
EFFECTS OF A COMMUNITY SPORT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON SPORT, SOCIAL AND HEALTH OUTCOMES: THE IMPORTANCE OF YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION

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Synopsis:

This study researches the effect of a community sport development program on sport participation, physical activity, mental health and social capital. It looks closer on how years of implementation time and different stakeholders influence processes that underpin these effects.

Abstract:

AIM

The aim of this study is twofold. First this study wants to research the effect of a community sport development program on sport participation, physical activity social capital and mental health. Second this study aims to explain how years of implementation time of a community sport development program effect the outcome at community, network and organizational levels.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To counteract the impacts of certain societal changes (such as economic reforms, migration and population changes, individualization and secularization) it has been advocated to invest in community development (Skinner & Zakus, 2008). Sport has been seen as one of the ways to develop the community (Vail, 2007). In light of this evolution community sport development programs were installed in many Western countries (Skinner & Zakus, 2008). One of the consistent success factors in community sport development programs has been the involvement of a wide variety of partners (Casey, Payne, Eime, & Brown, 2009). In evaluating partnership-initiatives as community sport development programs a first item to take into account are views of different stakeholders (Mandell & Keast, 2008). In the context of community sport development sport stakeholders may aim to increase sport participation, social stakeholders may aim to increase social capital, health

organizations may aim to boost physical activity and mental health. These varying reasons and motives to engage into a partnership-initiative influence views of effectiveness of the program, but are often discarded in evaluation of these programs (Mandell & Keast, 2008). A second item to consider in studying the effectiveness of partnership-initiatives is years of implementation time as this has been argued to effect outcomes on the community, network and organizational levels (Mandell & Keast, 2008). The importance of this element has to our knowledge never been studied in a community sport development context, although several studies in this research field have hinted its importance (Misener & Doherty, 2012; Vail, 2007). Many questions remain however on how years of implementation time effect outcomes on the different levels and which processes underpin these effects.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

An explanatory mixed method design was used, including six disadvantaged communities in Antwerp, Belgium. Two 'experienced' communities had an implementation time of the sport development program of fifteen years, two 'semi-experienced' communities had a seven year implementation time and two 'control-communities' had no implementation time. Quantitative data was gathered (a) on the community level to study the relation of the program with sport, social and health goals and (b) on the network level to research the reach of the program. Two hundred adults (aged 18–56 years) per community were randomly selected and visited at home to fill out a questionnaire on socio-demographics, sport participation, physical activity, mental health, social capital and the reach of the community sport development program. A sample of 272 adults participated in the study. Qualitative data was gathered to explain different perceptions of effectiveness and processes that underpin outcomes on community, network and organizational level. In total 52 face to face interviews were held with sports, health and social stakeholders of the community sports development program in program communities and potential stakeholders in control communities. Finally archival records were collected to provide data on organizational level of different activities of the community sport development program in the different communities.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

Communities with the community sport development program noted a significant higher sport participation and physical activity than control communities. No significant differences were found for mental health and social capital between the different communities. However, interviews with health and social organizations indicated that regardless of this finding, they perceived the program as being very important in the community. Most mentioned were the creation of sport offerings adapted to the needs of their target groups and the support to their own activities by providing expertise in sports or providing infrastructure, financial or administrative assistance. As expected results on network and organizational level showed that communities with 15 years of implementation time scored better than communities with 5 year of implementation, adding empirical evidence on the importance of experience and sustainability of community sport development programs. Interviews uncovered that this difference could mainly be explained by a higher interconnectedness with organizations in the field and a higher level of built trust and willingness to share resources over time.

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