
THE IMPACT OF SPORT ON DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract

Background: Research interest in the role of sport on development of social capital has grown in the past 10 years (Hoye & Nicholson, 2009; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Seippel, 2006). However, it has been argued that much of those studies has only focused on conceptualizing the hypothesis of the potential linkage between sport and social capital (Kobayashi, Nicholson, & Hoye, 2013); or for some studies which attempt to establish the link empirically, the results have been criticised as overstated or exaggerated due to measurement issues (see for example, Nicholson, Brown, & Hoye, 2013). In sum, there is a lack of a certainty over whether and how sport can lead to the development and/or maintenance of social capital. Thus, a thorough review of the literature in relation to this subject is needed in a systematic manner.

Methodology: This systematic review is conducted to search the following databases with language and the length of pages restrictions for papers published up to 2014: Web of Science, SPORTDiscus, Science Direct, Emerald, and Taylor & Francis. Studies of any design that directly address social impacts (in particular social capital) of sport are included. In addition, those studies, of which the potential association between social capital and sport emerged from the findings, are also included in order to boost the volume of empirical evidence.

In total 91 studies are included for thematic analysis, of which eight broad categories are identified. They are: the concept of social capital; social capital and sport (a dimension of sport participation); social capital and sport (a dimension of sport sites); social capital and sport (a dimension of events); social capital and sport (a dimension of volunteering); social capital development in disadvantaged groups; dark side to social capital; the measurement issues of social capital.

Results: In general, the existing findings reveal that social capital can be enhanced in two ways: one, participating in sporting programmes as participants or volunteers helps strengthening self-identity and building social networks); two, sporting institutions or sporting events act as arena

that offers civic engagement, which leads to social inclusion or community revitalization. However, while there is considerable evidence which indicates that development of social capital is related to sport to various degrees, some of it fails to explain the complexity of the processes of achieving those outcomes. It is unrealistic to expect such pattern to reproduce on its own without considering the features and conditions of particular contexts. In addition, many of them which claimed sport can offer intrinsic benefits for the promotion of positive social capital often neglect the negative or 'dark' side of social capital which can generalise issues such as social exclusion and inequality. Furthermore, this study also addresses the issues in relation to in which way social capital effects should be measured at the end.

Conclusion: This study offers a systematic review of the literature of the concepts and assumptions underlying the nature of 'social capital' adopted for the sporting context research, to provide a more precise understanding of its distinctive meanings. It also advances knowledge by producing a synthesis of evidence that addresses the impact of sport on development of social capital. In addition, taking a critical approach, this review also identifies some emerged issues from current research and highlights several potential areas for future research.

References

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