Edith Cowan University

Research Online

2019

Managing informal sport participation: Tensions and opportunities

Ruth Jeanes

Ramón Spaaij

Dawn Penney
Edith Cowan University, d.penney@ecu.edu.au

Justen O'Connor

Managing informal sport participation: tensions and opportunities

Ruth Jeanes, Ramón Spaaij, Dawn Penney & Justen O'Connor

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

Managing informal sport participation: tensions and opportunities

Ruth Jeanes [a], Ramón Spaaij [b,c], Dawn Penney [d] and Justen O'Connor [a]

aFaculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia; bInstitute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia; cDepartment of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands; dFaculty of Education Edith Cowan University & Faculty of Education Monash University, Perth (Edith Cowan University), Australia

ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the role of informal sport within attempts to increase sport participation. Informal sport is a contested concept that government and non-government agencies are grappling with. In this article, the focus is on participation that is self-organised and not club based. The research reported reflects that at present, policy makers and practitioners have not seriously considered how informal sport may be positioned as a central facet in efforts to respond to participation objectives and associated health and social policy agendas. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with stakeholders responsible for promoting community sport participation in Victoria, Australia, the authors explore some of the tensions and challenges that stakeholders experience in supporting and managing informal sport. The findings indicate that current practices limit the potential of informal sport. Drawing on concepts from collaborative governance, the article concludes that changes to both culture and practices within sport development systems are required in order for stakeholders to harness the potential of informal participation.

Introduction

Increasing sport participation remains a significant priority for the Australian Government and other Western democracies. The current government 'game plan', *Play. Sport. Australia.* (Australian Sports Commission [ASC] 2016a), outlines the Australian Sports Commission's intention to encourage more Australians, particularly young Australians, to engage in sport more often and recognises that, to do so, sports organisations need to respond to a changing landscape of sport participation. The imperatives set out in *Play. Sport. Australia.* have permeated the policies of national sporting associations (NSAs), with many setting themselves ambitious participation targets as part of their yearly strategic plans while also experimenting with new game formats and/or membership strategies. Whilst federal government continues to invest funding in increasing participation in structured sport, Australian data suggest that sport-participation trends have shifted in recent years, away from organised club-based sport towards 'non-organised' or informal forms of participation (ABS 2015, ASC 2016b). Within Australia and internationally, there is a considerable shift away from club-based engagement (Green *et al*. 2015), particularly for young adults, with informal participation becoming an important aspect of the lifestyles of young people (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, Sport New Zealand 2012, ABS 2015, Sport England 2016). The ASC's

---

own participation data further indicate 'Sport clubs are not the main choice for participation in sport or physical activity in Australia for adults aged 18 years and over' (ASC, 2016b, p.11). Despite these shifts in participation trends, sports policy makers have yet to consider seriously how they might support and extend informal participation (Sterchele and Ferrero-Camoletto 2017).

This article critically examines the position of informal participation within a policy context that is focusing on increasing participation in sport but has yet to fully engage with informal sport as a legitimate form of activity. For the purpose of this article, we are defining informal sports as traditional recognised sporting forms, played by groups who are not affiliated to sporting bodies or pay membership fees. As we outline in more depth further in the article, there is no single agreed definition of informal sport and this in part reflects a compounding lack of consensus in policy arenas about what activities and participation are deemed to legitimately be termed 'sport'.

The article specifically explores how sport development stakeholders at state and local levels currently view, engage with and seek to manage informal participation. The research sought to answer three research questions:

(1) How do stakeholders understand informal sport and what types of informal participation were they aware of?
(2) How have they sought to manage and/or support these activities?
(3) What challenges and/or tensions have arisen in their efforts to manage and/or support informal participation?

Whilst there has been a significant amount of research examining informal/lifestyle sports, there is a notable lack of studies examining how informal participation fits within traditional sports development structures and systems, and how policy makers and practitioners can productively engage with informal participants. This is particularly apparent in the context of informal traditional sport rather than lifestyle activities. This article uses interviews to draw on the views and experiences of stakeholders from state sporting associations[1] (SSAs), local government sport and recreation departments and community groups. The article shows that traditional top-down approaches to managing and developing sport are unlikely to be effective in informal contexts and outlines some of the possibilities associated with utilising collaborative network thinking and principles from 'joined-up' governance (Carey 2015) to overcome key tensions inherent in the management of informal sport participation.

The research context: the Australian sporting system

The article considers the position of informal sport within current sport development systems in Australia. It is useful to provide a brief overview of these systems to assist with understanding the research context, findings and their implications. Australia has a complex, multi-layered sporting system that operates at a federal, state/territory and local authority level. At the federal level, the Australian Sports Commission is responsible for overseeing the development of sport participation and distribution of funding for this purpose to peak sporting bodies. NSAs (such as Cricket Australia, Football Federation Australia) have a responsibility for sport-specific support at a national level, setting strategic priorities and directions for sport development and resourcing. Sports also have state-level associations (SSAs, such as Cricket Victoria) that provide the connection between national-level policies and strategies and community clubs and associations. Each state also has a government department or office with general responsibilities for sport and recreation promotion and development (such as facility development, promotion of under-represented groups) and liaison with local councils/authorities.

At the community level, local authorities similarly have responsibility for developing sport and supporting participation through various means, including provision and maintenance of public open spaces, public facility development and maintenance and subsidisation of community

participation initiatives. Local authorities own and manage the majority of facilities used by community sport in Australia. Community sports clubs hire these facilities, often for substantial periods, but they rarely 'own' their own grounds or changing/club room facilities. Facilities are therefore public spaces and available for use by all members of the community. Soccer, cricket and Australian rules football (AFL) pitches in particular are often located within broader green space areas, making them easily accessible for casual users. These characteristics and the funding arrangements described below are particularly important when considering some of the tensions that this article outlines in managing informal participation.

Within community sport, participation targets are connected to funding. The ASC work with NSAs to set participation targets and provide funding to support the achievement of these. NSAs distribute funding to their relevant SSAs and to clubs. Ongoing funding is dependent on meeting the agreed participation targets. Within Victoria, where the research was located, Sport and Recreation Victoria (the state government department) provide further funding to the sport sector, via the SSAs, and at times also directly to individual clubs. Additionally, Sport and Recreation Victoria provide funding and support for large-scale infrastructure and facilities projects. At the local government level, councils throughout Victoria provide grants and funding for community clubs and have responsibility for upgrading and building new sport and recreation facilities. In general, clubs with larger numbers of affiliated members, and particularly junior members drawn from a spectrum of the local community, are better positioned to access funding. Further, it is extremely difficult to gain funding to support participation without attachment to a recognised and affiliated sporting club or association. In most instances, applications for funding are only open to established, registered clubs or associations.

