

SPORT PARTICIPATION ANALYSIS – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON TWO SMALL COMMUNITIES

Pedro Rodrigues, Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal

Miguel Outeiro, Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal

José Ángel Miguel Dávila, Universidad de León, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

Information about Sport Participation Index (SPI) is a critical factor in the sport development process. Socio-demographic data can be a cost effective instrument to increase efficiency of local policies that promote sport participation (SP). Although bibliography about SP is vast, the analysis and comparison of previous works is complex due to heterogeneity in methodologies. There is an enormous disparity in SP results in Portugal: Marivoet (2001) refers that SPI in Portugal is 27%; Almeida, & Graça (1998) refer that the non participation percentage in Portugal is 60%; and according to the Eurobarometer report (2004) Portugal presents the lowest figure of SPI, 22%, followed by Greece 26%, while the European average is 38%. There is a limited availability of data about SP in small cities. The presented study intended to: a) characterise SP in two small cities; b) identify target groups in order to increase the efficiency local authority efforts'.

METHODS

Bragança and Viseu are two small interior cities, 34750 and 93501 residents respectively. Data collection was accomplished using the questionnaire developed by Alexandris & Carroll (1997) translated and adapted to the Portuguese reality by Rodrigues & Theodorakis (2002). The respondents were selected in public places. A total of 750 questionnaires were used, 351 from Bragança and 399 from Viseu. This convenience sample was constituted by 48% of males participants; the group between 16-25 year-old represented 43%, the aged 26-35 represented 35%, the 36-45 year-old represented 13% and the ≥ 46 year-old group represented 9%; the academic qualifications were relatively low, only 35% had a high degree qualification; the majority was single 63%; and 68% had no children.

RESULTS

In this study we considered SP as the participation in sport activities, organized or not, at least once or more per week in the past 12 months; 40,6% of the respondents felt in this category. A large majority (68%) reported that would like to participate more in activities which they have already participated in and 63% refer that would like to participate more in activities which they have never experienced before.

Groups defined by socio-demographic variables presented significant differences in their SP: gender; female respondents participate less than male ($F 13,74$; Sig. 0,0002); and respondents that had children presented a lower participation rate SP ($F 5,291$; Sig. 0,022). No significant differences were found as far as variables age, academic qualifications, marital status and annual income are concerned.

DISCUSSION

Found differences confirm previous studies about SP (Alexandris & B., 1997; Almeida & Graça, 1998; Marivoet, 2001). According to those, gender differences may be related to social constraints that female are exposed to in leisure activities. Bibliography is also consensual in pointing that the reduction of leisure time is an important constraint in SP; this fact may, in some way, justify the lower participation presented by respondents that have children. At the same time, the fact that we have found no significant differences concerning the variables age

and academic qualifications contrasts with previous studies. This fact might result from sample bias. Gender proportion is similar to the general population (48% males). However; our sample differs from the general population of both cities (Table 1 and Table 2). This fact may also be responsible for the high SP figure (40,6%) when compared with Marivoet (2001), 27%, and Eurobarometer (2004), 22%.

Table 1 – Comparison between age groups – general population and sample.

Age group	0-16	15-24	25-34	35-45	>45
General population	16%	15%	15%	14%	40%
Sample		43%	35%	13%	9%

Table 2 – Comparison between academic qualification groups – general population and sample.

Age group	Elementary School or less	High School	College
General population	72%	15%	14%
Sample	12%	54%	32%

Comparisons of SP results are difficult; studies about SP differ significantly as far as methodologies are concerned. Despite the presented limitation, we can conclude that SP is lower in females and individual that have children. Further studies, if possible, should consider the reduction of sample bias.

Local politicians should promote strategies addressed to the elimination of social constraints related to female SP and individuals that have children in order to close the gap between these groups and general population.

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