

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL AND EXERCISE AND SPORT ACTIVITIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

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### **Introduction**

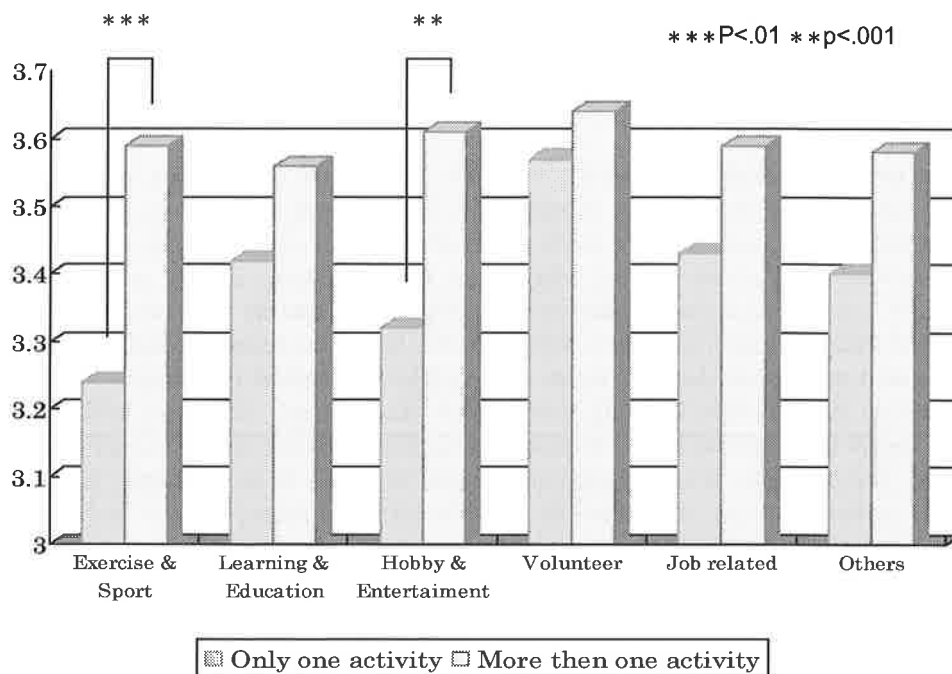
Starting from its educational applications, research into social capital has long been used as a barometer for building healthy, affluent communities in rural and urban areas, yet in recent years, it has caught the attention of people active in the fields of economics and business administration. Social capital was defined by Putnam (1993, chapter 6) as the “trust, norms, networking and other characteristics of a social organization that inspire people to cooperate with one another and enhance the efficiency of their society.” However, little research has been done into the relationship between sports involvement and social capital; Wann et al. (2001) identified the contribution that watching professional sports has towards building social networks amongst urbanites, while Robins (2001) reported how sports tournaments have promoted interaction between New Zealand’s Maori and non-Maori peoples. The situation of social capital research in Japan is no different, but it is worthy of attention that a national survey conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2003) indicated that the “percentage of participation in sports and activities of interest” was the greatest factor in building social capital. The objective of this study was to clarify the building effect that exercise and sports activities have in local communities, using the number of participants in local activities as an explanatory variable and a recognized social capital (SC) score as an explained variable.

### **Method**

Six indicators were used for the number of participants in local activities: “exercise and sports groups and gatherings”, “learning and educational groups and gatherings”, “hobby and entertainment groups and gatherings”, “volunteer groups and gatherings”, “job related groups and gatherings of the local area such as from cooperatives or the chamber of commerce and industry” and “other groups and gatherings (i.e., political, grassroots or consumer groups, etc.)”. Moreover, SC scoring was done by quantifying earned points against a 5-level evaluation scale. Points were earned from 18 items: “trust and solidarity” (5 items), “group action and cooperation” (2 items), “information and communication” (4 items), “social cohesion and subsumption” (3 items), and “feeling of efficacy and advocacy with government” (4 items). The questionnaire including the current participation in six local activities, the social capital scale consists of 18 items, and other demographic variables were developed. The survey was conducted in 2003 and, to acquire homogeneous sample in terms of age and income, questionnaire were distributed to parents of school children that attended six elementary schools in Yamagata Prefecture. There were 764 usable responses.

### **Results**

As Figure 1 indicates, amongst participants of just one activity, persons who participated in exercise or sports activities scored significantly lower SC points than persons who participated in voluntary activities ( $p < .001$ ). However, a comparison between persons who participated only in exercise or sports activities and persons who participated in multiple activities including exercise or sports showed that these latter scored a significantly higher number of SC points ( $p < .001$ ). This suggests that the more persons who participate in exercise or sports activities are involved in other local community activities, the more of a building effect it has. This result implied that there was no direct relationship between exercise and sports participation and social capital score.



**Figure 1: Social capital score for a single community activity participant and a plural community activity participant**

**References**

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