

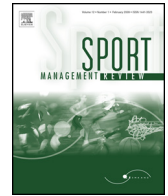


ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Sport Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/smr



Sport managers' perspectives on poverty and sport: The role of local sport authorities

Hanne Vandermeersch^{a,b}, Jeroen Scheerder^{a,*}

^a Policy in Sports Physical Activity Research Group, KU Leuven—University of Leuven, Belgium

^b Research Institute for Labour and Society (HIVA), KU Leuven—University of Leuven, Belgium

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 October 2015

Received in revised form 5 February 2017

Accepted 8 February 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Poverty

Social inclusion

Sport policy

Local sport managers

Sport participation

Barriers

ABSTRACT

Poverty and social exclusion are 'wicked issues' and require a joint approach from a wide array of policy fields. As practicing sport has become a customary activity, it has a part to play in fighting social exclusion. But to what extent is this a realistic expectation? Drawing on qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews at twenty local sport authorities in Flanders (Belgium), the aim of this study is to gain insight in the experiences of local sport authorities with people in poverty, and to identify barriers and facilitators for investing in the inclusion of this social group. Results indicate that facilitating inclusion for people in poverty is a challenging task for local sport managers. Policy initiatives, if any, often remain limited to providing financial discounts. Only a minority of local sport managers reported more comprehensive policies, involving different strategies. A major problem is the limited understanding and expertise of local sport managers with regard to poverty. Therefore, cooperation between sport managers and organisations from the social sector is crucial. Recommendations as to how the role of local sport authorities as a facilitator of social inclusion can be strengthened are formulated.

© 2017 Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Poverty and social exclusion are seen as social problems that warrant public policy intervention. In addition, both issues are considered as 'wicked problems' in the literature (Benington & Geddes, 2001; Carlisle, 2010; Onyango & Jentoft, 2010); they are highly complex issues which cut across traditional boundaries of policy levels and policy sectors. For several decades, it has become clear that poverty is not merely a financial issue. Both in research as well as in policy, and building on the foundational work of Townsend (1979), it has become gradually more commonplace to go beyond a purely financial, income-related approach and to take different indicators of material deprivation into account (see e.g. Nolan & Whelan, 2010; Whelan & Whelan, 1995). Moreover, in addition to a problem of material deprivation, and as a result of it, poverty is to be regarded as a multi-dimensional problem. Indeed, deprivation engenders consequences on many dimensions of a person's life, including at a social and cultural level (Townsend, 1979). Put differently, it is evident that material deprivation affects the ability to participate (Nolan & Whelan, 2010). Hence, relational issues became a central concern, focusing on a lack of social integration and inadequate social participation (Room, 1999), and the concept of social exclusion entered both the

* Corresponding author at: Tervuursevest 101, Bus 1500, 3001 Leuven, Belgium.
E-mail address: Jeroen.scheerder@kuleuven.be (J. Scheerder).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2017.02.002>

1441-3523/© 2017 Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

research agenda as well as the policy scene (see e.g. Barry, 1998; Berghman, 1995; Room, 1995). Poverty and social exclusion are linked to participation, or rather, to the *inability* to participate (Ferragina, Tomlinson & Walker, 2013; Townsend, 1979).

As participation in society encompasses virtually all social spheres, tackling poverty and social exclusion calls for a comprehensive approach, requiring joint efforts from many distinct policy fields. Policy domains include those in health, education, housing and employment. Though not generally regarded as one of the main, traditional pillars of the welfare state, such as health care or employment (see e.g. Walsh, Stephens, & Moore, 2000), leisure can be viewed as a valuable domain in (and possibly through) which societal participation can be realised, hence contributing to the accomplishment of an inclusive society. As argued by Bittman (2002), if leisure and recreation are a customary activity in a given society, these domains should be taken into account, and therefore, also (Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010) authorities in the field of leisure have a role to fulfil. As an inherent part of the domain of leisure, sport should be taken into consideration. While Coalter (1998) argued against the normative citizenship paradigm with regard to leisure, questioning the close association between public leisure provision and social citizenship, we follow Vanreusel (2016), stating that a global coalition for Sport for All is needed, with sport being a right for every person, without exclusion or discrimination.

