

Article

Intersectoral Action to Enhance the Social Inclusion of Socially Vulnerable Youth through Sport: An Exploration of the Elements of Successful Partnerships between Youth Work Organisations and Local Sports Clubs

Niels Hermens^{1,2,*}, Sabina Super¹, Kirsten Verkooijen¹ and Maria Koelen¹

¹ Department of Social Sciences, Health and Society Group, Wageningen UR, 6700 EW Wageningen, The Netherlands; E-Mails: niels.hermens@wur.nl (N.H.), sabina.super@wur.nl (S.S.), kirsten.verkooijen@wur.nl (K.V.), maria.koelen@wur.nl (M.K.); Tel.: +31-317485169 (N.H.)

² Verwey-Jonker Institute, 3512 HG Utrecht, The Netherlands

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 15 July 2014 | In Revised Form: 24 October 2014 | Accepted: 10 November 2014 |

Published: 25 June 2015

Abstract

Research shows that participation in sport is positively related to self-esteem, self-regulation skills, and social inclusion. As socially vulnerable youngsters participate less frequently in sports activities than their average peers, youth work organisations try to guide their clients (i.e., socially vulnerable youngsters) to local sports clubs and inclusive sports activities. Inclusive sports activities, however, cannot be provided by youth work organisations alone. Therefore, in the Netherlands, intersectoral action involving both youth work organisations and local sports clubs has emerged. Because youth workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs are not used to collaborating with each other, we explored the factors that contribute to the quality and performance of such intersectoral actions. On the basis of five open interviews with youth workers and three focus groups with stakeholders in local sports clubs, we described factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action among youth workers and local sports clubs that are preconditions for the success of this specific type of intersectoral action.

Keywords

inclusive sports activities; intersectoral action; partnerships; socially vulnerable youth; youth work

Issue

This article is part of the special issue “Sport for Social Inclusion: Critical Analyses and Future Challenges”, edited by Dr. Reinhard Haudenhuyse (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium) and Professor Marc Theeboom (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium).

© 2015 by the authors; licensee Cogitatio (Lisbon, Portugal). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

Socially vulnerable youngsters face (temporary) difficulties in one or more domains in their life. Examples of these difficulties are income poverty, low parental education and negative experiences with institutions such as the family and school. These (temporary) difficulties may result in a low self-esteem and a disconnection from social institutions (Vettenburg, 1998). Trying

to increase participation in organised sports clubs is seen as a promising strategy for improving the self-esteem of these youngsters and rebuilding their sense of social inclusion (Feinstein, Bynner, & Duckworth, 2005; Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Coalter, 2012; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). On average, however, socially vulnerable youngsters tend to participate less frequently in local sports clubs than their peers (Breedveld, Bruining, Van Dorselaer,

Mombarg, & Nootebos, 2010; Vandermeerschen, Vos, & Scheerder, 2013).

The lower sport participation among socially vulnerable youngsters is due to social, financial, emotional, and/or physical reasons (Downward, 2007; Wicker, Hallmann, & Breuer, 2012). Because of these many factors influencing sport participation by socially vulnerable youngsters, intersectoral action by youth work organisations and local sports clubs is needed to increase sport participation among these youngsters. Rütten, Abu-Omar, Frahsa, and Morgan (2009) and Hartog, Wagemakers, Vaandrager, Dijk, and Koelen (2013) for instance, found that intersectoral action is also required to increase the physical activity of other socially vulnerable groups such as immigrant women and primary care clients. Kelly (2013) found that partnerships of practitioners (e.g., youth workers and volunteers at local sports clubs) are important because they can lead to shared resources and referral pathways. If strategic partners and community members are also included in such partnerships, access to funding increases, opportunities to influence policymaking grow, and possibilities to publish the results of the partnership arise (Kelly, 2013).

Several Dutch local sports clubs have the ambition to organise communal activities (e.g., trying to increase socially vulnerable groups' participation in sport through inclusive sports activities) in collaboration with social sector organisations such as primary care and youth work organisations. However, many social workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs lack experience with this type of intersectoral action. Thus, research is needed to gain insights into factors that contribute to the quality and the results of intersectoral action involving such groups. Unfortunately, to date few studies have investigated factors that improve the quality and outcomes of intersectoral action (Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2013; Williams, 2013), especially regarding the collaboration between professionals and volunteers (Harris, Mori, & Collins, 2009; Hartog et al., 2013). Hence, the aim of this article is to explore and describe factors that may contribute to the performance of intersectoral action involving youth work organisations and local sports clubs.

