Presentation

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Participation in Sports in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic: Towards a Typology of Sports Participants Profiles.

INFORMATION

Aim and research questions

First, the study aims to investigate how the corona crisis and its related lockdown has/had an impact on sports participation in Flanders, Belgium, and which types of sports participants can be discerned. Second, we will focus on whether and to what extent different population segments are affected by the corona measures.

Theoretical background and literature review

In Flanders, i.e. the Dutch-speaking, northern part of Belgium, research has shown that before the corona crisis, 63 percent of the Flemish inhabitants aged 15 to 86 practice sport at least once a year (Scheerder et al., 2015), while for children aged 6 to 18 this equals 92 percent (Scheerder et al., 2013). Additionally, in order to take health recommendations into consideration, sports participation research should also focus on the frequency at which people are actively engaged in sports (Scheerder et al., 2019).

It is believed that the Covid-19 disease has a major impact on physical activity behaviour and sports participation (Hammami et al., 2020; Parnell et al., 2020). At the 18th of March, social and public life paused in Belgium, as from that moment the corona restrictions started. The corona measures implied that people were only allowed to be physically active in their neighbourhood, with no other people except for members of their household, while at the same time usage of public sports infrastructure was forbidden. This meant that, from the installation of the corona measures onwards, only walking, running and cycling were allowed in public area. Later, non-motorised physical activities such as roller-skating and skateboarding were permitted too. The current study therefore aims to develop a typology of corona sports participants, as one can expect that sports participants are affected differently by the corona measures.

Second, pre-corona studies demonstrated that not all segments in society have equal access to sports participation. For Flanders it has been shown that younger adults, men, higher educated people, and parents who do not have (younger) children are more likely to partake in sports (Hickey & Mason, 2017; Scheerder et al., 2015). The question raises whether the corona lockdown strengthened or weakened such social stratification patterns. Moreover, since the lockdown some population segments have more spare time left, as they do not have to commute, have no social obligations or are temporally unemployed, while on the contrary other groups, among which parents with school-aged children, can be expected to face additional barriers to engage in sports.

Research design, methodology and data analysis

A compact online sports participation questionnaire was carried out between March 30 and April 5, 2020, resulting in 13,515 valid responses. Data have been weighted based on gender, age, educational level and having at home living children or not, such that the data are representative for the Flemish population.

A canonical correlation method has been performed to define specific types of sports participants, while logistic regressions are used to determine which social groupings belong to the different segments.