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## **Alternative sport programmes and social inclusion in Norway.**

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## **Alternative sport programmes and social inclusion in Norway.**

### **Introduction**

In 1992, the Norwegian Government, in its first ever White Paper on sport, expressed concern about the fact that many people were taking little or no part in sport or other physical activities (St. meld. nr. 41, 1991–1992). Following this report, the government established the Sports City Programme, which was intended to provide ‘alternative’ sport and physical activities, that is to say, activities which are organized in ways which are different from the ways in which ‘conventional’ sport is organized, and which it was hoped would make them more easily accessible to groups which did not usually take part in ‘conventional’ sporting facilities. The target groups identified were inactive young people (children aged 6-12 years and adolescents aged 13-19), deprived and at-risk young people (children aged 6-12 and adolescents 13-19) and members (especially female members) of ethnic minority groups. The identification of deprived and at-risk young people and ethnic minorities as target groups is indicative of the fact that social exclusion was one of the explicit objectives of the programme. The central focus of this paper is on adolescent sporting participation and the degree to which these programmes have been successful in attracting those adolescents who have not been attracted to more conventionally organised sports. In particular, this paper, which builds on an earlier study of the Sports City Programme in Norway (Skille, 2004a), examines the degree to which the Sports City Programme has helped to break down barriers of class and gender in relation to participation in sport.<sup>i</sup>

### **Young people and sport in Norway**

Approximately three-quarters of young people in Norway take part in organized sport during their childhood and early adolescence. However, as is common in many western societies, very many of these drop out of sport during their mid- to late teenage years (Ekeland et al., 1999; Hansen, 1999;

Seippel, 2004). Participation in sport and early drop-out from sport are both strongly associated with gender and with socio-economic status (Krange & Strandbu, 2004; Kurtze *et al.*, 2001; Sjøgaard *et al.*, 2000). In brief, boys have higher levels of participation in sport than girls while, in relation to class, adolescents from middle class homes with above average incomes and highly educated parents, and who attend an academic secondary school, are more likely to participate in sport than their peers from working class families with lower incomes and less well educated parents, and who attend a non-academic vocational secondary school (Sisjord, 1993; Skogen, 1998). These patterns are often explained by variations in cultural patterns and differences in socialization in the different social classes (Engström, 1999). Similar patterns can be seen in relation to drop-out rates from sport: boys, and especially middle class boys, are less likely to drop out of sport and are more likely to remain involved in sport throughout their teenage years.

It was a growing concern with these issues of non-participation and drop-out which led to the establishment of the Sports City Programme. This programme reflected a growing recognition that conventional patterns of sporting provision – that is formally organized and mainly competitive sport – are not attractive to, and are not consistent with the broader patterns of social life of, many young people, particularly girls and working class young people. Conventional sports provision, it was argued, was not effectively providing ‘sport for all’ and thus there was a need for the provision of alternatives to conventional sport to offer options to those young people who had not been attracted to, or who had dropped out of, conventional sport.

The concept of ‘alternative’ - as opposed to ‘mainstream’, ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’ - sports embraces a variety of activities. Such activities tend to be much more loosely, and less formally, organized than conventional sports. They also tend to be, to a greater or lesser extent, controlled by the participants themselves, sometimes with a minimum of adult supervision, and allow the participants to engage freely on their own terms, often with minimal economic costs and flexible time schedules. Of particular importance is the fact that the competitive element is often

more or less absent from alternative activities; these activities usually stand outside any formal training regime and participants are not expected to invest large amounts of time or effort in order to 'improve their game' or to be successful in competition. It was hoped that the Sports City Programme, by the provision of facilities for sport and exercise which were organised in less formal and more flexible ways, and which allowed participants to engage on their own terms, would be much more consistent with the lifestyles of young people and would therefore be likely to attract participants for whom conventional sport was not attractive. Some recent research has also indicated that the competitive focus of conventional sport leads many adolescents to drop out of sport, and this competitive focus may be particularly unattractive to many teenage girls (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004; Skille, 2005).

The Sports City Programme, which began in 1993, is publicly funded and run by local sports clubs in cooperation with municipal authorities, with the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC) as the central coordinating body. The programme provides three broad types of sporting activity:

1. Some activities are targeted exclusively at specific groups; examples include aerobic or swimming groups exclusively for ethnic minority women, and adventurous activities for young people who are held to be deprived or at risk; activities for the latter are seen as a means of preventing at risk young people from drifting into crime or drug use.<sup>ii</sup>
2. Some activities are of the same general kind as those provided in existing sports clubs, but are less intensive and less competitive; these so-called 'low threshold' activities are offered as introductory sessions to the clubs' established activities, and as lower intensity activities designed to prevent young people from dropping out of sport altogether.