However, accomplishing this goal – or even working towards it – poses serious challenges, as traditional ‘sectoral’ boundaries need to be overcome. Can it reasonably be assumed that the goal of enhancing social inclusion is picked up in policy fields which fall outside the more ‘classical’ realm of social policy, which is the case for sport policy? Are actors in the field of sport willing and able to facilitate participation for people in poverty? Since the local policy level plays an important part in sport policy and sport provision, we explore the perspective of local sport authorities in this respect. Local sport authorities have been important actors in implementing the idea of Sport for All since several decades (Da Costa & Miragaya, 2002). Investing in the inclusion of socially vulnerable people, such as people in poverty, is however an additional step.

Drawing on qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews at local sport authorities in Flanders (Belgium), we explore the local sport managers’ perspectives on people in poverty as a potential ‘target group’ for sport policy, and investigate their ability and willingness to invest in facilitating sport participation for this specific social group. The aim of this study is to gain insight in the experiences of local sport authorities with people in poverty, and to identify barriers and facilitators for investing in the inclusion in (and possibly through) sport of people in poverty. This paper contributes to the field of sport management in a three-fold way. First, it provides an accurate picture of the extent to which social inclusion is currently picked up by local sport managers. Second, it offers a better understanding of what determines local sport managers’ attitude and action in this respect. Third, a deeper insight is provided in how the role of local sport authorities as promoter of social inclusion can be strengthened. More generally, more insight is provided in the challenges and pitfalls of dealing with social inclusion within sport management.

2. Poverty, social exclusion and sport participation

While many definitions and approaches to poverty coexist, the foundational work of Townsend (1979) remains influential for our understanding of poverty, stressing the importance of conceptualizing poverty in *relative* terms. As indicated by Ferragina et al. (2013), Townsend’s ideas are still relevant for current studies and debates on poverty. Townsend (1979, p. 31) states that people are to be considered in poverty ‘when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong’. Of central importance is that he puts the inability to participate at the core of his definition of poverty, this inability being attributable to a lack of resources (Nolan & Whelan, 2010). The shift in the conceptualisation of poverty has led to an increased focus on social exclusion. Though the relationship between poverty and social exclusion has been articulated in various, and even contradicting ways by different scholars (Lister, 2004), the concept of social exclusion is generally seen as a more comprehensive concept than poverty. Poverty is then often considered as a specific form of social exclusion (Berghman, 1995). Burchardt, Le Grand, and Piachaud (1999, p. 498) offer a concise definition, stating ‘an individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society, (b) he or she cannot participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society, and (c) he or she would like to so participate, but is prevented from doing so by factors beyond his or her control’.

For much of the twentieth century, participation in leisure was considered as ‘luxury’, rather than a necessary expenditure (Bittman, 2002), but meanwhile, some fundamental changes have occurred, as the importance of leisure has grown (Roberts, 2006). Specifically with regard to sport, the interest for it has evolved considerably over the last decades, and sport has come to occupy a more central position in society (Shilling & Mellor, 2000). Many countries have seen a general increase in sport participation (Breedveld & Hoekman, 2011; Stamatakis, Ekelund, & Wareham, 2007; Van Bottenburg, Rijnen, Van Sterkenburg, 2005). Also the heightened interest of media, the fact that sport participation has evolved from being rather exceptional to normal and even normative behaviour (Macdonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson, & McCuaig, 2012), and the rise in governmental investments in the field of sport (e.g. Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nørdland & Rommetvedt, 2007; Houlihan, 2005) indicate that sport has gained importance. The ‘health ethos’ in current Western societies and the widely (and uncritically) accepted idea that practicing sport leads to good health (Waddington, 2000) offer at least part of the explanation. People are increasingly expected to take care of their body and health – or even to take *responsibility* over their own health – and practicing sport is an important part of it.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6576160>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6576160>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)