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SPORT FOR ALL? SOCIAL STRATIFICATION OF RECREATIONAL SPORT ACTIVITIES IN THE EU-27

ŠPORT ZA VSE? SOCIALNA STRATIFIKACIJA REKREATIVNIH ŠPORTNIH DEJAVNOSTI V DRŽAVAH EU-27

ABSTRACT

Based on Eurobarometer data from 2005 (N=26.688), this paper presents some insight into European citizens' physical activity patterns. An analysis is performed of 1) overall physical activity patterns, and 2) social stratification of physical activity patterns in the EU-27. The results show that, as of 2005, four out of ten Europeans are still not exposed to sport or physical activity in their leisure time and, that in spite of 30 years of Sport for All policy, the democratization of sport participation in Europe is still not realized. Also, sporting activity declines when going from north to south and from west to east. Moreover, physical activity patterns are still characterized by social differences according to sex, age, educational level, occupation, marital status and socio-geographical status. The challenge of developing a sound policy consists of subordinating the influence of geographical and social differences as much as possible to the needs of the social, educational, medical and personal spheres.

Key words: sport participation, Europe, social stratification, Eurobarometer

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POVZETEK

Prispevek temelji na podatkih Evrobarometra iz leta 2005 (N=26.688) in omogoča delni vpogled v vzorce telesne dejavnosti državljanov Evrope. Analiza obravnava 1) splošne vzorce telesne dejavnosti in 2) socialno stratifikacijo vzorcev telesne dejavnosti v državah EU-27. Rezultati kažejo, da v letu 2005 štirje izmed desetih Evropejcev še vedno niso športno ali telesno dejavni v prostem času in da kljub tridesetletni politiki športa za vse ter demokratizacije dostopnosti športa, ti cilji še niso doseženi. Športna dejavnost še vedno pada od severa proti jugu in od zahoda proti vzhodu. Še več, vzorci telesne dejavnosti so še vedno podvrženi socialnim razlikam glede na spol, starost, stopnjo izobrazbe, poklic, zakonski status in socio-geografski status. Izziv za razvoj trdne politike je v čim večji meri podvreči vpliv geografskih in socialnih razlik potrebam družbene, zdravstvene in osebne sfere.

Ključne besede: športna dejavnost, Evropa, socialna stratifikacija, Evrobarometer

INTRODUCTION

Sport and Europe share a strong connection (see Scheerder, Van Tuyckom, & Vermeersch, 2007). Not only is Europe the birthplace of modern sport – which originated in the British public schools in the 18th and 19th century (Renson, 1992), but Olympism and the Sport for All movement also have their roots in European soil. The fact that Europe is considered by some to be “*the powerhouse of world sport*” (European Commission, 1998) is demonstrated by the number of international organizations who have established and maintained headquarters in Europe, for example the IOC (International Olympic Committee) in Lausanne, the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) in Zürich, the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federation) in Monaco, etc. The major role European countries have played historically in the organization of several international sport events is evident as well (Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007): more than half of the Olympic Games and World Championship Football tournaments have taken place in a European host city.

One of the distinctive characteristics of European sport is the so-called European sport model, a model in which sport is embedded within a network of sport clubs and sport federations which organize competitions at all levels and which are linked to one another through systems of promotion and regulation (Heinemann, 1999; Van Bottenburg, Rijnen, & Van Sterkenburg, 2005). For example, in the former EU-25 alone, approximately 750,000 clubs were operating, with about 150 million sustaining members, which equals one third of the total EU population. Put another way, there were about 17 sports clubs per 10,000 citizens (Scheerder, 2004). However, the majority of those active people were “amateurs” who did not make money from the practice of sports.

One particular powerful, commercial sport dominates the European club scene: football (soccer). European football is the most popular sport in most countries and is growing in popularity in countries where this is not yet the case. Europe counts more football players than any other continent: of the 122 million official football players almost 36 million of them are active members of a European football club. As such, it is not surprising that a European sport federation such as the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) is an important player in developing European sport policy (Scheerder & Van Tuyckom, 2006; Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007).

