

Who's joining the club? Participation of socially vulnerable children and adolescents in club-organised sports

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Abstract: Sport is often considered as a promising instrument for reaching a wide array of policy objectives. Social inclusion is one of the goals frequently mentioned. Though one can argue about the feasibility of the many claims made, sport can only reasonably be expected to play a role if the targeted population is effectively taking part in sports. This is what is investigated in this study. The focus lies on the sports participation of children (primary school) and adolescents (secondary school), more particularly in a club-organised setting. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether family-related factors associated with a higher risk of social exclusion can be considered as determinants of club sport participation among children and adolescents. Data are based on a large-scale cross-sectional survey (2009), collected in 39 schools in Flanders (Belgium), with a total of 3005 children and adolescents (aged 6-18) participating in the research. A multilevel logistic regression has been conducted, controlling also for differences between schools. Income poverty and parental education come forward as important determinants for club-organised sports participation. No evidence was found that living in a single parent-household affects the likelihood of club-organised sports participation. While sport is often considered as an important instrument for social inclusion, the study shows that children and adolescents who are likely to occupy a more vulnerable position in society as a whole, have higher odds to be left out with regard to sport club participation as well.

Key words: club-organised sports participation, social vulnerability, children and adolescents, social stratification

Introduction

Sport is increasingly being linked with other policy domains. It is considered as a means to attain central, non-sports related policy objectives, such as societal participation and active citizenship (Bergsgard et al., 2007; Green, 2007; Hylton, 2011). While ‘health’ is perhaps the most evident policy objective mentioned in relation to sports, social inclusion is also presented as a goal in sport policy (see f.i. Bailey, 2005; Hoye et al., 2010; Long & Bramham, 2006). Though sport policy does not belong to the traditional pillars of the welfare state, such as health care or employment policy, it is often regarded as a valuable policy domain in striving for an inclusive society. Scholars have challenged this optimistic view of sports in various ways. Firstly, sport can also entangle negative consequences. With regard to children and youth, one can think of abuse, bullying, learning inappropriate skills (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002) or discrimination (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). Secondly, sport tends to be put forward as a miracle solution to societal problems, without sufficiently taking the context and necessary conditions into account (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Coalter, 2007). Many claims are made without sufficient empirical evidence (Coalter, 2007; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Smith & Waddington, 2004). However, regardless of this debate, it can be asserted that sport can only stand a chance of attaining wider societal goals such as the enhancement of social inclusion, if people who are occupying a more vulnerable position in society are effectively participating in sports. Evidently, if there is no participation, no further benefits can be expected. Therefore, in this paper it will be explored to what extent risk factors for social exclusion, such as living in a household with an income below the poverty threshold or single parenthood, also affect the chances for sports participation. More specifically, the participation of socially vulnerable children and adolescents is studied.

The aim of the present study is to investigate whether family-related risk factors for social exclusion affect the odds of club-organised sports participation of children and

adolescents. In this study, the focus lies on club-organised sport, since this is an important sporting context for children and adolescents (Engström, 2004; Scheerder et al., 2005). In addition, club-organised sports participation tends to be considered as the ‘prime setting’ for sport, offering additional benefits, such as good quality training or the use of appropriate facilities and accommodations, and encouraging lifelong sports participation. Furthermore, club-organised sport is also generally expected to contribute to the development of social capital (see f.i. Putnam, 1995, 2000; Seippel, 2006).

The research has been conducted in Flanders (Belgium). In Flanders, there is a dense network of sport clubs. There are around 23 900 sport clubs, or 319 clubs for every 100,000 inhabitants (Scheerder et al., 2011). Most clubs (88%) offer only one particular sport. The relative emphasis on either competition/performance or recreation differs largely. Four out of ten clubs (43%) are mainly oriented towards recreation, whereas one out of ten (11%) almost exclusively focuses on competition. Around half of the clubs (47%) combine competition and recreational sport (Scheerder & Vos, 2010). Approximately 33 percent of the sports clubs organise activities specifically for children (until 12 years old), and 37 percent of the clubs have separate activities for adolescents (13 to 18 years old) (ibid.). Clubs which have youth members vary in size. Approximately 36 percent of the clubs are small, with less than 60 members (in total, youth and adults), 42 percent have between 60 and 200 members, and 22 percent are large clubs, with over 200 members. In 56 percent of the clubs which are open to minors, the latter represent at least half of the total number of members (Seghers et al., 2012). For youth members, the average membership fee amounts to 67 euro per year (in 2012) (Scheerder et al., in press).