Conceptualising informal sport participation

As indicated above, we recognise the diverse application of the term 'informal sport' nationally and internationally, and the range of other terminology (including 'non-sport related'; see ASC 2016a) that is used to refer to forms of participation that fall outside of long-established sporting structures. Within this article, we identify formal sports as activities undertaken in affiliated sports clubs that sit within the sporting structures outlined above. Participants usually pay a membership fee, commit to regular training sessions and invariably participate in competitive leagues and tournaments. We also make a distinction between informal sport and lifestyle or leisure sporting forms (such as surfing, skateboarding or parkour), many of which emerged outside of, or in resistance to, traditional sporting forms (Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017), and the participation that we are focusing on. In this article, we use the term 'informal sport' to refer specifically to recognisable traditional sporting forms (e.g. cricket, soccer and basketball) that groups participate in informally without payment for membership or affiliation. Participation is flexible with the opportunity for individuals to drop in and out. In our study, stakeholders gave various examples of this type of informal provision, ranging from a group who came together to play soccer and cricket at facilities in their local park, through to a group of young people who came to participate in free to play basketball sessions at a community stadium that was booked for open use by a community group. In adopting this particular definition of informal sport, we accept that other notions of informal participation exist, including casual pay-to-play arrangements, and that the boundaries between formal and informal sport are blurred and fluid, rather than fixed.

Research insights into informal sport participation

There has been an expansion of academic research exploring various dimensions of informal participation, particularly within lifestyle sports. A range of studies have suggested that individuals gain mental, physical and social benefits from participating in informal opportunities similar to those experienced in mainstream sport (King and Church 2015, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2017,

Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017). Although informal participation is often conceptualised as an individualistic endeavour allowing people the freedom to opt in and out at their choosing, some researchers have suggested that informal engagement can also facilitate a sense of community and belonging amongst participants (King and Church 2015, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2017). For young people, informal opportunities have been identified as offering 'significant spaces for relaxation and social interaction, to just "hang out" … these sites are important to their sense of belonging and associated emotional economies' (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2017, p. 3). It has also been suggested that informal opportunities can provide a valuable opportunity to expand participation to groups traditionally marginalised within mainstream sporting settings, including people of low socio-economic status, culturally diverse communities and women (King and Church 2015, 2017). However, other studies have proposed that non-structured spaces can simply reproduce the hierarchies and masculine hegemony evident in mainstream sport (Fahlén 2015), and that participation in informal sport needs to be acknowledged as having its own inequities. For example, access to many informal sport opportunities requires particular socio-economic, social and cultural resources.

Although there have been increasing calls for greater policy engagement and recognition of informal sport, existing literature suggests this is problematic for sport governing bodies. The nature of informal participation does not readily align with the structure and systems of governance agencies (King and Church 2017). As Sterchele and Ferrero-Camoletto (2017, p. 89) argued, 'this presents policy makers and sports institutions with new challenges in terms of developing suitable systems of governance, regulation and funding'. At the heart of this problem is the incongruity of governance and systems with informal participation. Unstructured opportunities often appeal to individuals precisely because they are deregulated and not rule bound (Fahlén 2015, Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017). As Wheaton and O'Loughlin (2017, p. 74) suggested in relation to parkour, participants are 'often hostile to rules and regulations, especially those that are externally driven, which have often been understood as a form of "selling-out" of their sport's "alternative" values and ideologies'. Thus, providing support for informal participation, without overlaying a system of bureaucracy that changes the nature and practice of informal opportunity, remains a clear challenge for governments and other agencies. Discourses of safety also frequently influence the governance of informal sport, including a perceived need to protect the public from informal sport participants, as well as to safeguard participants themselves. These issues have been particularly prominent in attempts to regulate parkour; for example, a UK local authority banned the activity in the town of Moreton based on the belief it encouraged anti-social behaviour (Gilchrist and Osborn 2017).

Some studies have suggested that informal participation creates tensions between participants, stakeholders and communities (Beal *et al.* 2017, Gilchrist and Osborn 2017, Turner 2017). A key issue is negotiation over the use of space and who has the right to access certain spaces for informal participation. Tensions in informal sport participation emerge from particular spatial politics, which challenge conventional notions of ownership within public spaces (Gilchrist and Osborn 2017). This may arise when participants frequent spaces that regulations and/or physical infrastructure excludes them from, or they use space in ways that the wider public and/or sporting stakeholders perceive to be inappropriate. King and Church (2017, p. 110) described how 'clashes and conflict over space amongst users and between users and the regulators of space have been shown in a range of locations to be highly influential on lifestyle sport participant experiences'. Similarly, Gilchrist and Osborn (2017) outlined the relationship between law, the governance of space and informal sport participants. They suggested that law influences 'who can belong in, or who is excluded from, space. It stipulates the types of behaviour that are permitted, and restricted, in places and spaces. It … authenticates the presence of legitimate users, dependent upon the performance of stipulated behaviours' (Gilchrist and Osborn 2017, p. 55).

The growth of informal sporting activities and the potential for informal sport to reach groups that would not traditionally engage in mainstream sport also make it highly appealing to health and sport practitioners seeking to increase sport participation and achieve broader health and social agendas (King and Church 2015, Wheaton and Doidge 2015, Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017). However, existing studies indicate that sporting stakeholders currently use practices more commonly associated with traditional sport in their efforts to manage informal sport (such as developing coach education and accreditation systems; see O'Loughlin 2012, Sterchele and Ferrero-Camoletto 2017), and seek to regularise informal opportunities in a similar way to mainstream opportunities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this has created backlash from some informal participants. For example, parkour participants in the UK have spoken out against attempts to formalise their sport through affiliation and a coaching-accreditation scheme, refusing to engage with these new forms of governance (Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017).

As our discussion above indicated, governance approaches within Australian sport are relatively hierarchical and traditional. Sporting associations operate as 'classical organisations' underpinned by 'notions of rationality, linear thinking, task differentiation and functionalism' (Williams 2002, p. 105). Although there are numerous complexities in relation to how the sport policy chain works in practice in Australia (Jeanes *et al*. 2017), the basic structure of community sport governance continues to be centralised, rationalistic and bureaucratic, requiring stakeholders and participants to engage in sport in particular ways if they want to be supported. Within the confines of classical organisational thinking, individuals become trapped by convention (Williams 2002), and as our data illustrate, the current lack of flexibility within sport governance systems creates particular tensions when agencies seek to engage with informal participation. In the context of research that seeks to make a contribution to future policy development, within this article, we suggest that thinking around collaborative networks can provide a useful framework for understanding how sporting stakeholders could more productively engage with informal groups. We provide an overview of the key concepts within collaborative network theory.