In addition to the traditional sport organizations, several European governments have contributed to the development of the European sport sphere. After World War II, many (West) European countries developed a noticeably active government policy with regard to sport and physical activity. An important aim of this policy was to inspire as many citizens as possible to get involved in sportive action and to take part in physical activities. In 1966 the Council of Europe had already launched the Sport for All idea, as a result of which Sport for All achieved a pioneer role in the advancement of sportive body movement among European citizens (Husting, 2003; Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007). In 1975 government actions with respect to recreational sport became institutionalized in the form of the European Sport for All Charter (Council of Europe, 1975). Inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Charter endorses the right to active sport participation for every citizen. All Council of Europe member-country ministers responsible for sport signed the Charter, and it still acts as a democratic counterbalance for the ideology of top level sport (Vanreusel, 2001).

It is evident that societal interest in sport has increased in past decennia, and that active sport participation has become one of the most common forms of leisure activity. Crum summarized this trend as the “*sportization of society*” (1991, p. 15). However, this popularization of sports

does not imply that sport participation has become (more) democratized. Numerous empirical studies demonstrate that participation in sports still appears to be socially stratified according to sex, age, income, education, etc. (Collins, 2003; Collins & Kay, 2003; De Haan & Breedveld, 2000; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Lamprecht & Stamm, 1995; Scheerder & Pauwels, 2002; Scheerder, Vanreusel, & Pauwels, 2007; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2000; Taks, Renson, & Vanreusel, 1998; Wilson, 2002). Bourdieu's perspective (1979, p. 24) on "sport as a site of struggles between the social classes" remains a topic of interest.

In this paper, we intend to present an initial look at European citizens' physical activity patterns. Specifically, an exploratory analysis is performed of (1) overall physical activity patterns in the EU-27, and (2) social stratification of physical activity patterns in the EU-27. By doing this we intend to develop a picture of sport participation in the European Union, and to verify whether traditional background characteristics such as sex, age, education, etc. still play an important part in recreational sport activities. The first section of this article describes the research material used for the (bivariate) analyses. In the second section, the results are presented. Finally, the third section discusses the results in greater detail and provides some policy recommendations.

METHOD

1.1 Comparative research into physical activity

Europe has a tradition of mapping out sporting activity based on scientific research from European member states, an approach that is aimed at enhancing a stimulating sports policy both on the European level and the level of the individual member states. For example, at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, Rodgers (1977; 1978) and Claeys (1982a; 1982b) conducted a study of the sporting behavior of European citizens, commissioned by the European Council. Two decades later a similar European project, the COMPASS study (COMPASS, 1999; see also Gratton, 1997; Rossi-Mori, Neri, Minelli, & Freda, 2002), showed the sporting activity of seven European member states by means of comparable and adjusted questionnaires. In addition to these seven countries, the COMPASS study also included twenty other countries that had data on sporting activity available; however, the figures provided did not allow for cross-national comparisons.

More recently, the Dutch Mulier Instituut carried out a study, commissioned by Nike Europe (Van Bottenburg et al., 2005), about active sporting activity in Europe. This study provided an overview of research into sport activity in the (then still) 25 member states of the European Union. However, this research was based on secondary source material, so results from the various countries are not comparable. Like the private initiatives mentioned earlier, an examination of the sporting activity of European Union citizens was conducted by the European Commission (in particular the Directorate-General for Education and Culture) by means of the Eurobarometer survey series (European Commission, 2004). Since these surveys apply standardized measurement instruments, they do allow for cross-national comparisons between the different European member states.

1.2 Research material

The most recent Eurobarometer survey about recreational sporting activity was carried out in November 2005 by request of the European Commission, Directorate-General Press and Communication Polls. It covers the population of each of the EU member states aged 15 years and

older ($N = 26,688$). The survey was also conducted in Bulgaria and Romania, an interesting detail since at that time they were still preparing for accession to the EU. A multistage random sample design was applied in all countries and all interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes, in the appropriate national language. With respect to the data capture, CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) was used in those countries where that technique was available (Papacostas, 2005). In each member state, at least 500 (Malta) and at most 1,557 (Germany) interviews were conducted. In spite of the standardized procedure, however, it must be considered that citizens from different member states may have different perceptions about the concept of sporting activity. Consequently, differences in responses might be partly ascribed to differences in conceptualization.