3. Every participating city has some provision for 'drop in' sports. One key strategy has been to provide 'open sport halls', that is sport facilities which are open during afternoons, weekends and school holidays, and where young people may arrive and leave whenever they choose. These sessions are very loosely and informally organised; the activities are often arranged spontaneously by the young people themselves, with little adult supervision. One intention is to tone down the competitive focus of conventional sport, and make it possible to *play* sport.

It should be added that there are many schemes which contain mixtures of elements from one or more of these types of activities; this is particularly the case with activities which are mixtures of types two and three.

The central object of the research reported here was to examine what impact, if any, these alternative patterns of sporting provision have had in terms of breaking down established patterns of participation in sport which, as we noted earlier, is much more common among middle class and male adolescents, than among working class and female adolescents (Sisjord, 1993; Skogen, 1998). Has the removal or toning down of some of conventional sport's most significant attributes – its formal organization by adults, its lack of flexibility in terms of time and the strongly entrenched competitive element – significantly impacted on the class and gender balance of those who participate in sport? Have these changes resulted in sport becoming more easily accessible to those who do not normally participate in conventional sports? And, in particular, is what is arguably the most radical model of alternative sport – that is the open sport hall, characterised by the lowest degree of formality, the greatest degree of flexibility, and the lowest degree of adult control – more or less successful than the other types of sporting provision in breaking down barriers to participation?

## Methods

The research reported here was based on a survey of secondary school pupils in Norway, supplemented by observations of the participation of young people in an open sport hall setting. The research thus drew on two rather different methods, one mainly quantitative and the other mainly qualitative.

The more quantitative data were derived from a survey of students in secondary schools, drawn from two parts of the city of Bergen, where the Sports City Programme is well established. Bergen was one of three cities (the others being Oslo and Trondheim) which took part in the first phase of the Sports City Programme from 1993-2000, and the survey was carried out during the winter of 2002-2003. Of the 812 questionnaires sent out, 566 (69.7%) were returned completed, of which 557 (68.6%) were usable. Respondents consisted of 266 boys (88 vocational and 178 academic students) and 291 girls (111 vocational and 180 academic students), with a mean age of 18.2 years.<sup>iii</sup> Ethically, the survey was screened and accepted by the Norwegian Data Inspectorate, with regard to the collection and storage of information about people under the age of majority (18 years) in Norway.

The questionnaire was designed to gather data on the patterns of young people's participation in the 'alternative' activities provided by the Sports City Programme and in more conventional sports, with particular emphasis on the relationships between participation, socio-economic status and gender. Among the many possible indicators of the socio-economic status of young people – for example, parental occupation or income, or the type of school they attend – the type of school attended (academic or vocational) has in previous studies in Norway had a stronger association than other possible indicators (parents' income or occupation) with sport participation and other leisure habits (Sisjord, 1993; Skogen, 1998; see Engström, 1999 for similar Swedish findings). For this reason, in this study the type of

secondary school attended was taken as the key indicator of the respondents' socio-economic status.

In the questionnaire, respondents were presented with a list of the activities provided by the Sports City Programme in each part of the city and were asked if they had participated in any of these activities over the previous twelve months. Those who indicated that they participated 'occasionally' or 'regularly' in one or more activities were defined as 'Sports City Programme participants', while those who had never participated, or who had participated just once, were defined as non-participants<sup>iv</sup>. In relation to conventional sport, respondents were asked: 'Do you train/participate in a sport club?' to which the possible answers were either a simple 'yes' (defined as conventional sport participant) or 'no' (non-participant). Respondents were divided into four categories (vocational boy, academic boy, vocational girl, and academic girl) and the data on socio-economic status and gender were then cross-tabulated with the data on participation in the Sports City Programme and in conventional sports. Where appropriate, chi square analysis was conducted (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001).

The qualitative data were derived from several days of observation of young people's participation in an open sport hall under the umbrella of the Sports City Programme. In addition to many informal discussions with the programme consultant in the district sport association and with the leaders of the sport club which managed the open sport hall, interviews were also conducted with four boys, all aged eighteen, who were among the most frequent users of the open sports hall. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The data from this more qualitative part of the study were used to examine in more detail aspects of the relationship between participation and gender and, in particular, to shed light on a key difference between participation in the open sport hall and participation in other aspects of the Sports City Programme.



## Results

Slightly over half of the young people in the survey (54%) participated in conventional sport and about the same proportion (55.8%) participated in the Sports City Programme (Table 1). Since the Sports City Programme is targeted at groups which take relatively little part in 'conventional' sports it is important, as an indication of whether the Sports City Programme is reaching its target groups, to ask whether those who take part in the two different kinds of sporting activities represent different halves of the population of people in their late teens. In other words, are those who take part in the Sports City Programme different people from those who take part in more conventional sports? Or are the 'alternative' sporting programmes simply being used by those who already take part in more conventional sport?

