

THE ROLE OF SPORTS FACILITIES IN SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN DENMARK

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Aim of paper

This abstract presents a first step in setting up new research aimed at understanding the relationship between the provision and supply of sports facilities (input) and sports participation (output) in Denmark. The results presented in this abstract are from a study conducted in the municipality of Rudersdal which serves as a guidepost for further research.

Literature review and background

Denmark ranks as one of the top countries in world in regard to participation in organised and recreational sports (Scheerder et. al., 2011), which to some extent, according to Rafoss and Troelsen (2010), reflects a great supply of sports facilities.

In Denmark, sports facilities are planned, built and operated almost entirely by local authorities, and of the DKK 5.4 billion in public money spent on sports provision per year, DKK 4.5 billion is spent on sports facilities. The 98 individual municipalities are the main contributors in providing sports facilities.

Research questions

Despite the large sums of money used on sports facilities each year, the planning of these facilities has rested on chance, local enthusiasm and the whim of politicians. Little is known about the link between the provision of sports facilities and participation, and how different types of facilities promote participation among various subgroups of users.

Being a first step, the study in Rudersdal gives initial answers to important research questions which are planned to be explored deeper in the future:

- i. How do large investments in sports facilities and a wide supply of facilities affect sports participation rates?
- ii. Which roles do different kinds of facilities play in participation among different subgroups of users?

Method

To answer the research questions four different surveys are brought together:

1. The national survey on sports participation (Laub, 2013).
2. A database upon the number and types of facilities across municipalities.
3. A survey of local sports participation in the municipality. In Rudersdal the survey gives access to

more precise data on sports participation and use of facilities.

4. An analysis of the use of indoor facilities during two weeks of the peak season. The analysis indicates who uses the different facilities (Forsberg and Høyer-Kruse: 2013).

Results and future studies

The results from the study in Rudersdal are mixed and the link between sports facilities and participation is not fully exposed.

In general, the provision of sports facilities in Rudersdal is better in some areas and worse in others. For instance, the provision of swimming pools and tennis courts is better at the municipal level in Rudersdal than at the national level, while the provision of football pitches and large sports halls (typically used for handball, badminton and gymnastics) is worse.

In regard to sports participation, children (under the age of 16) in Rudersdal are as active as children at the national level, while adults (16 to 64 years of age) and the elderly (above 65 years of age) are much more active. Participation in swimming, football or activities normally held in large sports halls (gymnastics and badminton) does not differ significantly from participation at the national level despite the differences in the provision of facilities (Forsberg and Ibsen, 2012). This is not the case for tennis and handball. The percentage of inhabitants in Rudersdal playing tennis is significantly higher than the national level, which might reflect a greater supply of facilities. Conversely, fewer children play handball which might correspond a lesser supply of big halls for handball.

Looking at the figures for the elderly, the higher participation in sport in general in Rudersdal might reflect a greater supply of facilities especially suited to the elderly. The provision of small halls is greater than at the national level and these halls attract the elderly because they are well suited to gymnastics and are often placed throughout the municipality, i.e. relatively close to home. Conversely, the higher participation among adults has little to do with the provision of sports facilities. The three biggest activities for adults (jogging, strength training and walking) are not catered for at sports facilities set up by the municipality of Rudersdal.

Therefore the results from the study of Rudersdal show that a great provision of facilities might play an important role for sports participation among some subgroups of users (tennis players and the elderly), while this is not the case for others (adults).

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