This study focuses specifically on aspects of active sporting participation. Passive participation – as spectators, newspaper readers or television viewers – will not be dealt with here. Eurobarometer 64.3 (2005) assesses overall sporting activity by means of the following question: "In the last 7 days, how much physical activity did you get from recreation, sport and leisure-time activities?" The answer categories are as follows: (i) a lot, (ii) some, (iii) little, and (iv) none. Physical activity items not included are physical activity when at work, when moving from place to place, and when working in and around the house since these items are the subject of a different question. The original question is dichotomized, whereby respondents who answered "none" are defined as non-participants and those who answered "a lot," "some" or "little" are defined as participants. This dependent variable is related to the following six background variables:

- *Gender*: men versus women;
- *Age*: (i) 15- to 24-year-olds, (ii) 25- to 34-year olds, (iii) 35- to 44-year-olds, (iv) 45- to 54-year-olds, (v) 55- to 64-year-olds, or (vi) 65 years old and older;
- *Marital status*: (i) cohabiting or married, (ii) single, (iii) divorced, or (iv) widowed;
- *Occupation*: (i) self-employed, (ii) manager, (iii) white-collar worker, (iv) manual worker, (v) house person, (vi) unemployed, (vii) retired, or (viii) student;
- *Education (age when finished)*: (i) younger than age 15, (ii) between age 15 and age 18, (iii) between age 18 and age 21, or (iv) after age 21;
- *Geographical status*: (i) living in a rural area or village, (ii) living in a small- or mid-sized town, or (iii) living in a large town.

To get an initial picture of active sporting participation with regard to certain socio-cultural and socio-economic background characteristics, several bivariate analyses were performed. The results of the analyses are presented by means of crosstabulations with Pearson χ^2 -test statistics. These statistics are used to test the hypothesis of no association between columns and rows in tabular data, or in the case of this study, no association between the independent and the dependent variables. A χ^2 probability of 0.05 or less is interpreted as justification for rejecting the null hypothesis that the row variable is unrelated (that is, only randomly related) to the column variable, or for accepting the alternative hypothesis that the row and column variables – or independent and dependent variables – are related to each other.

RESULTS

1.3 Overall physical activity

First of all, we notice striking differences between the European member states with respect to sporting activity in 2005. Figure 1 shows Finland as the most active sporting nation. More than

eight out of ten Fins age 15 and older are physically active. Remarkably, in contrast with research from 2004 in which sporting participation was assessed by means of the question “How often do you exercise or play sport?” (Scheerder & Van Tuyckom, 2006; 2007), the other Scandinavian countries are not among the leaders in the present survey. Sweden (71%) and Denmark (62%) are merely in eighth and thirteenth place, respectively. Portugal and Romania are last with only four out of ten citizens being physically active. On average, 63% of the European adults indicate some sort of physical activity from recreation, sport or leisure-time activities in the last seven days. The percentages of countries which differ significantly from the European average are indicated with an asterisk (* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$). In general, physical activity declines when moving from north to south in Europe. Citizens from more northern locations and from Scandinavian countries exceed their continental colleagues from the Mediterranean Sea area. In addition, East Europeans generally score less well in the sportive sphere than West Europeans. The exceptions, however, are Slovenia and to a lesser degree the Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

