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### **Sport's Social Provisions**

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### **Sport's Social Provisions**

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Social capital has become a useful tool for conceptualising the way in which social relations generate positive outcomes for individuals, organisations, groups, communities and nations (cf. Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). Voluntary organisations are often assumed to be a significant factor in building social capital, including social cohesion, levels of trust, norms of reciprocity, civic participation and engagement, and are therefore considered an important aspect of community wellbeing (Putnam, 2000). However, there is a distinct lack of clarity about whether particular voluntary associations contribute to social capital more or less than others, and a lack of knowledge about the ways in which these associations contribute to making their members more (or less) trusting, more (or less) prepared to engage in civic participation or more (or less) socially connected (Stolle, 1998).

As one type of voluntary organisation, community sport organisations are often ascribed a range of social benefits and outcomes, including community capacity building, reducing crime and youth delinquency, empowering disadvantaged groups, improving confidence and self-esteem and increasing social integration and co-operation (Long and Sanderson, 2001). Sport's role in developing social capital, as articulated by organisations such as the European Union and national governments (cf. Commission on the European Communities, 2007; Commonwealth of Australia, 2001, 2008; Sport Canada, 2002; Sport England, 2004), appears to tap into assumptions about sport's inherent value, qualities and capacity for good. However, the role of sport in facilitating social outcomes such as inclusion and connectedness is notoriously lacking in robust evidence. The evidence that does exist is beset by what Coalter (2007) identified as conceptual weakness; methodological weakness; and little consideration of sufficient conditions.

The research presented in this paper is part of a larger study examining the relationship between social capital and sport and non-sport community involvement. As such, we are concerned here with exploring only one aspect of sport's broader connection to social capital and relationship to individual and community wellbeing - the social provisions associated with sport involvement, a framework for examining relationships and what people gain from them, proposed by Weiss (1974), which consists of six elements: attachment; social integration; opportunity for nurturance; reassurance of worth; a sense of reliable alliance; and the obtaining of guidance. This paper explores the relationship between sport and social capital by reporting on research that examined the social provisions of individuals' involvement in sport and non-sport community organisations. Data were collected via a large cross sectional survey (n=1826) on levels of involvement in community sport and other third sector organisations (the number of organisations, length of time involved with an organisation, number of hours per week spent engaged with an organisation, and organisational role - player, coach, administrator or other volunteer), selected demographic variables, and a measure of social provisions using the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona, 1984, 1986; Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

The findings of this research appear to support Weiss' (1974) original contentions that the social provisions of a particular social relationship will be different to another social relationship in a different context or setting and 'that different types of relationships make different provisions' (p. 21). Having a partner and being female, which in turn might suggest the presence of close friendships, had the most significant predictive effect in each of the subscales and the overall social provisions scale. This was to be expected, given that many of the social provisions rely on close relationships, either with a partner, family, or a very close friend. In a sense the existence of these close relationships might be considered a bedrock or foundation upon which an 'adequate life organisation' (Weiss, 1974: 24) might be built. However, the results also show that after controlling for all other demographic variables, sport involvement had a small but significant predictive effect on higher social integration, reliable alliance, guidance, nurturance and the overall social provision scale scores. By contrast, non-sport community involvement only had a significant predictive effect for the social integration subscale. As such, the research reported

within this paper supports the contention that social networks developed through involvement in sport organisations are of more value than those developed through non-sport community organisations. The research provides the foundation for further research which examines how sport organisations facilitate social provisions within specific contexts and given particular human, physical and social resources.