Governance, collaborative networks and informal sport

Collaborative networks are described by Isett et al. (2011, p. 158) as 'collections of government agencies, non-profits, and for-profits that work together to provide a public good, service, or "value" when a single public agency is unable to create the good or service on its own'. In this article, we explore the potential of collaborative networks as a framework for conceptualising how sport, local government and health and physical activity stakeholders engage with informal groups. We discuss the range of actors and organisations currently operating within informal sport that could potentially provide enhanced levels of support through a more collaborative approach. In particular, we explore the potential of Carey's framework for 'joined-up' working (Carey 2015, see also Carey and Crammond 2015, Carey et al. 2014) as an approach to support stakeholders engaging with informal sport . This framework outlines the different elements, tools and practices of joined-up working (Carey 2015). Carey's model proposes a series of 'horizontal' aspects, which are activities that need to occur across networks, organisations and actors. These include developing skills to work across organisations (such as brokering and negotiation), sharing objectives, targets and information, strategies to improve communication across organisations and shared control of resources. 'Vertical' elements are changes that need to occur within organisations to facilitate cross-boundary working and include ensuring a strategic focus on collaborations, cultural changes, incentives and accountability, dedicated resources and funding for collaborative work and ensuring local control and leadership of the process. Carey and Harris (2016, p. 115) proposed that joined-up governance requires 'both technical skills/tools as well as a gradual institutional shift through the adoption of different norms and values to support collaborative working'. In particular, Carey (2015) highlighted that within a horizontal context,

organisations and networks may need to change elements of their structure and how they work to accommodate new influences and ways of thinking from within the network. This may require a change in institutional processes. Carey (2015, p. 81) suggested that it is not easy to change organisational systems and processes but that this is critical 'at multiple levels – from operational levels through to strategic'. Furthermore, Carey (2015, p. 79) recommended that skill development may be required to facilitate joined-up working, 'as working across boundaries for systems change requires a particular set of skills' that may need to be nurtured and facilitated.

Broader network governance literature addresses the importance of 'boundary spanners' or 'brokers' in this context (Long *et al*. 2013). Organisation theory suggests that organisations and networks will establish boundaries or 'demarcation lines for the domains of tasks and people … boundaries also serve as mechanisms to secure a certain amount of organisational independence from the environment' (Goldring 1996, p. 284). Essentially, boundary spanners help navigate and permeate these boundaries, and in doing so 'facilitate transactions and the flow of information between people or groups separated or hindered by some gap or barrier. This may be a physical … cognitive or cultural gap' (Goldring 1996, p. 284). Boundary spanners operate across organisational boundaries, including departments or disciplines, to exchange knowledge or mediate interactions. Such work is important at an organisational level for bringing ideas across groups, increasing cooperation and understanding between groups, and generating innovative ideas and ways of practice (Williams 2002, Long *et al*. 2013).

Within Carey's (2015) framework, boundary spanners have important roles both horizontally and vertically, providing leadership within their own networks and organisations and helping bridge relationships with other networks. At a vertical level, Carey emphasises that mandates for change and a strategic focus on collaboration within organisations are important to create the cultural and institutional change required for commitment to collaborative approaches. As Carey (2015, p. 83) concluded, she does not intend her framework to provide a formal structure but instead 'can draw attention to the ways in which different "layers" of integration can be enhanced'.

There is a growing body of research examining the role of networks within sport. Topics examined include how networks can be facilitated (Casey *et al*. 2012); models of network governance with the introduction of new sports systems (Grix and Phillpots 2011, examining county sports partnerships in the UK) and how networks can be used to strengthen existing fragmented sports systems (Cousens *et al*. 2012, analysing networks in Canada). Key themes emerging from this literature are the potential value of a network approach within community sport to enable sharing of resources and expertise and to enhance coordination (Barnes *et al*. 2007, Misener and Doherty 2009); the challenges of facilitating network collaboration due to existing fragmentation and lack of collaboration between actors (Jones *et al*. 2017); perceived competition for resources; creating and managing partnerships and establishing mutual goals and ambitions (Barnes *et al*. 2007, Jones *et al*. 2017). Misener and Doherty (2009) outlined how respect, trust and openness were essential in developing relations amongst actors and enhancing network capacity.

In the remainder of this article, we empirically examine how aspects of thinking around collaborative networks could be replicated and utilised in the management of informal sport in Australia and internationally. Collaborative networks are not currently common within Australian sport, although numerous multi-layered organisations (such as NSAs and SSAs, local government, sports clubs, community organisations and not-for-profit groups) exist that have a connection to sport development. The dominant approach to sport development tends to be characterised by siloed forms of operation.

Methodology

The research undertaken was exploratory, utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to examine their experiences and involvement with informal sport. The research team invited stakeholders to be involved based on a purposeful sampling approach. The research team

initially outlined the research focus at a local authority sport and recreation officer network meeting. Officers at this meeting suggested that whilst they could all identify pockets of informal activity, it was particularly prevalent within six local authority areas to the extent that the officers were regularly required to deal with issues created by informal groups. Sport and recreation officers from the six local authority areas were invited to participate in the research; three officers (Rachel, Eleanor and Narresh) accepted the invitation. The local government officers additionally identified the most common informal sports played within their areas, which included basketball, soccer, cricket and rugby. The research team contacted participation officers at the SSAs for each of these sports and invited them to participate in an interview. Two officers, from cricket and basketball (Robyn and Sylvia), responded to this invitation. The local authority officers were also asked if there were any additional organisations within their community, who they felt supported or engaged informal groups. They further identified a number of community and not-for-profit organisations (e.g. migrant resource centres) that they knew of who assisted in organising informal activity. Seven of these organisations were contacted with two agreeing to participate (Asha and Logan). In total, seven interviews were conducted.

Purposeful sampling enabled a rich and informative dialogue with individuals who were involved in either supporting or regulating informal participation (Duan *et al.* 2015). Through purposeful sampling, we were able to obtain as diverse an array of perspectives as possible (Higginbottom 2004). Although only a small number of interviews were conducted, the interviewees were drawn from across different sectors that influence informal sport participation within the local authority areas. The lead author obtained full ethics approval from her institution prior to undertaking the study. All participants and organisations are referred to using pseudonyms.

Rachel, Eleanor and Narresh were officers with a specific remit to promote inclusive opportunities within their local authority. They were often a point of contact for informal groups, particularly those from newly arrived communities. All three worked in local authorities whose community was characterised by high levels of diversity and rapidly changing populations, with continued arrival of new migrants and refugees. They found that informal groups seeking help with accessing facilities and sourcing equipment often contacted them. Although they did not have the resources to be particularly proactive in their engagement with informal groups, they had a detailed understanding of when and where participation tended to occur and would respond on a reactive basis to requests for help and guidance from the groups. These officers also often fielded complaints and sought to manage problems arising from informal sport. Mainstream clubs complaining about informal groups 'illegally' using facilities would frequently contact them. They suggested that a key aspect of their role was managing expectations across informal and mainstream sport participants with regard to facilities and access.

