer-review process.

The literature selection stage follows the PRISMA procedure, which includes four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion. Out of a total of 96 articles found, after the screening and content assessment process, only 10 articles were judged to meet the criteria for relevance and quality for further analysis. According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the selection of literature with such gradual stages is necessary to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the focus of studies in literature-based research.

Inclusion criteria are set so that the selection process runs objectively. Accepted articles are those that address sport in a social or community context, have a focus on solidarity or social integration, use an empirical or conceptual approach, and are available in full text. Articles that highlight only medical, physiological, or sports achievements with no social relevance are excluded from the analysis. Each article is then studied in depth with a thematic

analysis approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2012), to identify patterns and themes that arise in various research contexts. The results of the analysis are grouped into three main themes, namely sports as a means of forming social solidarity, sports as a medium for cross-social and cultural community integration, and sports as a reinforcement of social capital and collective identity.

To maintain the quality and validity of the results, each article is judged based on the relevance of the topic, the clarity of the methodology, and the consistency between the objectives and the results of the research. The evaluation was carried out by examining the research design, data collection techniques, and suitability of the theoretical framework used. Articles with strong scientific arguments and transparent methodologies acquire higher analytical weight in the synthesis process. The final results are then integrated with relevant social theories, such as Durkheim's theory of social solidarity, Putnam's theory of social capital, Parsons' functionalism, and Blumer's symbolic interactions, in order to provide a complete understanding of how sport can play a role in strengthening social solidarity and community integration in modern society.

3 Results

The data obtained through a review of ten scientific articles provide a comprehensive picture of how sport plays a role in strengthening social solidarity and community integration in various social and cultural contexts. This study confirms that sport does not only function as a physical activity, but also as a social phenomenon that is able to build social networks, strengthen a sense of community, and foster collective values in society.

Table 1. Article Analysis Results

Yes	Heading	Purpose	Method	Key Results
1	Sport and Community Cohesion (Coalter, 2017)	Identify the role of sport in strengthening the social cohesion of local communities.	Qualitative	Community sports increase social participation and strengthen relationships between citizens through shared activities.
2	Building Social Capital through Sport (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2018)	Explain the contribution of sports to the formation of social capital.	Mixed Method	Sporting activities generate trust, reciprocal norms, and new social networks.
3	Sport for Social Inclusion (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2020)	Analyze sport as a means of social inclusion of vulnerable groups.	Qualitative	Sport helps the social integration of minority groups and increases the sense of belonging.

4	The Role of Sports in Social Integration (Coakley, 2021)	Examining the role of sport in strengthening social integration in urban society.	Description	Sport is an effective medium of interaction across social and cultural classes.
5	Sport and Solidarity in Urban Communities (Winarno, 2022)	Examining the contribution of sports to the solidarity of urban communities.	Qualitative	Joint sports activities strengthen solidarity and the spirit of mutual cooperation.
6	Sport as a Tool for Community Development (UNESCO, 2021)	Assessing sports as an instrument of social development.	Policy Analysis	Community sports programs contribute to social cohesion and the reduction of social conflicts.
7	Social Cohesion and Physical Activity (Moustakas & Wagner, 2023)	Identify the relationship between sports participation and social cohesion.	Scoping Review	Sporting activities have a positive impact on social connectedness, but definitions of social cohesion still vary.
8	Sport and Intercultural Understanding (Räikkönen, 2024)	Analyze the role of sport in strengthening cross-cultural understanding.	Qualitative	Sport builds communication and empathy between individuals from different cultures.
9	Community Sports Participation and Belonging (Zhou, 2018)	Examine the relationship between sports participation and a sense of belonging to the community.	Survey	The higher the level of sports participation, the stronger the sense of belonging and social identity of the community.
10	Social Integration through Youth Sport (Anderson & Taylor, 2020)	Examining the influence of youth sports on the social integration of adolescents.	Qualitative	Youth sports activities build social discipline, cooperation, and group solidarity.

4 Discussion

The results of the analysis of ten scientific articles show that sport has a very significant social role in strengthening relationships between individuals and communities. Based on the synthesis of findings, there are three major ideas that explain how sport contributes to social dynamics, namely as a means of forming social solidarity, a medium for cross-social and cultural integration, and a vehicle for the formation of social capital and collective identity.

These three dimensions are interrelated in forming a cohesive and sustainable social network, and show that sport has a social function that goes far beyond physical activity alone.