In the next paragraph, some light is shed upon the relationship between sport and social inclusion. Subsequently, earlier research findings with regard to the social stratification of (club-organised) sports participation are discussed and hypotheses for the current study are

introduced. Next, the data and method used are clarified, after which the results are presented. We conclude with a discussion of the main findings and their implications.

Sport and social inclusion

During the last decennia, sport has gradually come to occupy a more central place on the policy agenda. The potential of sport, as perceived by both policy makers and the public, has changed considerably over the last decades. Overall, the interest in sport on behalf of governments has grown in Western countries (f.i. Agergaard & Sørensen, 2010; Bergsgard et al., 2007; Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Houlihan, 2005). This is referred to as the ‘governmentalisation’ of sport (Bergsgard et al., 2007), indicating that governments have come to play a more active, interventionist role. This evolution is perhaps most evident for elite sport, but also with regard to mass sport, a considerable shift can be noted. The governmentalisation of sports can be witnessed by the increased regulation with regard to sport and by larger financial investments (Houlihan, 2005), or by governments acting as sport organisers themselves (Vos et al., 2011). Characteristic of the governmentalisation of sport, however, is also the increased belief in sport as a means to tackle other policy problems, in areas ranging from health to social and economic development (see f.i. Bergsgard et al., 2007; Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Coalter, 2007; Gratton & Henry, 2001; Hoye et al., 2010). With regard to children and adolescents, the educational value of sport is frequently mentioned as well (Bailey et al., 2009).

The instrumental use of sport is not a new phenomenon. Sport has since long been used as a tool to realise non-sportsrelated objectives, such as to enforce feelings of national pride (see f.i. Houlihan, 2000), or in the areas of defence or health care (van Bottenburg & De Bosscher, 2011). Groundbreaking, however, are both the scope (in terms of the variety of

objectives) and the frequency of the instrumental use of sports we are currently facing. Following this trend, sport is seen as a promising instrument for social inclusion. This implies that sport is considered as a tool for reaching one of the central objectives of current welfare states: societal participation. The underlying reasoning of this instrumentalist approach is that underprivileged groups should participate in sports, because participation presents vital advantages for themselves and society as a whole. Secondly, linking sport to public interests and to the realisation of broader welfare objectives such as social inclusion also provides sport policy, and the investments made, with additional legitimacy (Bergsgard et al., 2007; Bloyce & Smith, 2010). The question, however, remains whether sport can live up to these expectations. A first condition to be met is that participation is effectively taking place. This is what is investigated in this study, more specifically with regard to school-aged children (6 to 18 years) and club-organised sport.

However, the instrumental view presented above is not the only way in which sport and social inclusion are interrelated. Apart from inclusion *through* sport (i.e. treating sport as an *instrument* for reaching social inclusion more generally, also outside sport), one should also distinguish inclusion *in* sport. Here, the reasoning holds that, as sport belongs to the social sphere, all citizens should have access to it. In other words, when striving for social inclusion in society in general, the field of sport should be no exception. Sport is then considered as a subfield of society, which should be socially inclusive, rather than as an instrument *per se*. This idea is strengthened by the sportification of society (see Crum, 1991). Since sport has come to occupy a more central place in society, it is ever more problematic if certain groups do not have equal access. Similarly, sport can be considered as a social right, i.e. a right of citizens. As Van Regenmortel (2008) argues, social inclusion regards facilitating and/or providing full citizenship, and social participation is an inherent part of it. Since sport is one of the forms of social participation, it should be accessible. In other words, the

relatively dominant instrumental perspective – inclusion *through* sport, or sport as a means to tackle policy problems, such as social exclusion – can be complemented by a rights perspective: the right on social participation, including in sports.