**Table 1: Participation rates of young people in 'conventional' sports and in the Sports City Programme. N = 566.**

	<b>Conventional sports</b>	<b>Sports City Program</b>
<b>Participant</b>	<b>54.0%</b>	<b>55.8%</b>
<b>Non participant</b>	<b>46.0%</b>	<b>44.2%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that there is a substantial overlap between those young people who participate in conventional sport and those who take part in the Sports City programme; in other words, many of those who take part in the Sports City Programme also take part in more conventional sport. However, it is clear that the Sports City Programme also enjoys a substantial measure of success in attracting those who do not take part in conventional sports: girls and, in particular, working class boys.

**Table 2: Participation rates of young people in ‘conventional’ sports and in the Sports City Programme, by socio-economic status and gender. N = 557**

	<b>Conventional sport participant</b>	<b>SCP participant</b>	<b>Participates in both contexts</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Vocational boy</b>	<b>47.7%</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Academic boy</b>	<b>70.6%</b>	<b>58.4%</b>	<b>47.8%</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>Vocational girl</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>53.2%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Academic girl</b>	<b>50.6%</b>	<b>52.2%</b>	<b>31.1%</b>	<b>180</b>

### **Socio-economic status and participation**

If we focus firstly on socio-economic status (as measured by type of school attended) it is clear from Table 2 that the Sports City Programme is more attractive – perhaps because it is more accessible - to working class young people than are more conventional sports, while the reverse is true among middle class young people. Among working class males, under half (47.7%) take part in conventional sport, while almost two-thirds (64.8%) participate in the alternative Sports City Programmes. Since 31.8% of working class males participate in both conventional sport and the Sports City Programmes, this indicates that 33% of working class males take part *only* in the Sports City Programmes, twice as many (15.9%) as take part *only* in conventional sports. These data do suggest that the Sports City Programmes are providing a real alternative to conventional sports for many working class boys. The Sports City Programmes are similarly attractive to working class girls, among whom over half (53.2%) take part, compared with just over a third (37.8%) who take part in conventional sport. Since 23.4% of working class girls take part in both types of sport, this means that 29.8% of working class girls take part *only* in Sports City Programmes, while just half that number (14.4%) take part *only* in conventional sport. Again, these data suggest that the Sports City Programmes provide a genuine alternative for working class girls.

Although many middle class young people also take part in the Sports City Programmes, conventional sports remain more popular than among their working class peers, especially among males. For example, while 70.6% of middle class boys (as measured by attendance at an academic school) take part in conventional sport, only 58.4% - a lower percentage than among working class young males - participate in the Sports City programme. Moreover, since 47.8% take part in both types of sport, this means that just 10.6% of middle class young males take part *only* in the Sports City programme, compared with 22.8% who take part *only* in conventional sport. Among middle class young females, conventional sports and the alternative sports provided by the Sports City Programme are about equally attractive, with 50.6% taking part in conventional sports and 52.2% taking part in the Sports City Programme.

The data do therefore suggest that the Sports City Programme has had a significant degree of success in breaking down class barriers to sporting participation; that is, this programme is much more attractive to working class young people, both male and female, than are the more conventional sporting alternatives. But what impact have they had in terms of breaking down gender barriers?

### **Gender and participation**

As noted above, the Sports City Programme has proved more attractive than conventional sport among working class females, but among young middle class females, conventional sport and the Sports City Programme are about equally attractive. The aggregated data for all females, of both social classes, are shown in Table 3.

For the moment let us focus on columns one and two of table 3, which provide data on participation, by gender, in conventional sport and in the Sports City programme; we will analyse the data in column three, which relate to participation in the open sport hall in the next section.

**Table 3: Participation rates of young people in 'conventional' sports, in the Sports City Programme and in the open sport hall, by gender.**

	Conventional sport participant*	SCP participant**	Open sport participant***	N
Boy	63,26%	60,30%	19,85%	266
Girl	45,97%	52,01%	7,72%	291

\* Chi square = 16, 84; p < .001. \*\* Chi square = 3, 92; p <.05. \*\*\* Chi square = 17, 80; p< .001.

In relation to conventional sport – that is organized, competitive activities – the data indicate that, as a good deal of previous research has suggested, there are significant gender differences, with 63 per cent of young males participating in conventional sport, compared with just 46 per cent of young females. However, the gender differences are considerably less marked in relation to the alternative Sports City Programmes, in which 60% of young males and 52% of young females participate. These are significant differences; the gender balance is much less unequal in the Sports City Programme than it is for conventional sport. In addition, participation rates for young women are higher in the Sports City Programme (52%) than in conventional sports (46%). There is, therefore, some evidence of the success of the Sports City Programme in relation to the breaking down of gender barriers. However, it is important to emphasise that, as we noted above, what success the programme has had in breaking down gender barriers has been much more evident in relation to working class than in relation to middle class female participation.