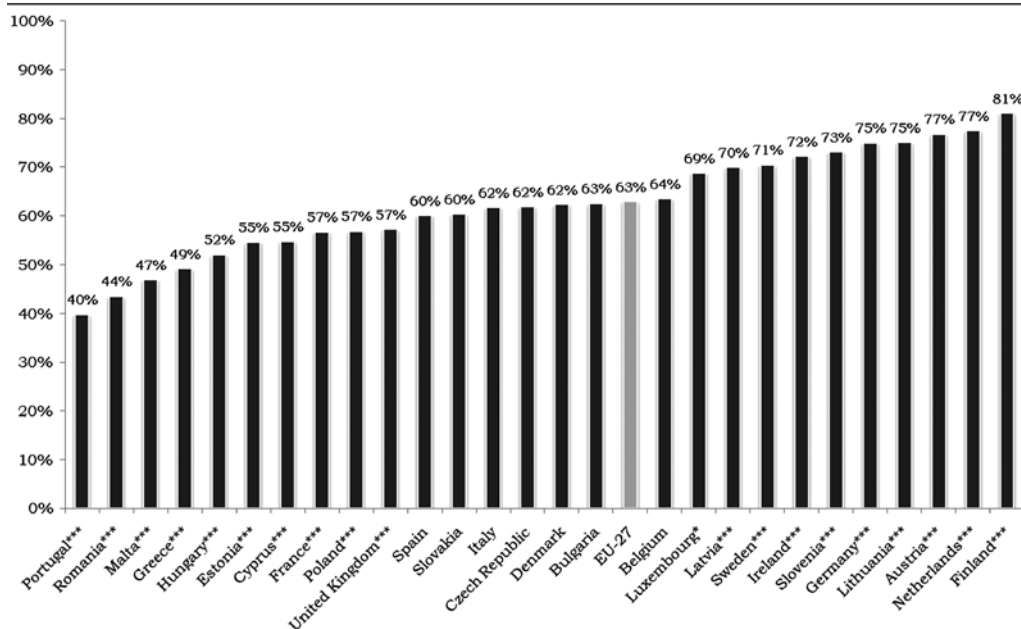


Figure 1: Sporting activity for all EU-27 member states (2005), percentages in function of total population (* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$ for difference with EU-27 average)

1.4 Social stratification of physical activity

From Table 1 it is apparent that differences in physical activity occur according to sex, age, marital status, occupation, educational level and geographical status. First, more European men than women seem to be actively involved in sports. Whereas 66% of the European men aged 15 or more are active sport participants, this number decreases by 8% for their female counterparts. Second, age also seems to be a strong determinant of sporting activity in the EU-27. As age increases, sporting activity decreases. Almost 80% of the 15 to 24 year old Europeans are physically active, in contrast to merely 45% of the 65-year-olds. Third, sport activity clearly increases with additional years of education. Of the European citizens who finished school after the age of 21, 69% are

Table 1: Sporting activity according to background variables for all EU-27 member states (2005), results of bivariate analyses, percentages in function of total population

Variable	Categories	No	Yes
Sex	men	34.2%	65.8%
	women	42.0%	58.0%
$\chi^2 = 186,743$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$; $N = 28815$			
Age category	15- to 24-year-olds	20.2%	79.8%
	25- to 34-year-olds	32.1%	67.9%
	35- to 44-year-olds	34.8%	65.2%
	45- to 54-year-olds	39.5%	60.5%
	55- to 64-year-olds	42.8%	57.2%
	65 years and older	55.5%	44.5%
$\chi^2 = 1411,205$; $df = 5$; $p < .001$; $N = 28815$			
Marital status	cohabiting or married	39.2%	60.8%
	single	24.6%	75.4%
	divorced	36.0%	64.0%
	widowed	60.5%	39.5%
$\chi^2 = 986,539$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$; $N = 28495$			
Occupation	self-employed	37.4%	62.6%
	manager	24.0%	76.0%
	white-collar worker	29.0%	71.0%
	manual worker	36.7%	63.3%
	house person	51.0%	49.0%
	unemployed	43.2%	56.8%
	retired	52.3%	47.7%
	student	15.2%	84.8%
$\chi^2 = 1814,354$; $df = 7$; $p < .001$; $N = 28815$			
Education	finished younger than age 15	61.0%	39.0%
	finished between age 15 and age 18	43.2%	56.8%
	finished between age 18 and age 21	36.1%	63.9%
	finished after age 21	31.4%	68.6%
$\chi^2 = 1106,617$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$; $N = 26146$			
Geographical status	rural area or village	42.6%	57.4%
	small-or mid-sized town	37.3%	62.7%
	large town	34.4%	65.6%
$\chi^2 = 136,200$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$; $N = 28681$			

active in sport, in contrast to 39% of those who finished school before the age of 15. With respect to the relationship of physical activity to marital status, single Europeans are the most active (75%), followed by divorced people (64%) and cohabiting or married individuals (61%). Widowed