Also children are increasingly considered as full-fledged citizens (Steenssens et al., 2008), partly as a consequence of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). This implies that the entitlement to social participation – and in this context, to sport – also holds true for children and adolescents. In practice, however, participation in sport does not seem equally self-evident for all citizens, children, adolescents nor adults, as will be elaborated below.

The social stratification of sports participation

Earlier research indicates that, though Sport for All policies have been present in Western European countries from the early seventies until today, sports participation is still socially stratified (see f.i. Downward & Riordan, 2007; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Scheerder & Vos, 2011). Even if the impact of socio-economic and socio-demographic variables seems to be diminishing over time (Scheerder & Vos, 2011), previous studies have revealed that age and general socio-economic status still determine sports participation, indicating that Sport for All objectives (see Vanreusel et al., 2002) have not fully been accomplished yet (see f.i. Bloom et al., 2005; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010; Stamm & Lamprecht, 2011). Specifically for adolescents, previous studies have also shown that sports participation is socially stratified, for example with regard to school program (Scheerder et al., 2005), gender (Laakso et al., 2008; Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2003; Scheerder et al., 2005) or parental physical activity and sports participation (Scheerder et al., 2005; Yang et al., 1996), often particularly in organised sports. Concerning the socio-economic status of the parents,

Scheerder et al. (2005) have found no effect of this background variable at the end of the 20th century, as opposed to earlier measurements. Empirical studies moving beyond general determinants and specifically focusing on determinants linked to an underprivileged position in society and deprivation, are scarce. Still, Hoff et al. (1997) for example, investigated the participation of children in different activities, and have found no difference in sports participation between poor and non-poor children. However, in their research, the number of hours of sports participation per week was considered, rather than club-organised sports participation, which is the focus of the present study.

In this paper, the aim is to investigate to what extent risk factors for social exclusion amongst children and adolescents – more specifically living in a household at risk of poverty, living in a single parent-household, and low educational achievements of the parents – are to be considered as determinants of club-organised sports participation. If these factors indeed codetermine participation, this would undermine the promising role of sport with regard to the social inclusion of children and adolescents, both *in* and *through* club-organised sport, as is often referred to. Based on the academic literature, we expect club-organised sports participation to be hampered by the family-related risk factors for social exclusion, for several reasons. First, though every individual is likely to encounter constraints to participation (see f.i. Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Hultsman, 1992), it can be expected that some of these factors are intensified for children and adolescents at risk of social exclusion, and that possibilities to circumvent the constraints are restricted. Collins (2003; 2012) has identified three groups of constraints and exclusion factors in children's and adolescents' sports and leisure-time participation. He distinguishes between structural, mediating and personal factors. Structural factors are for example a poor physical or social environment, or a poor support network. Examples of mediating factors are managers' policies attitudes and labeling by society. Personal factors comprise amongst others a lack of income, a lack of time structure or a poor

self/body image. These constraints are influencing the possibilities to participate. Also Holt et al. (2011) have demonstrated children from low-income families face a range of constraints and barriers.

However, other determinants play a role at an earlier stage, shaping preferences and expectations for participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). In this context, the work of Bourdieu, and his concept of *habitus*, is highly instructive (see f.i. Bourdieu, 1980; 1987; 1990). The concept of habitus allows understanding that preferences and tastes cannot be considered as neutral: they are shaped by earlier experiences. The habitus is both a system of acquired dispositions functioning as categories of perception, as well as the organising principles of actions (Bourdieu, 1990: 13). It implies that earlier experiences throughout life are deeply incorporated, determining an individual's present and future actions and choices. This also holds for sport. Bourdieu argues that sports practices cannot be understood without taking the habitus into account, *a fortiori* since sports practices are so intrinsically linked to the body (Bourdieu, 1991: 367). Also the work of Sen (2009) indicates individuals tend to adapt their desires and expectations to what seems feasible, as a strategy to cope with deprivation, which may result in an underestimation of social inequality, and lead to its perpetuation.