Robyn and Sylvia were both inclusion officers within their SSAs, with broad remits that were mostly across mainstream settings. Significant increases in informal participation had driven Sylvia's engagement with informal groups, particularly by culturally and linguistically diverse communities. She recognised that informal opportunities were providing a more inclusive sporting opportunity for some communities, and sought to work with the communities to consider how she might better support them and to draw them into the structures of her sport association. Similar to the council representatives, Sylvia had worked with groups attempting to source facilities and equipment, but she was also required to deal with complaints from mainstream clubs who were disgruntled about informal groups using and degrading 'their' facilities. Robyn was less proactive in her involvement in informal sport; however, similarly to Sylvia, she recognised that there were significant rates of informal participation within her sport. She sought to support groups with accessing facilities and equipment when they contacted her.

Logan and Asha both worked for not-for-profit community organisations located in highly deprived and disadvantaged areas. Amongst other aspects of their job, both were responsible for facilitating informal participation within their local communities. They would book facilities in the local area to allow young people and adults to turn up and play a range of sports on a

weekly basis. Their community organisations provided these opportunities at no cost to participants.

The research team identified key themes to pursue in interviews from existing literature including the scope and extent of informal sport participation; perceived benefits for participants and communities; strategies and approaches to supporting and managing informal sport and tensions and challenges in this process. A semi-structured interview scheduled was developed, in alignment with these areas. The research team initially provided contacts with an explanatory statement detailing the research. The researchers asked willing interviewees to provide written consent. Interviews were audio recorded (with permission) and transcribed in full. Data were uploaded to NVivo software, which supported data management and analysis. The data set was thematically analysed examining benefits, processes and challenges, and then re-analysed using Carey's framework for joined-up working as a guiding tool. Two of the research team undertook this process independently and then cross-referenced their analysis to increase rigour. A third investigator reviewed the coding to further strengthen the dependability of the findings. The lead researcher additionally discussed the findings with the SSA representatives and the local authority staff to check interpretations.

Understanding informal sport and its benefits

In this section, we illustrate some of the benefits stakeholders attributed to informal participation within their local communities, to provide a context for understanding why alternative ways to manage, support and grow informal participation are deemed necessary. The interviewees suggested that informal opportunities were widespread and attracted significant numbers of participants. Other researchers have noted that it is difficult to accurately capture participation across diverse and fluid contexts (Tomlinson *et al*. 2005); however, all interviewees were familiar with particular spaces where informal activity took place and suggested that informal opportunities usually involved large numbers (defined as thousands when they were asked to quantify) of people of varying ages

Logan described how he would book facilities for informal participants to play basketball across a number of locations in deprived areas across the city. He commented that 'there will rarely be less than 30 coming along and that's usually only on a wet and cold night, at some places there will be about 60 young people coming along'. Similarly, Narresh talked about soccer participation in her local authority, indicating that 30–40 people would attend and play in a series of self-organised games. She discussed how these participants would develop their own tournaments and invite members of the community to attend: 'Usually a couple of times a year they'll organise a festival that we know nothing about until after it has happened, and you'll get about 300 people come down to the park, bringing food and coming together. Some of the participants tell me that they have family fly in from Perth to come and be part of it'. Although no formal data are available, the discussions with the stakeholders suggest that the scale and scope of informal participation is significant within their respective areas and sports.

Also noteworthy is that this form of participation appeared to be attracting participants from culturally diverse and low socio-economic communities. Rachel speculated that 'most of the groups that come together are from our newly arrived or refugee communities, so our Afghan, Somalian, Syrian populations'. Sylvia similarly indicated that most of the groups she had contact with were from South East Asian backgrounds. As others have outlined (Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011, King and Church 2015, 2017), there is potential for informal sport to engage a broader participation base than mainstream clubs have traditionally engaged (Spaaij *et al*. 2014, Toffoletti and Palmer 2017). However, the suggestion that informal participation is fully inclusive should be tempered somewhat by the acknowledgement that most participants were male and/or that we know little about how welcoming 'established informal groups' are (and are perceived to be) to participants who are associated with other cultural groups, and/or differ from group norms in other ways (for example,

because of a disability) . Only Logan and Narresh knew of informal opportunities containing large numbers of females, reinforcing the perception that informal opportunities can be further sites of masculine hegemony (Wheaton 2004). Nevertheless, our data point to an important potential for informal opportunities to appeal to a diverse population base.

The interviewees were unanimous in their view that informal participation supported a range of health and social benefits. Robyn explained how most participants 'are playing regularly in fairly high intensity activity. There's obviously health and wellbeing benefits associated with that in the same way as any physical activity'. Reaffirming the findings of other studies (Wheaton 2004, Walseth 2006, Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011), the interviewees considered that informal participation could considerably enhance social connections within communities. Narresh summarised as follows:

> '… it helps them settle, it builds social cohesion within the community. I think it obviously keeps them physically active and healthy. It has a huge benefit there. I know for their mental wellness, it definitely keeps – it has all of those physical and mental wellbeing aspects of physical sport; it's just done in a different way. It would get the same benefits as you and I going to play at a club, but the thing is there's no cost to it, it's affordable, it's with their mates, and … it's empowerment for them, because they're determining; they're not being told by anyone what to do. It's a completely community capacity-building activity because they organise'.

The findings in this section therefore point to the potential significance of informal sport as a mechanism for encouraging participation and physical activity. The stakeholders suggested that informal provisions have the capacity to attract participation from groups who traditionally have found mainstream sport a marginalising and exclusionary space. In establishing the potential significance of informal sport in this regard, we use the following sections to consider the ways key organisations and networks manage opportunities and how this could be reconceptualised.

Informal sport networks

To outline the potential value of a collaborative network approach, it is first necessary to detail some of the key organisations and actors that form informal sport networks. At the heart of these networks were the numerous and highly diverse informal groups described by the interviewees. There were also a number of community not-for-profit organisations that structurally sat outside of sport, such as the ones Asha and Logan worked for, which helped facilitate informal opportunities as part of broader community outreach to achieve wider social objectives aligned with their organisation. As highlighted by Sylvia and Robyn's data, within sport-specific organisations, some SSAs were clearly seeking to manage informal groups. Various local government departments were identified by Narresh and Rachel as having influence and interest in informal sport. These included their own sport and recreation departments, and also facility management, health and well-being, urban planning and environment departments, who at times had all interacted with or had the potential to influence informal participation.