#### **Gender and participation in the open sport hall.**

Although the Sport City Programme appears to have had some success in terms of breaking down gender barriers to participation, this effect appears not to be equally evident in all aspects of the programme. More particularly, the periods of observation in the open sport hall suggested that gender remains, in this specific context, an important barrier to participation for, within the open

sport hall, male participants overwhelmingly outnumber females; during one of the observed days, the gender balance between males and females was about ten to one. One of the leaders of the sport hall indicated that this pattern was the normal situation. One of our interviewees, who was one of the core participants in the open sport hall, similarly confirmed that the vast majority of participants were normally males. When asked, on the basis of the researcher's observation, about the fact that the one girl in the sport hall that day was simply standing on the sideline, he replied: 'They (girls) sit and watch, you see ... there is not much for them to do here'. Another interviewee, also one of the most regular users of the sport hall, when asked about the same issue replied: 'It is because girls ... they cannot do the things that we are doing. It is too exhausting for them'.

On the basis of the data gathered by observation at the open sport hall, the survey data were re-examined in order to compare the participation of young males and females in the open sport hall with their participation in the Sports City Programme more generally. Data on participation, by gender, in the open sport hall, are shown in column three of Table 3.

It is striking that, although as we have seen, the overall impact of the Sport City Programme has been to reduce gender differences in participation, in the case of one specific aspect of that programme – the open sport hall – the gender differences are particularly great. Thus while 20 per cent of the young males participated in the open sport halls, only 8 per cent of the young women did so. How does one account for this very unequal pattern of participation in the open sports hall?

### **The open sport hall as a male preserve?**

It is a striking finding that the open sport hall has generated a pattern of gender participation which is even more unequal than that which characterises conventional sport. Why is that so? Why is male dominance even stronger than in the case of conventional sport? The open sport halls, it should be emphasised, are not organised with a focus on 'serious' training and competitive performance, both of which have been reported as reasons why girls drop out of conventional sport (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004; Skille, 2005). Rather, they are facilities which are provided at the local neighbourhood

level, in a non-bureaucratic and informal way, and are explicitly designed to be open to everyone. Why, then, have they not only failed to break down, but have actually reinforced, existing gender patterns?

Perhaps the first point to note in this connection is that it is by no means unusual for social policies, whether in sport or other areas of social life, not merely to fail to achieve the declared objectives of those policies, but to have outcomes which are unplanned and which may even be the very opposite of those which were intended. As has been argued elsewhere (Dopson and Waddington, 1996), the process of formulating and implementing policy is a complex process which, almost inevitably, has consequences which are not only unplanned but which, in many cases, may be held to be undesirable. It is also important to emphasise that such outcomes are, as Elias (1978:71-103) has pointed out, not unusual; indeed they are a commonplace occurrence in everyday social life.<sup>v</sup>

But let us return to the specific problem in relation to the open sport hall: how do we explain the much greater gender imbalance in participation in the open sport hall than in other aspects of the Sports City Programme? The work of Eric Dunning, which draws upon Norbert Elias's theory of civilizing processes, provides some useful clues in this respect.

Dunning (1999: 227) notes that, although there is obviously a degree of overlap between the sexes in this regard, it is the case that, as a function of both biology and social processes, males have tended in all societies to be bigger, physically stronger and faster than females and therefore better equipped as potential fighters. This has been an important source of the greater power chances of men relative to women. However, the power chances which men derive from their greater power, strength and capacity for inflicting physical violence have varied according to the degree to which constraints have been effectively imposed on the use of physical force and violence in everyday social life. Where there are relatively few constraints on the everyday use of physical force and violence in social life – as, for example, was the case in European societies prior the establishment of

relatively stable, modern nation states in which the state has established a monopoly of the legitimate use of violence – then their greater capacity for fighting and for the use of violence in general was a very important source of men's greater power chances compared to women. However, as part of the long term civilizing process which took place in Europe from the Middle Ages until the early twentieth century, the use of violence in everyday social life has come to be increasingly regulated, with the result that the use of direct force has played a diminishing role in social relations. This, in turn, has been associated with a shift towards the equalization of the power chances of those who were physically weaker relative to those who were physically stronger (Dunning, 1999: 45). This has been one of the key processes underlying the shifting balance of power between men and women in an equalizing direction.

These broad social changes have also had important implications for sport. Firstly, sports have themselves undergone a civilizing process. For example, as they developed in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sports such as boxing, soccer and rugby came to eliminate some forms of physical violence, while also requiring that participants should exercise stricter self-control in regard to physical contact (Dunning, 1999: 64). However, although they are considerably less violent than they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, modern sports continue to serve as a central avenue of expression for socially generated aggressive impulses which are not normally permitted to be expressed in other social contexts. In this regard, it can be said that, in present-day societies, many sports have become enclaves for the expression of physical violence, not in the form of unlicensed or uncontrolled violence, but in the form of socially sanctioned violence as expressed in violently aggressive 'body contact'; indeed, in the relatively highly pacified societies of the modern West, sport is probably the main – for many people the only – activity in which they are regularly involved in aggressive physical contact with others.