Data and method

Data

The present study is conducted on data for Flanders, Belgium. In 2009, a large-scale cross-sectional survey measuring sports participation was carried out among children (primary school, 6 to 12 years of age) and adolescents (secondary school, 13 to 18 years of age) in Flemish schools, by the Policy in Sports and Physical Activity Research Group of the

University of Leuven (see Scheerder & Vos, 2011). Two-stage sampling was used, i.e. a representative sample of the schools was taken, followed by a selection of the students to be surveyed. For the school sample, stratified sampling was done based on four criteria (school type, educational system, region, and level of urbanisation). In total, 39 schools were selected, 26 of which were primary schools, 13 were secondary schools. For the selection of students, the educational track (general, technical, vocational or arts) was taken into account. In primary schools, 2,103 students were selected. In secondary schools, the representative sample consisted of 2,397 students. In the end, 3,005 students aged 6 to 18 (and their parents) filled out the standardised questionnaire, which corresponds to a response rate of 68 percent (Vos & Scheerder, 2010). Due to missing values on some variables, the analysis was eventually based on 2,016 students in 39 schools. Most missing values were linked to the income variable (862). We reckon this is to be explained by the fact income tends to be perceived as sensitive information in Flanders. More generally, problems to collect information on income are a recurrent problem in social research.

Though the number of students per school varies, at least ten students from each school were included. The survey, called *Study on Movement Activities in Flanders*, is part of a repeated cross-sectional study and has been conducted every ten years since 1969 (Scheerder et al., 2005). However, for the current study, only the data on 2009 were used, since the 2009 questionnaire was the first to include information on household income. The main topic of the questionnaire was sports participation (frequency, intensity, organisational context, sports preferences, ...). Questions were asked with regard to the child that was given the questionnaire, but also the parents and siblings were asked to provide information. Apart from sports-related information, the questionnaire comprised information on the socio-demographic and socio-economic background of respondents.

Method

In order to answer the research questions, a multilevel logistic regression analysis was conducted. More precisely, two levels were considered: the first level in the analysis is the individual (student level), the second level regarded the school the students belong to (school level). The data had a strict hierarchical two-level structure. A multilevel design was necessary for this study because of the structure of the data: the two-stage sampling process could have induced dependency in the data, students from the same school possibly being more alike as compared to other students. A multilevel model allows to model this dependency and correct for the design effect (Guo & Zhao, 2000). Data manipulation was done in Stata SE 12 (Statacorp., 2011), the actual analyses were conducted in MLWin 2.10 (Rabash et al., 2009).

The dependent variable in the analysis, i.e. club-organised sports participation, is a binary variable, which led to the choice for binary logistic regression modelling. To estimate the results, at first a marginal quasi-likelihood (MQL) procedure was applied, and then refined with predictive quasi-likelihood (PQL). Second order PQL offers a less crude estimation as compared to MQL (Rabash et al., 2008.). In order to make the results more easily interpretable, the log odds ratios were transformed into odds ratios. Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methodology was used (Browne, 2009) to compare the model fit. The latter allows to use the Deviance Information Criterion (or DIC diagnostic), which is a generalization of the Akaike Information Criterion (Jones & Subramanian, 2011) and can be used for hierarchical modelling. To calculate the Variance Partitioning Coefficient, a threshold approach was used, treating the individual-level variation as having a variance of 3.29, which is the variance of a standard logistic distribution (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Operationalisation

In the survey, students were asked to complete the three main sports they were practicing (if any), and were consequently requested to provide information on the frequency, intensity and context of this sports practice. With regard to the context, a number of items were listed (f.i. with family, alone, in a sports club, ...) and they were given the possibility to select several answers at a time. In this study, the binary response variable 'club-organised sports participation' took value 1 when a student had ticked 'in a sports club' for at least one of his/her sports, and 0 otherwise. This implies neither the frequency nor the intensity of the sports practice was taken into account.