Our data indicated that most of these networks operated in relative isolation. Narresh and Rachel noted that they had limited contact with SSAs and with other departments in their own local authority. Similarly, Asha and Logan discussed how contact with both SSAs and local government was limited despite them having the most extensive and regular contact with informal participants. Mainstream clubs were also identified as engaging with informal sports participants. Narresh and Rachel outlined how clubs came into contact with informal groups through negotiations over the use of space, particularly soccer grounds and cricket ovals. There are likely additional networks and organisations that could influence informal participation that have not been identified within this exploratory study. However, the available data illustrate that numerous networks exist within and across informal sport, and that these have different types of interactions with informal groups. As Carey (2015) suggests, these sort of networks bring different types of skills and constraints to the process of supporting and developing informal sport.

Networks, culture change and informal sport

As outlined in the initial sections of this article, Carey (2015) suggested that cultural change happens 'vertically', so within an organisation this is often a prerequisite to fostering productive collaborative networks. Organisations may be required to alter current restrictive practices that make collaborative work challenging. Within this section, we draw on the data to outline how dominant discourses surrounding sport are embedded within many of the networks highlighted, and we illustrate how these discourses constrain management and support for informal sport. We suggest that, to fully mobilise the potential of informal sport, change has to occur amongst many of the organisations and actors with regard to how sport is perceived and understood and what forms of sport are considered to be a priority.

All of the interviewees agreed that sport and local authority stakeholders gave priority to formalised structured versions of sport, or what has been described as 'Western, achievement sport' (Griggs 2012). Despite broader policy rhetoric, all stakeholders agreed that the drive to support informal sport has not necessarily filtered into the policies of NSAs and SSAs, or into local authority health and well-being plans. The local government and sport association stakeholders felt they had to prioritise support for structured clubs and associations within their everyday practice. Robyn indicated that whilst her sporting association recognised there was extensive informal participation, her priority should be to support their affiliated clubs and members. As she noted: 'There is so much informal participation but we are not here to support that, our role is to ensure we support those clubs that are paying membership fees and part of the system and pathway. We exist to support them so we have to make sure they are our priority focus'.

Sylvia's association was more flexible towards informal participation, principally because her sport was currently struggling to attract new members within mainstream opportunities. She described how informal participants represented 'new markets' for the association, and how they wished to engage more with them to capture participant numbers 'so that they can count in our statistics' and subsequently translate into additional funding for the sports association. Sylvia indicated: 'They're a growth market, they're a market opportunity for us, plain and simply that's what it is. If you put it in business terms, they're a market opportunity … Because the pressure on sports is we have to be able to count and continue growing participation'. Furthermore, when discussing the importance of informal sport, both Robyn and Sylvia viewed it as a valuable foundation to encourage young people to transition into mainstream opportunities. As Sylvia explained:

> 'We don't want to encourage kids down that same path [into informal participation]. We want the kids to join up to the mainstream entry level programmes and club programmes, so that yeah, they're becoming part of the wider [sport] community. That's the ideal world. They transition into mainstream'.

The remaining interviewees suggested that informal sport should have a position in its own right within communities, detached from formalised sport. However, Rachel, Eleanor and Narresh outlined the limited resources available within their sport and recreation departments and the political pressure they encountered to direct these towards affiliated sports clubs. Eleanor suggested that 'we certainly want to encourage them, but it needs to be not at the detriment of the mainstream clubs'. Narresh suggested that, for senior managers within her local authority, informal sport had little place or priority, whereas 'The clubs are quite powerful. Most sporting clubs … have quite strong connections and can be quite a powerful influence, influencing decision making, usually through the elected representatives'. This made it difficult for Narresh to support informal groups through, for example, space allocation or equipment, because the council mandated that such support should primarily be available for mainstream clubs. Eleanor outlined similar challenges, stating that 'certainly for us it can become very political as to who we allow to do what'.

Whilst Narresh, Rachel and Eleanor felt constrained in their capacity to support informal sport, they were all personally deeply committed to supporting opportunities and recognised the value

such participation could offer to communities in terms of health and social benefits. However, all the non-sport interviewees discussed the need for culture shift within both the sporting and their own organisations to broaden understanding of what forms of sport they should be prioritising. They currently felt that senior managers, and particularly councillors within their local authority, regarded structured opportunities with clear pathways into elite performance sport as the only acceptable and valuable form of sporting engagement and that therefore, this was where the local authority should invest their time and funding. Narresh, Rachel and Eleanor suggested a need for a shift in what forms of sport were prioritised within the senior levels of sports administration organisations and local authorities. Rachel discussed the necessity of a shift in mindset amongst sport development agencies:

> 'We're very traditional sport. That's how we operate. That's how they've always done, that's how we've always operated. If we change and if we try something different, it could all go horribly wrong … Why can't you change the way you think about how you deliver it and where you deliver it? That seems to be the biggest issue … From an industry point of view, the whole industry needs to change the way it looks at how people should participate in sport'.

Asha similarly indicated that substantial shifts in how sport and sports clubs were funded and supported were needed if there was to be a reconceptualisation of how sport is supported and promoted. As she explained:

> '… at the moment sports associations are funded on the number of affiliated members they have, there might be pockets of funding for informal opportunities but their core
>
> comes from supporting structured pathways and talent development. Unless we shift to a genuine participation model it is unlikely sports associations will place significant importance on supporting informal opportunities'.

Collaborative approaches and the role of boundary spanners

In line with Carey's (2015) framework, the data illustrate the importance of communication across and within organisations. There was limited collaboration amongst the various organisations operating within informal sport, which created a range of problems. Some of these problems were best evidenced when examining the problem of space and who had rights to claim public spaces within the local authority. Local authority interviewees explained that mainstream club volunteers would claim certain public spaces for their club and actively seek to prevent informal groups from using them. This was a particularly prevalent issue for soccer and cricket groups, who could readily access pitches because of their location within public spaces. Club volunteers would argue that this was for practical reasons, such as informal groups wearing down pitches or damaging equipment; however, the local authority interviewees recognised that ideological reasons surrounded who and how space should be used and were critical of attempts by clubs to govern facilities. For example, Narresh outlined how 'yes, a club will have a problem with thirty Sudanese lads using "their" pitch regardless of whether they cause any damage, because they don't think they should be there'. Research has examined how individuals utilise particular spaces and, in doing so, create meaning and values regarding how certain spaces should be used and what is acceptable practice within them (van Ingen 2003, Neal 2016). Participation that was not connected to mainstream clubs was perceived to be problematic, challenging perceptions of how the space 'should be used' (Gilchrist and Osborn 2017). Some interviewees suggested that their organisations positioned informal participants as troublesome and untrustworthy, in the same way parkour participants were positioned in Wheaton and O'Loughlin's (2017) research. Interviewees indicated that this was heightened when informal participants were visibly different from the individuals who usually use particular spaces, such as the young Sudanese men occupying what had predominantly been a white space.