The close association between sport, aggression and violence, even in modern societies, provides an important key to understanding why sport is in modern societies perhaps the most

widely available arena for the legitimate expression of masculine aggression and for the display of traditional and dominant notions of masculinity involving physical power, strength and courage. As Dunning has noted, sport, along with such occupations as the military and the police, has come to represent 'an enclave for the legitimate expression of masculine aggression and the production and reproduction of traditional male habituses involving the use and display of physical prowess and power'; put more succinctly, sport is a 'primary vehicle for the masculinity-validating experience' (Dunning, 1999:229).

It is important to note that there are important differences between sports in terms of the degree to which they provide appropriate contexts for generating and sustaining particular conceptions of masculinity. For example, Dunning (1999:229) has suggested that 'it is perhaps reasonable to describe soccer as an intrinsically more "civilized" and "civilizing" game than American football ... while it, too, is a mock battle played with a ball, in soccer the war-like element is less obvious, more muted and usually more controlled'. It is indeed the case that, though it is less violent than it was in the late nineteenth century, American football remains, by comparison with most other sports, relatively violent; it is significant that, as Guttman (1978: 121) has noted, proponents of American football list among what they see as positive features of the game its bellicosity and its similarities to actual warfare and the pain and self-sacrifice which it requires. For many players and fans alike, relatively violent sports such as American football are, precisely because of their violent character, arenas *par excellence* for young men to demonstrate a particular kind of aggressive masculinity.

In the light of these considerations about civilizing processes, violence and masculinity, we can now return to the key question in relation to the open sport halls: what is it about these activities which accounts for the marked gender inequality in participation? Are there some respects in which it might be argued that the open sport hall constitutes, to a greater degree than other aspects of the Sports City Programme, a specifically masculinity-



validating experience which, at the same time that it makes these activities attractive to males, also makes them less attractive to females?

We noted earlier that open sport halls provide facilities which are open during afternoons, weekends and school holidays, and that young people may arrive and leave whenever they choose. The sessions are very loosely and informally organised and one intention is to de-emphasise the competitive focus of conventional sport. None of these characteristics of the organisation would necessarily make these schemes unattractive to young females and some, like the de-emphasising of competition, might make them more attractive to females. However, there is one other aspect of the open sports hall which, we suggest, is the critical element of these schemes which explains the marked gender imbalance.

We noted earlier that the power chances which men derive from their greater power and strength vary according to the degree to which constraints are imposed on the use of physical force and violence in everyday social life and that, where there are relatively few constraints on the use of physical force, their greater power and strength is a very important source of men's greater power chances compared to women. In this regard, we suggest that, in terms of explaining the marked gender imbalance within the open sport hall, the fact that, as we indicated previously, the activities are organised largely by the young people themselves, with little or no adult supervision, is of critical importance. Let us explore this a little further.

As Elias pointed out, civilizing processes are observable both at the level of state-societies and of human society as a whole, and also at the level of the individual. Thus while it is possible to observe the development on a societal level of more civilized codes of behaviour – including the stricter regulation of violence and aggression – the process of 'growing up' in modern societies is itself a civilizing process on the level of the individual. These processes are intimately linked and, with regard to civilizing processes on the level of the individual, relationships between children and young people, on the one hand, and adults on the other, are of central importance. As Elias noted, 'the

specific psychological process of “growing up” in Western societies ... is nothing other than the individual civilizing process to which each young person, as a result of the civilizing process over many centuries, is automatically subjected from early childhood, to a greater or lesser degree and with greater or lesser success’. He continued: ‘since in our society every human being is exposed from the first moment of life to the influence and the moulding intervention of civilized grown ups, they must indeed pass through a civilizing process in order to reach the standard attained by their society in the course of its history’ (Elias, 2000:xi).

As Elias noted, within this process the ‘influence and the moulding intervention of civilized grown ups’ is of major importance; we might add that this influence is important not just in the early years of childhood, but also among young people more generally. The central importance of adults in controlling the behaviour of young people has been noted by a number of sociologists who have written about sport and violence. For example, one aspect of Clarke’s (1978) explanation of the development of football hooliganism in England in the 1960s focuses around changing patterns of adult control of young males. He suggests that before the Second World War, working class boys typically went to football matches with their fathers, uncles, older brothers or neighbours and, in that context, the behaviour of young males was relatively effectively controlled by older males. However, he suggests that when, from the 1960s, they began increasingly to go to matches in the company solely of lads of their own age, control by older relatives and neighbours could no longer operate effectively. Although the historical evidence relating to changing patterns of attendance is not perhaps as clear as Clarke claims, his more general point – that adults play a critical part in regulating the behaviour of young people – is undoubtedly correct.