First, sports play a role as a means of forming social solidarity through regular collective interaction. Sports activities create a space of togetherness where individuals from different backgrounds participate equally, share experiences, and build shared values such as cooperation, discipline, and mutual respect. Durkheim (1912) explained that social solidarity grows through shared activities that strengthen collective awareness and a sense of attachment to the group. Findings in several articles show that community sports activities, such as joint gymnastics, futsal between residents, or mass running competitions, can foster a spirit of togetherness and increase mutual care among community members. In some cases, participation in sports also reduces the level of social conflict and increases participation in mutual cooperation activities. However, this impact is highly dependent on the consistency of the implementation of activities and social support in the local environment. Communities with low levels of trust take longer to build solidarity, so sport needs to be combined with a participatory approach and sustainable social facilitation.

Second, sports are an important medium for social integration across classes, ages, and cultures. Sports activities provide a neutral interaction space where differences in social and economic status become irrelevant as each individual participates based on the same rules and goals. This perspective is in line with Parsons' (1951) theory of functionalism, which views sport as a social mechanism to maintain the balance and order of society through the formation of universal values such as honesty and cooperation. Research by Coakley (2021) and Rääkkönen (2024) shows that community sports activities in multicultural areas can reduce social prejudice as well as strengthen empathy between individuals from different backgrounds. In the context of urban societies, sport has proven to be an effective means of building social inclusion and reducing distances between social groups. However, the success of social integration through sport is highly dependent on the accessibility of activities, policy support, and active community involvement in planning and implementation. Sports programs that are designed top-down without involving participants often fail to create a sense of belonging and instead widen social gaps.

In addition to being a means of solidarity and integration, sports also function as a form of social capital and collective identity. Through participation in sports activities, individuals gain the opportunity to expand social networks, build trust, as well as internalize norms of togetherness that strengthen social cohesion. This view is in line with Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital, which states that joint activities such as sports create *social capital bonding* among group members as well as *bridging social capital* that connects social groups. Nicholson and Hoye (2018) found that community sports are able to strengthen a sense of belonging to the group and increase cross-generational interaction. This phenomenon also shows how sports symbols such as uniforms, chants, and competition rituals play a role in shaping the collective identity of a community. However, some studies warn that the social capital that is formed can be exclusive if sports activities are only attended by homogeneous groups, such as high-cost clubs. Therefore, the implementation of inclusive sports is an important factor so that the solidarity and social capital that is formed can reach all levels of society.

The synthesis of the three findings shows that sport is an effective social instrument in building strong social networks, encouraging mutual trust, and strengthening shared identities in communities. Social solidarity formed at the micro level can develop into social capital that strengthens relationships between individuals and ultimately supports social integration in a broader scope. Theoretically, these results link Durkheim's view of solidarity with Putnam's

notion of social capital, as well as a symbolic interactionism approach that explains the formation of social meaning through sports activities. However, most of the research analyzed is still qualitative, descriptive, and has not fully measured the long-term impact of exercise on social change. Therefore, further research is recommended to use longitudinal design and quantitative methods that are able to assess the dynamics of social solidarity and social capital more objectively.

Overall, the results of this study broaden the understanding that exercise is not only physical activity, but also an effective tool for social transformation. Through joint activities, communities learn to respect differences, work together to achieve collective goals, and develop inclusive social identities. In this context, sport became a medium that connected Durkheim's classical theory of social solidarity with Putnam's modern theory of social capital. Thus, sports have a strategic role in creating a more cohesive, participatory, and socially integrated society.

5 Conclusion

Based on the results of a systematic review of ten scientific articles, this study confirms that sports have a very important social function in strengthening community cohesion. Sport plays a role not only as a physical activity, but also as a social space that encourages the formation of solidarity, strengthens integration across social and cultural groups, and develops social capital that sustains community life. Participation in sports activities has been proven to be able to increase positive interactions between individuals, foster social trust, and expand the network of relationships that contribute to the development of an inclusive and harmonious society. Theoretically, these findings reinforce Durkheim's view of social solidarity and Putnam's view of social capital, that participation in sport can form social networks that support the integration of society. Practically, sports need to be developed not only as a place of achievement, but also as a means of inclusive and sustainable social development. With participatory planning, sport can be an effective instrument to strengthen social relationships and build a more cohesive society.

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