SSAs and local government frequently legitimised the claims that mainstream sports clubs made to public sporting spaces, by prioritising their access and, in some cases, actively preventing use by informal groups. Narresh, Rachel and Eleanor outlined how their facility management department tended to manage this by sending enforcement officers to move informal participants whilst allowing the clubs to access 'their' space as 'legitimate users'. As the data presented in the previous section illustrate, mainstream clubs can hold significant positions of influence within the politics of local government and as such are well placed to leverage access. Informal groups, as Narresh highlighted, 'simply have no voice and no one to advocate for them in this process'. The tendency of certain departments to work using rationalistic approaches, such as those critiqued by Carey (2015), was illustrated in a specific experience of Eleanor's. She talked about engaging with the local Burmese community to support their participation in informal soccer. Simultaneously, colleagues in facility management had been sending officers to prevent the group from accessing the pitches due to complaints from the established soccer club. She explained how she had not been included in managing the complaints because 'It's not my role to be in the facilities space. That was my colleagues doing some of that negotiating. But it's important for my role to understand what those issues are and have that being resolved and what else can be done'. This example neatly illustrates some of the limitations of current siloed approaches to managing informal sport.

The interviewees in local government suggested that the tensions associated with using and managing space could be resolved with collaboration across networks and outlined how partnerships that drew on the expertise across networks could lead to enhanced strategic decision-making. Interviewees indicated that there was currently minimal collaboration between key departments within local authorities, SSAs, mainstream clubs and community groups regarding the planning and development of space. Narresh and Rachel both provided specific examples of how this was problematic. Narresh lamented:

> 'There's just no discussion or communication. Why are we [local authority] only building facilities that we want sports clubs to use when we've got a small percentage of the population playing structured sport and the rest aren't … But having an understanding of what they're actually doing means that we could at least provide facilities that would cater for those needs and probably build more multi-use facilities'.

Rachel suggested that, despite increasing the numbers of newly arrived communities within her local authority, the facility management and urban planning departments continued to prioritise the building of ovals to facilitate AFL rather than soccer or basketball facilities that would better suit the community. She argued:

> 'Footy is dying off here and soccer is taking over … Certainly when I look at the number of AFL facilities we're building in comparison to the number of soccer facilities, it doesn't make any sense, given the demand that we have for soccer. I know this and [Football Federation Victoria] know the growth from their participation data but no one in planning would ever think to speak to other departments in their own council or the sports themselves about what is happening'.

Similarly, when suitable facilities for informal participation were available, facility management prioritised club use. Rachel stated: 'The suburb is growing so fast that even when recreation reserves have been built that are for more leisure or informal participation they end up being used for structured sport because there's not enough facilities'. Therefore, there were significant issues with meeting the demand for informal participation and ensuring that the available facilities were appropriate at the most basic level to accommodate the range of community-driven opportunities. In considering the findings, we suggest there is potential for a collaborative approach to begin to challenge and address some of these issues, involving discussions between sporting associations, informal groups, local authority facility management and sport development departments and mainstream clubs. Currently, the lack of collaboration is leading to significant challenges for informal groups in accessing space.

Communication and collaboration between different networks clearly has an important role to play in improving support for informal opportunities, particularly in addressing the persistent

tensions relating to space (King and Church 2015, Gilchrist and Osborn 2017). The obvious presence of 'structural holes' (Long *et al*. 2013) within and between organisations suggests that such communication is unlikely to organically occur and would require the presence of individuals capable of acting as boundary spanners (Williams 2002). Such individuals would need to have the skills to work across the various networks and, in particular, be able to prioritise the voice of informal participants, the group that is currently lost and rendered powerless in negotiations over space and resources. Amongst our interviewees, local authority inclusion officers would likely be best positioned to undertake such a role. They have contact at different times with all of the organisations and actors involved. However, as the literature suggests, boundary spanners frequently need a level of seniority within and across organisations to be able to coordinate and facilitate collaborative working (Carey 2015). Rachel, Narresh and Eleanor all suggested that they were relatively powerless within their organisation to encourage such collaboration, as they were not necessarily part of the existing networks of influence. For example, Rachel described how she would never be invited to strategic urban planning meetings because 'I'm not senior enough'. Boundary spanners therefore have a vital role to perform in supporting informal sport, but it is essential they have the necessary horizontal and vertical authority to be able to successfully establish and mobilise a collaborative network approach.

Informal sport and system-level changes

The previous sections have illustrated the need for culture change, particularly a reshaping of attitudes towards the value of informal sport within the sport development sector, and how a collaborative approach could ease some of the tensions that exist within informal participation. Following Carey's (2015) framework, we recognise that culture change and commitment towards collaborative networks are often only the starting point of joined-up working. Successful joined-up working frequently requires organisations within networks to change their systems and approaches to facilitate successful collaboration. Interviewees stressed that attempts to manage and support informal groups often utilised systems and structures traditionally associated with mainstream sport. These had been unsuccessfully applied to managing informal groups. For example, Narresh outlined how she had allocated space on the local authority system for ad hoc bookings of facilities at a discounted rate to attempt to alleviate access issues. This could be done relatively easily via an online system and would, she reasoned, ensure the informal groups could claim a 'legitimate' right to use the booked space. However, to book a facility, informal groups were required to have public liability insurance, which most did not possess and which would be a costly administrative burden for them. It would also require a level of organisation that runs counter to the informalities that are an attraction of this sporting form.

The perceived legal risks of informal activity are well documented (Gilchrist and Osborn 2017). Legal aspects of participation often serve to disadvantage informal groups. For Robyn, legal concerns significantly discouraged her association from engaging with informal sport and resulted in a desire to convert informal participants to mainstream clubs. She noted: 'All our members gain insurance as soon as they affiliate, we need informal participants to affiliate before we'd be willing to engage with them really otherwise it is just too much of a risk managing the liability'. Sylvia's sporting association had, similar to Narresh's local authority, sought to apply a traditional approach to the management of informal opportunities. Her development team had worked with larger informal groups to encourage them to become affiliated as social members of nearby clubs, on the agreement that for a nominal fee to the club they could use the facilities and also be covered by necessary insurance. For Sylvia's organisation, this allowed informal participants to be 'counted' in their participation statistics, and brought informal participants under the auspices of mainstream systems. However, she described that this approach had largely been ineffective, because volunteers within the club became frustrated that the informal participants were 'taking advantage of all our resources and giving absolutely nothing back to the club'. Similarly, informal participants had

complained to her that the club was trying to regulate and structure their participation in a way that did not suit them. She explained how 'they wanted to turn up when they wanted but the club wanted them to commit to certain days and times and get more involved in their activities'. The potential value of a collaborative network for providing solutions and demonstrating alternative ways of working is illustrated when examining how Logan and Asha avoided this issue.