Probably the most detailed analysis of the relationship between adult control of young people, and violence and aggression in sport is to be found in Dunning and Sheard’s (2005) work on football in the early nineteenth century English public schools. They note that football in the public schools was integrated into the authority structure in those schools and that, in order to understand

the development of football at that time, it is necessary to examine its relationship to the structure of authority relationships in the schools.

In this regard, they note that it was symptomatic of authority relationships in the public schools between about 1750 and 1840 that football was adopted and run by the boys themselves. It was not, that is, an activity introduced by the staff as a matter of deliberate policy but, on the contrary, a leisure activity of the boys for which they alone were responsible. How did this situation come about?

The earliest public schools were foundations endowed by wealthy benefactors for the education of 'poor boys'. However, during the eighteenth century – for reasons which need not concern us here – members of the aristocracy and gentry began to send their sons to public schools as fee paying students in growing numbers. As a result, the schools grew rapidly in size and the fee paying boys from high status families came to outnumber the 'poor boys'. This takeover of the public schools by the aristocracy and gentry was associated with a shift in the balance of power between masters and pupils. As Dunning and Sheard (2005:43) put it:

As long as pupils in the public schools were largely 'poor scholars', the masters appear to have retained command. When, however, pupils from the ruling classes flocked to them, their position deteriorated. Central among the developments which reduced the masters' power was the changed dependency pattern which resulted from the upper-class takeover. When 'poor scholars' had formed the majority, most pupils had wanted from the schools what the masters could offer, namely a classical education. The boys, in that respect, depended on the masters. As the social composition of the schools began to change, however, so the masters grew financially dependent on the fees paid by the families of their wealthy pupils. Their power was reduced accordingly. It was limited, too, by their growing career dependency on the patronage of upper class families, for example, if they wanted to

move from teaching into the church. In short, the emergent pattern of interdependencies was asymmetrical. The masters' power was accordingly reduced.

In this situation, conflict between boys and masters was endemic. The boys resented being given orders by men they considered their social inferiors, and there were numerous violent rebellions by the boys in public schools in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some of which were only suppressed after the reading of the Riot Act. From this situation there emerged a system of dual control, in which the authority of the masters was recognised as legitimate within the classroom in return for their recognition of the rights of the senior boys to exercise control over extra-curricular activities, including football.<sup>vi</sup>

The fact that the masters were no longer able to control the senior boys meant that they were unable to control them in relation to the younger and weaker boys. As a result, there emerged a dominance hierarchy based on age and physical strength, in which the older and stronger boys 'lorded it' over the younger and weaker ones. Younger pupils were forced into the role of 'fags', and were required to perform menial tasks for their seniors. As Dunning and Sheard (2005:45-6) note, the 'strongest held sway and, as one would expect of teenagers untrammelled by effective adult control, they often exercised their power cruelly'. Bullying was the order of the day and was often physically severe. The system was one of 'dominance of the younger by the older boys since, given the absence of effective adult control, the prefects and, more generally, the older and physically stronger boys, were able to act in relation to their younger and weaker fellows in accordance with their whims, unchecked by anything other than the customary restraints which they forged among themselves. These were based on the standards of masculinity characteristic of the period and class from which they came' (Dunning and Sheard, 2005:46).

The leisure activities of public schoolboys corresponded to these power relations. Football was a means by which, in the absence of adult control, older and stronger boys asserted their

dominance over younger boys. Fags were often forced to play, and restricted to the role of 'keeping goal' and it was even known for fags to be lined up to demarcate the pitch! The game itself was very rough, and the older boys do not appear to have tempered their violence in relation to younger boys. In short, 'the relatively "uncivilized" character of social relations at that stage in the development of the public schools was reflected in the types of football they played' (Dunning and Sheard, 2005:50).

As Dunning and Sheard point out, the absence of adult control is central to an understanding of the type of football played in the English public schools at that time. Similarly, we suggest that, in the context of the open sport halls in Bergen, as in the English public schools, the relative absence of adult control is of critical importance in structuring the pattern of relationships. Just as in the public schools the absence of adult control meant that adults were unable to control those who were stronger in relation to those who were weaker – that is, in the public schools, the older boys in relation to the younger boys – so, in the open sport halls, the relative absence of adult control means that adults similarly exercise relatively little control over the behaviour of those who are stronger in relation to those who are weaker – that is, in the open sport halls, older males in relation to younger males, and males in general in relation to females. Thus the absence of adult control as a restraining influence has enabled older males to develop a dominance hierarchy which reflects their greater strength and physicality vis-à-vis younger males and females, relatively unfettered by the forms of adult control which characterise other aspects of the Sports City Programme. Of course, we are not suggesting that, in the open sport halls, older males have developed patterns of dominance which are as violent as those in the nineteenth century public schools which, as we have noted, could involve high levels of physically severe bullying and cruelty. But just as the dominance hierarchy within the public schools reflected the standards of masculinity characteristic of the period and class (and country) from which the boys came so, too, we suggest, the patterns of male dominance within the open sports halls, more or less unregulated by adult control, reflect the standards of masculinity characteristic of the period, class and country in which they are found. If these standards are much less violent than those of the nineteenth century English public schools, they nevertheless reflect,

like the relationships between the boys in the public schools, a clear pattern of dominance based on strength and power.