Intersectoral action and intersectoral partnerships have been studied in several social domains such as education (Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2013), crime (Chavis, 1995), and health promotion (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). In this study, the starting point is a framework for intersectoral partnerships in the field of health promotion, the Health ALLiances (HALL) framework. The HALL framework aims to contribute to the facilitation of successful alliances. It was developed stepwise in a participatory research project in which the participants needed guidance in organising alliances working on health promotion (Vaandrager, Koelen, Ashton, & Revuelta, 1993). One result of this research project was a list of dilemmas and challenges for col-

laboration in health promotion (Koelen, Vaandrager, & Colomé, 2001). Combined with experiences and studies in several applied settings in the Netherlands, and with review studies on collaborative processes, these dilemmas and challenges led to the HALL framework (Koelen, Vaandrager, & Wagemakers, 2012). As the youth workers and the stakeholders in the local sports clubs lack experience in collaborating with each other, the HALL framework seems to be a useful framework to investigate the presence or absence of factors that contribute to the intersectoral action of youth workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs. Therefore, it may be a useful framework from which to derive recommendations for the involved organisations. Blok, Wagemakers, Leeuwe, and Scholten (2014) and Hartog et al. (2013) have previously used the HALL framework to synthesise data from qualitative studies on collaboration between care and sport.

The HALL framework identifies three clusters of factors that hinder or facilitate the success of intersectoral partnerships (see figure 1).

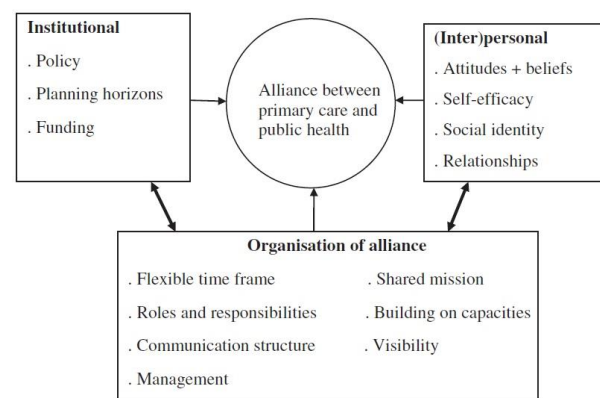


Figure 1. The Health ALLiances (HALL) framework (Koelen, Vaandrager, & Wagemakers, 2012).

The three clusters are institutional factors, personal factors, and factors relating to the organisation of a partnership (Koelen et al., 2012). Institutional factors include targets of the involved organisations, organisational values, cultures, and rituals, and funding possibilities. Personal factors are attitudes towards the intersectoral action, experience of collaborative work, and the feeling of being able to affect the results and performance of the intersectoral action (i.e., self-efficacy). Factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action help to deal with the institutional and personal factors that stakeholders bring into the partnership. Hence, factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action may increase the quality and performance of the partnership (Koelen et al., 2012; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). Koelen et al. (2012) described seven of these factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action: a flexible time frame, clear roles and responsibilities, a clear communication structure, the use of the specific expertise and capacities of the organisa-

tions involved, a shared mission, visibility of (the results of) the partnership, and a neutral and empowering management of intersectoral action. Williams (2013) argues that boundary spanners might be such neutral and empowering managers. Boundary spanners work in collaborative environments and possess the communication, co-ordination, mediating, and entrepreneurial skills required to deal with tensions and differences that occur within partnerships. Boundary spanners are, for instance, initiators of collaborations, partnership coordinators, and frontline workers collaborating with frontline workers from other organisations (Williams, 2013).