Three independent background variables were of central importance in the analysis. These regard (i) whether the child or adolescent is living in a poor household or not, (ii) whether the child or adolescent lives in a single parent family or not, and (iii) the highest educational achievement of the parents (either the father or the mother, whichever is the highest). The first determinant - living in a poor household - was based on an indirect, relative measure of poverty. More specifically, the net total income of the family, adjusted for the size and composition of the household was considered. The use of a relative standard is a very common approach to measure poverty (Vleminckx & Smeeding, 2003). A person is considered as being poor when living in a household with a level of resources below a minimum acceptable standard of living applicable in a specific society (Gordon, 2005), i.e. relative to the common standard. It is an indirect approach since it is based on the determinants of living conditions (income), rather than the actual living conditions itself (Berghman, 1995; Ringen, 1988).

Concretely, in this study, respondents were given ten income categories and were asked to situate their net total household income in the applicable category. In the questionnaire, it was specified what was to be understood by net total household income (i.e.

all income sources, but after tax deduction). Each category had a range of 500 euros, with 'less than 1,000 euros' and '5,000 euros or more' at the two extremes. In order to determine whether or not a family has an income below the poverty threshold, first the poverty threshold was determined for each family. The poverty threshold is commonly defined as 60 percent of the median national income, controlling for the number of children and adults in the family (Bradshaw & Finch, 2003; Campaert, 2009). This is calculated based on the EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) (Eurostat, 2011). In doing so, economies of scale are taken into account. Second, the real income of the family was compared to the poverty threshold, given the household composition. The poverty threshold is in fact an 'at risk of poverty-threshold' (Atkinson et al., 2010): it indicates a high risk of living in poverty, rather than actual poverty per se.

Current income is only one of the factors influencing levels of deprivation (Whelan & Whelan, 1995). Educational qualifications are known as a determinant for deprivation as well (Nolan, 2003), hence the inclusion of the highest parental educational achievement as a variable in this study. Also single parenthood, the third key variable in this study, is often associated with deprivation (f.i. housing deprivation) and a larger social vulnerability (Nolan, 2003). Children living in a single parent-household are confronted with additional structural and social barriers (Walker et al., 2008). The three variables can be considered as risk factors of social exclusion. Age, gender and the sports involvement of the parents were included as control variables in the analysis.

Table 1 gives an overview of the level 1-variables, their operationalisation and the distribution of the cases. While age was a continuous variable in the analysis, the distribution is summarised in categories in this table. In the analysis, age was centered at the age of 6, in order to facilitate the interpretation of the results. Also a quadratic term for age was added in the model.

[insert Table 1 about here]

Despite the considerable number of missing values on the income variable (862), based on Table 1, we were able to assume that the distribution on the income poverty variable still resembled the population as a whole: official statistics indicate that 18.5 percent of the children and adolescents were living in a poor household in 2009 (ADSEI, 2011).

By allowing the variables of main interest in this study to vary randomly at the school level, it was tested whether some schools would lessen or aggravate the effect of parental education, single parenthood and risk of poverty with regard to club-organised sports participation (or in other words, whether these family-related background characteristics would matter more for children from certain schools as compared to others). This was not the case. No statistically significant changes in the slope for the main parameters could be detected. Therefore, in the next section, a random intercept model will be shown, rather than a full random model (random slope model).

Results

As can be observed in Table 1, 54 percent of the Flemish children and adolescents in our sample, across all schools, partake in club-organised sports participation. This is the best estimate for the club-organised sports participation among children and adolescents in our population as a whole. However, the likelihood of club-organised sports participation differs according to individual, family-related background characteristics. In what follows, the results of the analysis, based on a two-level random intercept model, are presented (see Table 2).

Living at risk of poverty decreases the likelihood of club-organised sports participation of children and adolescents. The results indicate that, across all schools, children from families with an income below the poverty threshold are about 44 percent less likely to be member of a sports club, compared to children from families whose income is situated in a higher category than the poverty threshold. Also educational achievement of the parents can be considered as an important determinant of club-organised sports participation among children and adolescents in Flanders. The results show that everything else being equal, children born in families where neither parent has finished higher secondary education are 39 percent less likely to be member of a sports club, as compared to children where one or both parents completed higher education. Children from families where higher secondary education is the highest educational achievement also have considerably smaller chances to participate in club-organised sport (as compared to the children of parent(s) who completed higher education), controlling for other factors. With regard to children from single parent families, however, while the regression coefficient is negative, no statistically significant differences have been encountered.