The older boys (18 years olds) constituted a core group of the open sport hall's participants, who clearly felt that the open sport hall was 'their' territory. Thus while members of sports clubs who used the hall for training sessions would normally leave when their training session had ended, members of the core group of older boys would spend a great deal of time in the open sports hall, typically staying to 'hang out' as a group long after their sports sessions had ended. The hall was, therefore, not only a locus for their sporting activity, but it was also an important focus for their social activity more generally; in this sense, the sport hall might, perhaps, be regarded as a functional alternative to the 'street corner' for youths in other western societies.

The older boys' sense of 'ownership' of this 'territory' was also evident in several aspects of their behaviour in the sports hall and, in particular, in their use of the sports pitch marked out within the hall, to which the older boys had more-or-less unchallenged first claim. Typically, the core group of older boys monopolized the space in the middle of the pitch where, on arrival at the hall, they would sit on mats and chat among themselves, while also exercising control over the stereo system, which they played all the time. In a spatial pattern which echoes the similar spatial marginalisation of the fags in the nineteenth century English public schools, the younger males and the few females who were present in the sports hall were typically consigned to the 'leftover spaces' along the sidelines and in the corners of the pitch.

The older and younger boys constituted distinct groups, between which there was relatively little contact. The dominance hierarchy was however clear, not only in the special arrangement of the groups but also in other aspects of their relationship. For example, on one occasion, the younger boys started to roll out a large, air filled mat for acrobatics ('air tumbling'). At this point the older boys intervened to stop the younger boys. After a brief

discussion, the younger boys were allowed to roll out the mat and to fill it with air, but it was the older boys who used the mat first, the younger boys being allowed to use it only after the older boys had finished. No explicit threats were made, nor was there any use of violence, but the dominance hierarchy was clear and unchallenged.

While the younger boys participated in the sports hall – albeit on terms largely defined by the older boys – the girls, as we have noted, participated much less in the facilities provided by the open sports hall. In part this was undoubtedly due to the dominance of the older boys and the way in which the activities were organised by, and largely for the benefit of, themselves. For example, in his comment that the girls ‘sit and watch ... there is not much for them to do here’, one of our interviewees hinted at the fact that, in the relative absence of adult control, the males had effectively organised the activities for themselves, with little or no provision for females, who were assigned a passive role of sitting and watching. Another male interviewee, in his comment that the girls ‘cannot do the things that we are doing. It is too exhausting for them’, similarly hinted at the fact that the activities were typically organised for the boys – girls ‘cannot do the things we are doing’ - and also at the high level of physicality which they involved. These values and patterns of behaviour - the assumption of male control, of female passivity and the emphasis on physicality - are typically male and, we suggest, they provide young males with an opportunity to reaffirm their masculinity in ways which, by effectively defining the open sport halls as ‘male territory’, simultaneously have the effect of excluding all but a few girls from the open sport halls.

As we noted above, the Sports City Programme (excluding the open sport hall aspect of the programme) attracts more young working class (but not middle class) females than does more conventional sport. It is interesting to note that some research suggests that commercially-organised leisure – which because of its cost is likely to attract mainly middle class people – attracts significant numbers of young females after the age of sixteen (Coleman and Hendry, 1999). This is consistent with a similar finding by Ulseth (2003; 2004) that commercial training centres are more popular among females than among males. It may be significant in this regard that commercial fitness centres

are normally run on very formal lines, and they often have quite strict codes governing participants' behaviour, including the use of offensive language, and sometimes dress codes, all of which appear designed to ensure that the sensitivities of all users of the facility, but perhaps especially the sensitivities of less 'robust' users such as some women, are not offended, and that all users – and perhaps, again, especially, those who are less 'robust' - can exercise in a situation in which they feel both physically and psychologically secure. This situation, we suggest, may not be found to anything like the same degree in the open sport hall, where the relative absence of adult control has facilitated the development of a distinctively masculine culture which is unwelcoming to young females.

### **Conclusion.**

Our analysis suggests that the Sports City Programme has, in general terms, enjoyed a measure of success in breaking social barriers to participation in sport. Specifically, several elements of the programme have proved much more successful than conventional, competitive sport in breaking down barriers associated with social class. It has also enjoyed a measure of success in attracting higher levels of participation from working class females, though among middle class females more conventional sports remain about equally attractive.

