

Session: **Local and global sport governance III.**

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## **Use and effects of urban public sports- and playgrounds in the Netherlands**

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### **Background**

Public sports- and playgrounds are important facilities in densely populated urban environments. With the development of concepts as the Cruyff Courts, Richard Krajicek Playgrounds, sports-schoolyards, and Nike zoneparcs, local governments in the Netherlands want to reach certain objectives such as: “sport back to the neighbourhood”, the promotion of active and healthy lifestyles, the reduction of youth annoyance, and stimulation of social bonding. But is it realistic to expect these outcomes? Who are the actual users of different types of sports- and playgrounds? How can local governments promote playground participation by different target groups? And which effects on users and residents can be reached? In other words: is it profitable to invest in the development and improvement of public sports- and playgrounds and how should this be done? These kind of questions are addressed in studies by the W.J.H. Mulier Instituut. The empirical findings presented here come from a research project carried out in four similar multicultural Rotterdam neighbourhoods (Van Lindert & Romijn, 2009). Five different public sports grounds have been studied extensively and all other existing public sports grounds in Rotterdam are scanned. The results are linked to findings of other research projects on the use and effects of contemporary playgrounds in the Netherlands (Breedveld, Romijn & Cevaal, 2009) and a literature study on the use and effects of public sports- and playgrounds (Van Lindert, Frelier & Nielander, 2009).

### **Objectives**

During the presentation the following topics are discussed:

- the amount and way of use of urban public sports grounds in the Netherlands;
- differences in the use of sports grounds by different groups;
- possible effects of urban public sports grounds on users and residents;

The discussion will be based on empirical data from the above mentioned studies. Recommendations for development, maintenance and social programming of public sports- and playgrounds are given.

### **Methods**

All public sports grounds in Rotterdam (n= 65) were visited, photographed, and scanned on a number of characteristics, using a checklist (see Bakker et al, 2008). Case studies have been carried out on five different types of sports grounds in similar multicultural Rotterdam

neighbourhoods. Different methods (data triangulation) are used to give insight in the above mentioned objectives:

- Observations and countings to register number of users on the sports grounds
- Questionnaires scholars (n=320)
- Face to face interviews users and residents
- Group discussions local professionals in the neighbourhood
- Mapping of physical characteristics of the neighbourhoods using a checklist (see Bakker et al, 2008)
- Analysis of secondary data on neighbourhoods (demography, etc.)

## **Results and conclusion**

The research findings indicate that it is profitable to reserve public space for sports and play in urban neighbourhoods. Public sports- and playgrounds, although they often differ in hardware (design and equipment), software (activity programme and supervision) and orgware (stakeholders), they all serve children's and youths needs to be physically active and meet with like-minded residents.

The successfulness of the investments depends on the specific objectives and target groups, as set by the local government, and on the distribution of the means over hardware, software and orgware. A careful consideration is needed to decide which concept in which setting is suitable. To attract girls (of Dutch and other ethnic background) it is not enough to develop hardware only. The research findings point out that girls use sports grounds less frequently than boys (see also Karsten, 2003). Boys outnumber girls on the 'typical' sports grounds, where football is the dominant sport. A larger number of girls are found on sports- and playgrounds with more variety in equipment and where activities are organized. Organised activities and supervision on sports- and playgrounds can stimulate the participation of groups that normally are outnumbered or denied access by dominant groups, deviant behaviour is corrected and users of different (ethnic) background and age play together.

For local governments it is important to learn about ways how to optimize the use and effects of sports- and playgrounds. This is possible by taking into account a few conditions. These are related to hardware (design, equipment, location and maintenance), software (organization of sports activities and supervision) and orgware (the participation of stakeholders e.g. sports, welfare, youth work, schools, etc.).

## **Literature:**

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