[insert Table 2 about here]

With regard to the control variables in the analyses, as expected based on the literature review, a gender effect was found. Controlling for other factors, girls are far less likely than boys to engage in club-organised sports participation. Age also has an influence on participation. The effect of age, however, is non-linear. As indicated by the quadratic term, age presents a concave function. The mean change in the odds of sports participation for an extra year depends on the age. The older a child, the higher the likelihood of being member of a sports club. However, this only holds true until the age of twelve, after which the likelihood

decreases again. Finally, sports participation of the parents seems to be the strongest determinant of club-organised sports participation among children and adolescents.

Everything else being equal, children from families where one or both parents are involved in club-organised sport are almost three times as likely to be involved in club-organised sport as compared to their counterparts from families where parents are not involved in any sport activities. Also children and adolescents from families where parents are involved in sports, but not in club-organised sports, are more likely to participate in club-organised sport as compared to children whose parents are not practicing any sports, though the difference is not equally large.

The model shows that, when controlling for family-related background characteristics, there is some between-school variation. This confirms a multilevel model was needed for this analysis, in order to avoid bias in the estimates at the individual level. Moreover, the between-school variation suggests that the odds of being member of a sports club do vary between schools. Though some caution is necessary due to the rather small number of schools in this study, which might somewhat bias the standard error of the second level variance (see Maas & Hox, 2004), the results seem to indicate students of some schools will be more likely to be member of a sports club than in other schools, regardless of their individual characteristics. If this is the case, this could for example be due to differences in school culture, the motivation or teaching skills of the PE teacher, etc. The latter could however not be empirically verified by our data. Yet, the between-school variation is rather weak (0,12). Family-related characteristics (individual level) are playing a much larger role.

Discussion

The present study has contributed to the existing knowledge in different ways. First, though many studies have investigated the social stratification of (club-organised) sports participation, studies focusing on indicators linked to deprivation or social vulnerability are scarce. Overall, this study has given quantitative evidence that in Flanders, social vulnerability is related to a lower likelihood of involvement in club-organised sport. Rather than focusing on ‘general’ determinants of (club) sports participation, this study has focused on three factors that are often associated with a risk of social exclusion in society as a whole, i.e. income poverty, single parenthood and parental education. In doing so, new light was shed on the accessibility debate of sports clubs (club-organised sport for all). The focus on club-organised sport was chosen because sports clubs tend to be considered as the ‘prime setting’ for sport, especially for children and adolescents. Second, the use of multi-level modelling has allowed controlling for dependency in the data and looking at the school effect, which, to our knowledge, had not been done in this area of research so far.

Though sport might be considered as a promising instrument for social inclusion - even if those claims should often be viewed more critically (see Coalter, 2007) - the results suggest that in Flanders, underprivileged groups in society are likely to be left out with regard to sports clubs as well. More specifically, children from poor households do not find the way to sports clubs equally often as their counterparts. In addition, a low educational achievement of the parents strongly decreases the likelihood a child will subscribe in a sports club. Yet, no evidence was found that single parenthood would exert an influence on the club attachment of Flemish children and adolescents.

Based on previous editions of the Study on Movement Activities in Flanders, Scheerder et al. (2005) have found that sports participation was not correlated anymore with

the socio-economic status of the parents at the end of the twentieth century, as opposed to earlier points in time. Our findings are not congruent with these results. Different explanations are possible. First, the impact of parental education/socio-economic status may have changed during the last decade (hence 2009 yielding different results than 1999). However, the fact that Scheerder and colleagues have used a measure combining the level of education of both parents with the father's professional status, offers a second possible explanation. The father's professional status was not taken into account in the current study, while Scheerder and colleagues did not include any indicators on income or poverty, nor on single parenthood. As for single parenthood, results are in line with previous research. Hoff et al. (1997) have investigated the possible effect on sports participation, but no evidence was found that growing up in a single parent-household would diminish the odds of sports participation. Yet, also income poverty was included in the study. Contrary to our findings, Hoff et al. did not find an effect of living in a poor household on sports participation. However, it should be mentioned that there are some important operational differences. In the study of Hoff et al., the focus lies on the number of hours of sports participation, rather than club-organised sports participation. Secondly, apart from poverty, also a general income indicator is used. Income is found to play a role, while no additional effect of poverty was found.