As employees of community-based, rather than sporting, organisations, Logan and Asha considered that they were under no pressure to align within mainstream sporting ideals and traditional approaches to sport development. They managed some of the challenges of facilities, spaces and legalities by booking facilities on behalf of informal groups, which mitigated legal issues. As they were not tied to particular notions of how sport should be played, they could support informal groups to remain relatively fluid in their participation. Attempts to manage informal opportunities through traditional structures and systems have generally been ineffective, but a joined-up approach would potentially generate some alternative systems. Whilst not a perfect solution, working through community agencies does have the potential to mitigate some of the challenges of gaining access to space. The obvious benefit of working with these organisations is that they are not tied to limiting perceptions of how sport 'should' be played. Rachel echoed these sentiments and stressed the need for a change in both culture and systems within sport agencies, in her concluding comments:

> 'Sport development, be it in local government or sporting associations, need to understand they have to work with communities. They need to rethink how they understand sport and what sport participation is and work with communities on helping them to participate on their terms, not what traditionally has been deemed appropriate and how they should participate'.

Conclusion

This research responds to national and international recognition that informal participation potentially represents a significant avenue for achieving both sport participation objectives and health and social agendas. Previous research suggests that informal opportunities can appeal to, and support participation amongst, diverse communities in ways that mainstream sport has struggled to do (Elling and Knoppers 2005, Lake 2013). Our findings indicate that, due to the invariable insistence on operating within the confines of mainstream sporting discourses and structures, several organisations and actors hinder informal participation rather than offering support to allow it to flourish and grow. This article has shown that the multiple agencies currently involved in managing informal participation rarely collaborate or combine expertise to consider how they might better address the opportunities and challenges presented by informal sport participation.

The CSIRO Future of Australian Sport report (CSIRO 2013) pointed to the shifting trends in participation and asked: 'How do some of Australia's mainstream and traditional sports need to change in order to appeal to a more diverse population?'. Drawing on Carey's (2015) framework, we suggest that there is merit in looking to a collaborative network approach, bringing together (and bringing into greater alignment) currently disconnected organisations, to manage and grow informal sport and, in doing so, prospectively also widen the access and appeal of sport. Such a collaborative network would particularly utilise the resources and skills of community agencies and would involve more extensive collaboration with informal groups.

Carey's (2015) work is further valuable for illustrating some of the changes in systems that would be necessary to support informal participation. At a strategic level, it is necessary to revisit how sporting stakeholders plan future investments, particularly in relation to facilities. Furthermore, to develop a network approach, consideration would need to be given to which actors/agencies might drive this forward. Local authority officer are well positioned to collaborate with a range of agencies, but they currently lack the seniority and support to do so. At a local level, booking systems, regulations and affiliation issues appear to be limiting the potential of informal sport. This raises broader issues regarding the challenge of supporting informal sport without formalising it in

the process and turning it into an opportunity that is no longer appealing to current participants. This ongoing tension warrants further research. This article has illustrated that non-sports-related community organisations potentially offer a more pliable structure through which some support and management can be provided to informal groups at a local level without the formality associated with sports organisations. Vail (2007, p. 593) similarly suggested the necessity for sport organisations to involve 'non-traditional partners and community leaders who might not be part of the recognised system but who do understand community needs' if they genuinely wish to increase participation.

Our data have further reaffirmed that as Carey (2015) illustrates, in order for effective collaborative networks to develop, there are often key shifts that need to occur within and across organisations. Within this particular research setting, our findings suggest that a culture change is required within sporting associations and local government in relation to how they perceive and understand sport and, specifically, what forms of sport participation they consider worthwhile and valuable. We recognise that achieving such change may well require a shift in the current power structure, which is dominated by mainstream competitive sport within Australia. As the data presented in this article suggest, whilst stakeholders acknowledge the potential value and importance of informal sport, most attempts to proactively support and extend informal participation revolve around absorbing it into traditional structures and approaches. We suggest that while this remains the case, growth of informal sport will remain stifled.

Informal participation represents a growing area of sports participation and one that could more readily connect with communities that feel excluded from mainstream sport. However, for organisations involved in supporting sport participation and sport development, the fluidity of informal participation undoubtedly presents a considerable challenge when considering how to 'unlock' its potential. Although exploratory, this study outlines some of the challenges in this area and presents possible approaches for moving beyond the current status quo of ignoring informal opportunities or seeking to regulate and formalise them (Wheaton and O'Loughlin 2017).

Note

1. In Australia, the states and territories represent a distinct tier of sport development. This research involved representatives from state associations located in Victoria.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Ruth Jeanes is a senior lecturer in sport coaching and community development. Her research focuses on sport and social inclusion.

Ramón Spaaij is a Professor in the College of Sport & Exercise Science and also holds a Professorial Chair in Sociology of Sport at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His research focuses on socio-cultural aspects and impacts of sport, with a particular focus on the intersections of diversity, social cohesion and sport.

Dawn Penney is a professorial research fellow in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University leading research project developments addressing quality and equity in health and physical education, physical activity and sport.

Justen O' Connor is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. His research focuses on examining socio-ecological influences on sport and physical activity participation.

ORCID

Ruth Jeanes http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3907-0108
Ramón Spaaij http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1260-3111
Dawn Penney http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2000-8953
Justen O'Connor http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6368-6693

References

ABS, 2015. *Participation in sport and physical recreation, Australia, 2013–14*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

ASC, 2016a. *Play sport Australia*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.

ASC, 2016b. *AusPlay: participation data for the sport sector*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.