Much of this success appears to be due to the fact that the activities which are organised as part of the Sports City Programme are offered as part of a programme of 'alternative' activities, that is, activities which are deliberately organised and delivered in ways which are different from the ways in which conventional sport is organised. In this regard, we drew attention earlier to the fact that the Sports City Programme offers activities which are organised in less formal and more flexible ways than are conventional sports. In addition, many of the activities are less intensive and physically less demanding than conventional sports and also de-emphasise the competitive element and it is likely that these characteristics of the programme also help to make it more acceptable to many



young people; in this context it is interesting to note that in relation to the physical activity programmes which it organised in Britain in the 1990s, the Health Education Authority noted that the effectiveness of such programmes 'can be limited by an over-emphasis in competitive performance', while it also recognised that negative perceptions of what it called 'sporty image' also constitute one of the barriers to more widespread participation in physical activity (HEA, 1995; 1992). It is likely that similar considerations are operative in Norway, for there is evidence that many young people, and especially teenage girls, find the competitive focus of conventional sport unattractive (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004; Skille, 2005).

More generally, we would suggest that the Sports City Programme has enjoyed a measure of success because its greater informality and flexibility by comparison with conventional sports make it more attractive to young people. In this connection, the process which Roberts (1996) has described as the growing individualisation of the lifestyles, and the preferred leisure activities, of young people is of particular importance. It should be noted that although Roberts is describing the situation in Britain, the process of individualisation is a much more general process which is also evident in Norway and, indeed, throughout Western Europe. In this regard, the Sports City Programme represents a movement towards the growing diversity of physical activities; put succinctly, young people are no longer confronted with a limited range of formally organised and usually competitive activities which are scheduled only at particular times, but are increasingly able to take part in activities which allow them to express their own individuality by playing what they want, when they want, and with whom they want.

However, notwithstanding this general success in breaking down barriers to participation, one aspect of the Sports City Programme – the open sport halls – is characterised by a very unequal pattern of participation, from which young females were largely excluded. We have argued that this marked gender imbalance is associated with the relative absence of adult control, which has allowed

young men to develop a typically masculine culture which is unattractive and unwelcoming to females.

This research therefore suggests that so-called 'alternative' sports may not always offer alternatives to the power relations associated with more conventional sports. Thus, while many aspects of the Sports City Programme do appear to differ in important respects from more conventional sports - for example, in terms of their informality, or in terms of their targeting at specific disadvantaged groups – the open sport halls appear to facilitate the development of very traditional patterns of gender relations which are antithetical to female participation. In this regard, it is interesting to note that research into other sports such as skateboarding and snowboarding – sports which, at least when they began, were sometimes seen as 'alternative' sports for young people - has indicated that the male dominance associated with many traditional sports has not diminished but, rather, has taken other forms (Anderson, 1999; Beal, 1996).

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## Notes.

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<sup>i</sup> Although female members of ethnic minority groups were specifically targeted, adolescent girls in general were not explicitly named as a target group. However, it may be argued that the breaking down of gender barriers was implicit in the programme. The programme was aimed in general at groups which had low levels of participation in sport and one such key group in Norway, as in Britain, consists of young females. Norwegian data clearly indicate that both participation and dropout from sport are strongly associated with gender, with girls having lower participation rates than boys. It should be noted that no data on female members of ethnic minority groups are included in this study since Bergen, where the study was conducted, has only a very small ethnic minority population.

<sup>ii</sup> The variety of target groups indicate that the Sports City Programme is underpinned by a general, though largely uncritical and implicit, acceptance of the social value of sport not only in improving health but more particularly in relation to social inclusion (with special reference to deprived groups and ethnic minorities) and with reference to the crime and drug use prevention functions which are sometimes claimed for such schemes. For a critique of the attempt to use sport to achieve some of these broader social goals, see Smith and Waddington (2004).

<sup>iii</sup> The non-replies are not believed to have skewed the sample in terms of the social characteristics of the young people themselves, but more probably reflect the priority – or lack of priority – given by school administrators and teachers to implementing the survey.

<sup>iv</sup> Respondents were given a choice of four boxes to tick, to indicate that they had during the previous year (i) never participated in the Sports City Programme; (ii) participated just once; (iii) participated 'occasionally', or (iv) participated 'regularly'. The definitions of what constituted 'occasional' and 'regular' use were left to the participants themselves.

<sup>v</sup> The implication of this is not that all social policies are inevitably doomed to failure; rather, the implication is that we should not assume policies have only the consequences which were intended by the planners. There is therefore a need for all policies to be carefully monitored so that appropriate remedial action can be taken if necessary. Of course, we do not assume that any such remedial action is unproblematic, for any remedial action is itself also likely to have unplanned outcomes.

<sup>vi</sup> The 'football' played in the public schools at that time was neither modern soccer nor rugby, but a variant of the traditional forms of folk football.

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