

Are Sport and Leisure Complements or Substitutes? A Time Allocation Analysis and Review of UK Policy

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Abstract

Aim of Paper

This paper assess the extent to which traditionally identified sports activities are complementary to, or substituted by, other leisure and cultural activities that are consumed as non-obligated time, to review and inform current UK Sports Policy.

Theoretical Background

Sport is frequently identified as a policy vehicle for overcoming problems like obesity and promoting health and well being. Consequently, much emphasis is directed towards policies aimed at promoting sports participation (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002). The main theoretical rationale, based in economics, is that the consumption of sport (that is participation) can help to correct for inefficiencies in the private or voluntary supply of sport. Sport has positive externalities that can correct for society's under provision of health and well being. Policy analysis has, however, tended to focus primarily upon sport, defined as a particular set of activities, and emphasised the drivers of, and contexts within which, such sport takes place (Sport England, 2004a, 2004b).

The UK is currently undergoing a change in its sports delivery apparatus. Whilst UK Sport now takes the lead on elite sport development, Sport England has responsibility for mass community sport, and the Youth Sport Trust for School Sport. However, the Department for Health will now lead on policy to promote an active nation, that may involve promoting a broader set of leisure and recreation activities with Sport England focussing primarily upon club-based sports.

This fragmentation suggests that policy formulated by, and understood in terms of, separate domains may be problematic if it does not account for the possible interaction of participation in a range of activities across individual lifestyles. This is an important issue because economic theory identifies that sport and leisure are competing claims on the discretionary time available to individuals, but the use of the latter may also include non-physically active leisure, such as cultural consumption. It is clear, therefore, that promoting sport and physical activity needs to account for the possibility that such consumption is chosen instead. This issue is not well researched. To address this bias, this paper provides an extension of a time allocation model to explore the choice to participate in both traditionally defined sports activities, but also

broader leisure and cultural activities and to identify the factors which make them substitutable or complementary (Becker, 1974, Downward and Riordan, 2007).

Methodology

28117 observations from the first year of the UK 'Taking Part Survey' (DCMS) are used in the analysis. A variety of regression models are applied to the data. First, count-data regression analysis is employed, using Heckman sample selection estimators to control for selection bias, to model the number of sport and broader leisure/cultural activities participated in over a 4 week period. Secondly TOBIT regression on the ratio of the activities is undertaken, to account for the right and left sided censoring of the dependent variable. Results With a significance level of $p=0.05$, it is shown that the sport is more likely to be substituted for broader leisure activities by, for example, males with higher levels of education, with those considering themselves to be healthy and on higher incomes. In contrast aging, being female and the presence of pre-school children will have the opposite effects, as will increased work hours.

Discussion

The results suggest that for some segments of society sport and broader leisure activities can be viewed as substitutes and that sport exhibits elements of being a good that requires investment in human capital, whilst broader leisure and cultural activities are more accessible activities. This helps to explain why the participation rates for sports are much lower. This also suggests that identifying broader leisure and cultural activities that have a physical activity dimension may more easily develop a healthy population than a focus upon sport per se, which will require targeting much more structural determinants of behaviour. In this regard the recent development in UK policy has some rationale, but care should be exercised in ensuring that policy addresses the needs of all segments of society.

References

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