Barnes, M., Cousens, L., and MacLean, J., 2007. From silos to synergies: A network perspective of the Canadian sport system. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 2 (5–6), 555–571. doi:10.1504/IJSMM.2007.013967

Beal, B., *et al.*, 2017. Skateboarding, community and urban politics: shifting practices and challenges. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 11–23. doi:10.1080/19406940.2016.1220406

Carey, G., 2015. *Grassroots to Government: creating joined-up working in Australia*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Carey, G. and Crammond, B., 2015. What works in joined-up government? An evidence synthesis. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38 (13–14), 1020–1029. doi:10.1080/01900692.2014.982292

Carey, G., Crammond, B., and Keast, R., 2014. Creating change in government to address the social determinants of health: how can efforts be improved? *BMC Public Health*, 14 (1), 1087. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-14-1087

Carey, G. and Harris, P., 2016. Developing management practices to support joined-up governance. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 75 (1), 112–118. doi:10.1111/aupa.2016.75.issue-1

Casey, M.M., Payne, W.R., and Eime, R.M., 2012. Organisational readiness and capacity building strategies of sporting organisations to promote health. *Sport Management Review*, 15 (1), 109–124. doi:10.1016/j.smr.2011.01.001

Cousens, L., Barnes, M., and MacLean, J., 2012. Strategies to increase sport participation in Canada: the role of a coordinated network. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 12 (3–4), 198–216. doi:10.1504/IJSMM.2012.052667

CSIRO, 2013. *The future of Australian sport*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.

Duan, N., *et al.*, 2015. Optimal design and purposeful sampling: complementary methodologies for implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42 (5), 524–532. doi:10.1007/s10488-014-0596-7

Elling, A. and Knoppers, A., 2005. Sport, gender and ethnicity: practises of symbolic inclusion/exclusion. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 34 (3), 257–268. doi:10.1007/s10964-005-4311-6

Fahlén, J., 2015. Sport Clubs in Sweden. In C. Breuer, R. Hoekman, S, Nagel & H. van der Werff (Eds), *Sport Clubs in Europe*. London: Springer International Publishing. pp.343-367.

Gilchrist, P. and Osborn, G., 2017. Risk and benefits in lifestyle sports: parkour, law and social value. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 55–69. doi:10.1080/19406940.2016.1272619

Gilchrist, P. and Wheaton, B., 2011. Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth engagement: examining the emergence of parkour. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 3 (1), 109–131. doi:10.1080/19406940.2010.547866

Gilchrist, P. and Wheaton, B., 2017. The social benefits of informal and lifestyle sports: a research agenda. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 1–10. doi:10.1080/19406940.2017.1293132

Goldring, E.B., 1996. Schools as Dynamic Organizations. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 5 (3), 278–286.

Green, K., *et al.*, 2015. [We're on the right track, baby], we were born this way! Exploring sports participation in Norway. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20 (3), 285–303. doi:10.1080/13573322.2013.769947

Griggs, G., 2012. Why have alternative sports grown in popularity in the UK? *Annals of Leisure Research*, 15 (2), 180–187. doi:10.1080/11745398.2012.659718

Grix, J. and Phillpots, L., 2011. Revisiting the 'Governance Narrative' 'Asymmetrical Network Governance' and the deviant case of the sports policy sector. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26 (1), 3–19. doi:10.1177/0952076710365423

Higginbottom, G.M.A., 2004. Sampling issues in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher*, 12 (1), 7–19. doi:10.7748/nr2004.07.12.1.7.c5927

Isett, K.R., *et al.*, 2011. Networks in public administration scholarship: understanding where we are and where we need to go. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 21 (suppl. 1), i157–i173. doi:10.1093/jopart/muq061

Jeanes, R., *et al.*, 2017. Yes we are inclusive': examining provision for young people with disabilities in community sport clubs'. *Sport Management Review*, 21 (1), 38-50.

Jones, G.J., *et al.*, 2017. Collaborative advantages: the role of interorganizational partnerships for youth sport nonprofit organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 31 (2), 148–160. doi:10.1123/jsm.2016-0118

King, K. and Church, A., 2015. Questioning policy, youth participation and lifestyle sports. *Leisure studies*, 34 (3), 282–302. doi:10.1080/02614367.2014.893005

King, K. and Church, A., 2017. Lifestyle sports delivery and sustainability: clubs, communities and user-managers. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 107–119. doi:10.1080/19406940.2017.1289236

Lake, R.J., 2013. "They treat me like I'm scum': social exclusion and established-outsider relations in a British tennis club'. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48 (1), 112–128. doi:10.1177/1012690211424523

Long, J.C., Cunningham, F.C., and Braithwaite, J., 2013. Bridges, brokers and boundary spanners in collaborative networks: a systematic review. *BMC health services research*, 13 (1), 158. doi:10.1186/1472-6963-13-158

Misener, K. and Doherty, A., 2009. A case study of organizational capacity in non-profit community sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23, 457–482. doi:10.1123/jsm.23.4.457

Neal, S., 2016. *Rural identities: ethnicity and community in the contemporary English countryside*. Oxon: Routledge.

O'Loughlin, A., 2012. A door for creativity—art and competition in parkour. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 3 (2), 192–198. doi:10.1080/19443927.2012.689131

Spaaij, R., Magee, J., and Jeanes, R., 2014. *Sport and social exclusion in global society*. London: Routledge.

Sport England, 2016. *Towards an active nation*. London: Sport England.

Sport New Zealand, 2012. *Sport and recreation in the lives of young New Zealanders*. Wellington: Sport New Zealand.

Sterchele, D. and Ferrero-Camoletto, R., 2017. Governing bodies or managing freedom? Subcultural struggles, national sport systems and the glocalised institutionalisation of parkour. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 89–105. doi:10.1080/19406940.2017.1289235

Toffoletti, K. and Palmer, C., 2017. New approaches for studies of Muslim women and sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 52 (2), 146–163. doi:10.1177/1012690215589326

Tomlinson, A., *et al.*, 2005. *Lifestyle sports and national sports policy: an agenda for research*. London: Sport England.

Turner, D. 2017. Performing citizenship. Lifestyle Sports and Public Policy. In D. Turner & S Carnicelli (Eds), Lifestyle Sport and Public Policy. Routledge: Oxon. pp.13-27.

Vail, S.E., 2007. Community development and sport participation. *Journal of Sport Management*, 21 (4), 571–596. doi:10.1123/jsm.21.4.571

van Ingen, C., 2003. Geographies of gender, sexuality and race: reframing the focus on space in sport sociology. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38 (2), 201–216. doi:10.1177/1012690203038002004

Walseth, K., 2006. Sport and belonging. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 41 (3–4), 447–464. doi:10.1177/1012690207079510

Wheaton, B., ed., 2004. *Understanding lifestyle sport: consumption, identity and difference*. London: Routledge.

Wheaton, B. and Doidge, M., 2015. Exploring the social benefit of informal and lifestyle sports. *Journal of Sport Science and Physical Education*, 68, 45–49.

Wheaton, B. and O'Loughlin, A., 2017. Informal sport, institutionalisation, and sport policy: challenging the sportization of parkour in England. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (1), 71–88. doi:10.1080/19406940.2017.1291533

Williams, P., 2002. The competent boundary spanner. *Public administration*, 80 (1), 103–124. doi:10.1111/padm.2002.80.issue-1