The present study has some limitations. Further research is needed. First, while ethnic background is likely to be an important determinant of club-organised sports participation as well, this information could not be included in the analysis, due to data limitations. Hence, we cannot exclude that some of the effect of poverty or educational attainment could be related to ethnic background. This needs to be clarified in future research. Second, since the income of people is surveyed in categories, some precision is missed out on the poverty variable. The poverty gap (depth of poverty) has not been taken into account in this study, because this could not be exactly measured. Future research should further investigate the link between

poverty and club participation, taking the poverty gap and the duration of poverty into account.

The question concerning club-organised sports participation asked in the survey used for this study is based on sports experiences during the previous twelve months. This informs us about club attachment, but does not give any information on the duration of membership in a sports club, nor on experiences in sports clubs in previous years. The results indicate a lower odds of club-organised sports participation for children or adolescents from low educated parents or living in families with an income below the poverty threshold. A question that rises here is whether this is a problem of accessibility (i.e. first access), limited stay, or both. It is possible that the current offer in sports clubs is too much focused on middle class preferences and not sufficiently adapted to the needs and desires of underprivileged children and adolescents, causing them to drop out soon after entry, leading to lower participation rates. If this is the case, the current results underestimate the problem of inequality. Longitudinal research would be helpful to answer this question.

Still, it is evident from the results that underprivileged children and adolescents risk being left out with regard to club-organised sports participation. A so-called Matthew effect (Deleeck, 2009) is taking place, indicating that resources are likely to be spent to the benefit of those who already have more. In Flanders, club-organised sport receives a considerable amount of – direct and indirect – financial support from the government. Even though club-organised sport is presented as a means to enhance social inclusion, and sport policy is used as an instrument to tackle exclusion, children and adolescents who are at risk from social exclusion in society are less likely to gain from these general investments in club-organised sport. In other words, we are facing a double problem. First, opportunities for inclusion through sport are missed out on, and second, the lower participation – if due to unequal opportunities – poses a problem of social justice.

Income poverty coming forward as a determinant of club-organised sports participation does not necessarily imply that the problem is mainly financial. Further, qualitative research is needed to explore the exact relation between living in a household with an income below the poverty threshold and lower likelihood of club-organised sports participation. As Collins (2003; 2012) has shown, different constraints are at stake here, and personal factors such as a lack of income are only part of the whole picture. In addition, building on the argumentation offered by Bourdieu (1990, 1991) and Sen (2009), the problem is deeply rooted, since people tend to adapt their desires and expectations to what they perceive as possibilities, and to their social environment.

The results should mainly be viewed as empirical evidence that social vulnerability hampers participation in club-organised sports. As a consequence, the findings in this study indicate that Flemish (and local) policy makers still have a considerable task ahead in accomplishing the Sport for All objectives. In addition, this also brings up the question what role should be played by the sport clubs themselves. To what extent can a wider social role be expected, asking clubs to put additional effort into reaching more vulnerable groups in society? Though many counterarguments are available - the reliance on volunteers, a limited capacity, a different organizational culture, etc. - one can still wonder whether there is not a collective responsibility to be taken here, to strive for a more inclusive society.

As argued by Coalter (2013), inequality in the field of sports is intrinsically linked to inequality in the broader society. As such, sport can hardly be expected to 'solve' these broader societal problems. It is likely societal issues like income inequality, the existing educational gap, etc. will continue to influence opportunities with regard to sport. Hence, when formulating goals in sport policy, one should be aware of the broader societal context (Coalter, 2013). Yet, sport is one of the many social fields that constitute society. Therefore,

efforts to improve social inclusion within the field of sports remain crucial. While sport policy cannot accomplish an inclusive society by itself, it can help the process along.

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