

# WHO'S GOING FOR LIGHT? A PROFILE OF LIGHT SPORT COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

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## Aim

The aim of this study is to analyse and to understand background characteristics of light sport community participants from a policy and marketing perspective. Therefore, two main research questions are put forward: (1) can significant differences in background characteristics be observed between active sports participants in light communities compared to other more formal organisational settings of sports participation?; and (2) which types of light sport community participants can be distinguished based on motives for sports participation?

## Theoretical background

During the last decades, the active involvement in sport as well as the provision of sport has undergone processes of diversification and de-traditionalisation. After a first participation wave in the 1970s, a second rise in sports participation since the 1990s mainly occurred due to the commitment in non-organised settings (e.g. Laakso et al., 2008; Scheerder & Vos, 2011). Therefore, a notable trend in sports participation in the last decades is the emergence of *light communities in sport*. Light communities in sport refer to groups of sports participants that organise themselves in an informal and flexible way. Moreover, light communities are characterised by loose bonds in which no licence fees, fixed engagement nor entrance to structural facilities is required (Scheerder & van Bottenburg, 2010). This trend can be understood from a broader sociological perspective in which individualisation, autonomy and de-traditionalisation have led to collective choices and flexible arrangements. As a consequence, participants schedule sports and leisure time activities without being dependent on rules, time-tables and external obligations as major features of formal sports organisations (Delnoij, 2004; Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004).

Because of the accessibility of light sport communities, it is hypothesised that a broader range of participants can be reached compared to more formal settings. As such, private and public policy makers and sports providers (e.g. sports clubs) need to be aware of this trend in order to maximise their ability to attract people. Therefore, the present paper focuses on the profile and segmentation of light sport community participants as part of a research tradition on the optimisation of access to sports provision for all.

## Methods

Quantitative data used for this study originate from a representative cross-sectional large-scale participation survey among 18- to 85-years old subjects (n = 2941) in Flanders, Belgium. This survey includes questions concerning participation in sport, media and culture. Data were collected through interviews by phone. For this study, data of active sports participants (n = 1812) are used.

In a first part, binary logistic regression analysis is used with regard to four organisational contexts (i.e. participants in sports clubs, commercial settings, light communities and individual participants). The influence of socio-demographic variables (age, gender, family status and level of urbanisation), socio-economic variables (level of education, professional status, level of income and parental socio-economic status), and lifestyle characteristics (size of the social network, media preferences, parental sports participation, sports participation in youth, and the intensity and frequency of sports participation) is calculated. In a second part, a typology of light communities in sport is elaborated through cluster analysis based on motives for sports participation. Background characteristics and light sports preferences within each cluster are presented.

## Results & implications

Results of this study indicate (1) whether there is a significant difference in background characteristics between active sports participants in light communities and other settings such as club-organised, commercial or individual contexts, and (2) which types of light sports participants can be distinguished. Insight in these market shares will allow public and private policy makers and sports providers to develop strategic goals and efficient marketing tools to attract light participants to organised settings in terms of lifelong participation. This approach fits within an overall policy to increase the physical activity level of the population.

At the time of this abstract submission, statistical analyses have not been conducted yet. However, results of the described analysis will be ready to be presented at the conference.

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