

# PhD Opportunity

Nationalism, populist politics and sport migrations:  
heroes or villains?

## Director of Studies

Prof. Győző Molnár, Adapted Physical Activity Research Unit, School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Worcester

## Supervisors

Dr S. Whigham, Oxford Brookes.

## Adapted Physical Activity Research Unit

### The PhD Opportunity

Right-wing populist political voices, movements and values have been on the rise. Europe has been witnessing tendencies that are frequently associated with identity politics, ethno-nationalism, racism, sexism, anti-elitism and a general sense of 'them vs. us' attitude. In essence, political perspectives that work to polarise the public for the sake of gaining political power have been rampant.

Such states often abandon principles of liberal democracy and form illiberal political approaches, which questions the feasibility as well as legitimacy of contemporary nation building. Along with conservative political overtones, there is symbolic emphasis on preserving traditional values, national integrity and unity and resisting certain aspects of globalisation.

The movement of peoples (whether legal or illegal) across countries is one of those aspects of globalisation which is frequently resisted by conservative governments as, in some narratives, that challenges national unity and identity. Migration and the 'threat' migrants may or will pose to a country have been effectively used in a number of political rhetoric and have, arguably, contributed to the outcome of the Brexit referendum and the success of right wing political movements across the West.

Nevertheless, it appears that in certain domains migrants are not only accepted but celebrated as long as they bring kudos to their adopted country. One such domain is sport where there is a long history of seeking out and employing talented foreign players to boost the sporting profile of a nation.

Therefore, this proposal aims to explore the extent to which sport poses both a contradiction and an opportunity: **contradiction** as sport migrants, especially at elite level, seem to experience a different social reception to those who may find occupation in other areas of work, and **opportunity** as sport might be that well needed 'Lingua Franca' through which migrants can effectively connect with societies in which they wish to settle.

## Application Process

To begin the application process please go to <https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

## The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

## Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

## Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

## Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

## Research Unit

### Adapted Physical Activity Research Unit

The Adapted Physical Activity Research Unit is committed to transforming the field of adapted physical activity through bold, interdisciplinary work that bridges theory and practice. Grounded in principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation, we focus on physical activity as a human rights and social justice issue.

Our aim is to dismantle barriers to participation, amplify marginalised voices, and influence systemic change so that all individuals can move, play, and thrive on their own terms. Working alongside disabled communities, practitioners, and cross-sector partners, we co-create knowledge and solutions that are both rigorous and deeply meaningful to those most affected. From examining joy and identity through movement, to developing culturally competent practice, to 'cripping' research methodologies and reimagining participation beyond traditional norms, our work challenges inequities and reshapes what inclusive physical activity can be.

This PhD will contribute to that mission, joining a vibrant research environment dedicated to redefining access, equity, and possibility in physical activity.

### Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and / or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**For further information** or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Gyozo Molnar (Director of Studies) via email at [g.molnar@worc.ac.uk](mailto:g.molnar@worc.ac.uk)