Europeans are the least physically active, which is not surprising given that this age group is generally older. Differences according to occupation can be noticed as well. As expected, sport participation grades are the lowest among retired citizens (48%) and the highest among students (85%). The latter are followed by managers (76%), white collar workers (71%), manual workers and self-employed individuals (both 63%), and unemployed persons (57%). The house persons group is, with only 49%, the least involved in sport and physical activity. Finally, geographical status is a determinant of sporting activity as well. Of the European citizens living in a rural area or village, 57% are active sport participants. This number increases to 63% for people living in a small- or mid-sized town, and to 66% for people living in a large town.

DISCUSSION

Sport and Europe are inextricably connected, and it seems clear that Europe will continue to strengthen its ties with professional and non-professional sports. Since the 1995 Bosman ruling, there has been a greater and greater involvement – governmental as well as non-governmental – in European sport policy. In addition, several academic and informal organizations have been established (see for instance www.easm.net, www.ejss.de and www.sportandeu.com) which focus on sport policy. Furthermore, in Europe a tradition is developing to empirically map several aspects of sport participation and sport policy. One of the most useful instruments for measurement on the European level is the Eurobarometer survey series. Based on the Eurobarometer survey of 2005, this paper has tried to present insight into the physical activity patterns of EU-27 citizens. In addition, our data has allowed us to carry out some exploratory bivariate analyses so that sport participation could be examined in function of certain socio-cultural and socio-economic background characteristics.

Based on the Eurobarometer survey of 2005, this paper has tried to present insight into the physical activity patterns of EU-27 citizens. In addition, our data has allowed us to carry out some exploratory bivariate analyses so that sport participation could be examined in function of certain socio-cultural and socio-economic background characteristics.

Some remarkable findings emerge from this paper. First of all, we find that the sport participation behavior of Europeans is geographically stratified. In particular, there are some apparent differences between North and West European countries on the one hand and South and East European countries on the other hand. In general, sporting participation declines when going from north to south and from west to east, with a few exceptions. The reasons for this finding should be scrutinized in future research. On average, 63% of European citizens are physically active. However, the popularization of sport participation at the start of the 21st century does not change the fact that in 2005 four out of ten Europeans were still not exposed to sport or physical activity in their leisure time, even by the rather broad definition of physical activity used in the 2005 Eurobarometer survey.

Furthermore, sport participation in the EU-27 is still socially stratified. The sportive leisure-time behavior of European citizens aged 15 and over seems to differ in terms of sex, age, marital status, occupation, educational level and geographical status. These findings are congruent with the results from previous national and regional studies into sport participation which have shown that in many European countries physical activity patterns are still characterized by social differences (see Collins & Kay, 2003; De Haan & Breedveld, 2000; Lamprecht & Stamm,

1995; Scheerder & Pauwels, 2002; Scheerder, Vanreusel, Taks, & Renson, 2002; Scheerder & Van Tuyckom 2006; 2007).

The findings discussed in this paper are based on a first, exploratory analysis. Consequently, some prudence is called for in the interpretation of the findings. Nevertheless, the results show that Europe still has many policy challenges to face in the field of sport. A Europe aiming at greater and greater integration of its citizens into the political sphere should also pay attention to optimal and equal opportunities with respect to the recreational sport activities of its citizens. As such, it is important to adjust for any social discrepancies with respect to physical activity. In spite of thirty years of Sport for All policy, differences according to social position continue to exist. At the onset of the 21st century active involvement in sports is still related to social position and social class. In other words, democratization of sport participation as of 2005 has still not yet been realized. Consequently, Europe should pay increasing attention to the promotion of sport and physical activity for and by all Europeans, so that elements such as health and social integration can be considered as appropriate arguments for potential policy changes. The challenge of developing a sound policy consists of subordinating the influence of geographical and social differences as much as possible to the needs of the social, educational and medical spheres, as well as to personal preferences and needs.

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