

In search for the politicizing function of community sport practices in Flanders

The enhancement of social cohesion has always been a key challenge for social work. As the community sport field in Flanders particularly found its origin in the youth and welfare sector since the '90s, community sport practices are intertwined in this challenge social work is faced with, particularly because community sport practices provide an inclusive alternative to classic social work approaches in the achievement of social objectives with socially vulnerable youth. Community sport initiatives particularly take the issue of social inequality as the main legitimation of their interventions in the leisure time of socially vulnerable young people. As such, the concept of community sport is established from the core objective to contribute to social justice and equity. Moreover, community sport initiatives attain to use social cohesion as a lever to combat this social stratification. However, we argue that existing conceptual frameworks of social cohesion are insufficient to capture this structural dimension of social cohesion, due to their dominant focus on individual levels of social cohesion. A previous study (we finished in 2016) towards the perspectives of Flemish community sport practitioners on the enhancement of social cohesion through community sport, reveals a disjuncture between these academic constructs of social cohesion and the understandings of practitioners, as practitioners pursue social cohesion from a clear awareness towards structural causes of inequality. However, the academic dominance on individual notions of social cohesion provides little possibilities for practitioners to translate their awareness into a structural way of working. Based on these results, ongoing action research was conducted in a community sport practice in Flanders in which we explored the structural (and politicizing) function of community sport. In this presentation, we will shed light upon the findings of this research, particularly with regard to the way in which practitioners deploy their signal function as a strategy to take up their political role.