2. Research Setting and Methods

2.1. Research Setting

The current study took place in the context of two research projects. The first research project is *Youth, Care and Sport*, which was initiated in 2013 and will come to an end in 2017 (Super, Hermens, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2014). The research project *Youth, Care and Sport* has four aims: first, to explore the causal relationship between participation in sport and life prospects (e.g., social inclusion) of socially vulnerable youngsters; second, to study the life experiences of these youngsters in the context of sport; third, to explore the social conditions for participation in sport that have a positive effect on life prospects; fourth, to investigate the elements of successful intersectoral action between youth work organisations and local sports clubs. The second research project is an evaluation study of the Sports Plus Programme. This evaluation study was carried out by the Verwey-Jonker Institute. The Sports Plus Programme is an initiative of Rotterdam Sportsupport, an organisation that supports local sports clubs in initiating and organising communal activities. The local sports clubs participating in the Sports Plus Programme have the ambition and the capacity to organise inclusive sports activities for specific target groups such as socially vulnerable youngsters. One of the aims of the Sports Plus Programme is to promote collaboration among social work organisations and local sports clubs.

Intersectoral action, involving youth work organisations and local sports clubs, has taken place at several locations in the Netherlands (Buysse & Duijvestijn, 2011; Hermens & Gilsing, 2013). One example is intersectoral action between FlexusJeugdplein, a large youth work organisation in Rotterdam, and Rotterdam Sportsupport. Alongside other forms of care, FlexusJeugdplein aims to increase the social inclusion of socially vulnerable youngsters by guiding them to new communal activities and new social networks. Hence, youth workers in this organisation—together with every youngster who starts a care programme—set goals

relating to the youngsters' leisure-time activities during the care programme. Rotterdam Sportsupport supports the administration of local sport clubs in managing the club, recruiting volunteers, and organising communal activities. One example of these communal activities is inclusive sports activities (i.e., sports activities targeting socially vulnerable groups). Rotterdam Sportsupport also employs four pedagogues who support sport coaches in ensuring a positive socio-pedagogical climate at the sports club. FlexusJeugdplein and Rotterdam Sportsupport have appointed a Care Sport Connector (CSC) who encourages youth workers to guide clients to local sports clubs. This CSC also aims to connect youth workers with local sports clubs.

2.2. Methods

Adopting a qualitative research approach and using the HALL framework's three clusters of factors, we explored the intersectoral action of youth work organisations and local sports clubs in the two research projects. This exploration took place from the perspective of both the youth workers and the local sports clubs.

Two researchers (NH and SS) interviewed five youth workers from FlexusJeugdplein. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews with the youth workers was twofold: first, to explore whether and how youth workers promote sport participation among socially vulnerable youngsters; and second, to find out what support they need to guide their clients to local sports clubs. To represent different types of youth workers, we purposefully sampled five from a list of 20 randomly selected youth workers. We interviewed two pedagogical professionals at a residential centre for youngsters (two different locations), one ambulant youth worker, one school youth worker, and one ambulant youth worker for youngsters living in foster families. The interviews with the youth workers (four women, one man) were conducted in October 2013 and took around 45 minutes. Five topics were discussed in the interviews: (i) useful daytime activities for clients of the youth work organisation, (ii) sport as a useful daytime activity, (iii) methods of encouraging youngsters to participate in local sports clubs, (iv) preconditions that strengthen possible positive effects of sport participation, and (v) the contact between youth workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs. The interviews were held at the youth workers' workplace.

We held three open focus group discussions with representatives of local sports clubs in Rotterdam. These focus groups had two purposes: to investigate what support local sports clubs need to organise communal activities, and to explore the preconditions for successful intersectoral action among stakeholders in the local sport clubs and social workers. Hence, local sports clubs that were already involved in intersectoral action were purposefully sampled for the focus groups.

The focus groups took place in June 2014. In total, 20 people representing 14 local sports clubs participated in the three focus groups. Most of the participants were part of the management of the local sports club. Three topics were discussed during the focus groups: (i) the type of communal activities at the local sports clubs, (ii) the support local sports clubs need to organise and carry out these communal activities, and (iii) experiences of intersectoral action with social work professionals. The focus group discussions took around an hour and a half and were held at the location of one of the local sports clubs participating in the focus group.

The interviews and focus groups were audiotaped with the permission of the interviewees and the participants. The interviews were transcribed intelligent verbatim style. Summaries of the focus groups were written by a research assistant. Without being prompted, the participants in the interviews and focus groups mentioned personal factors, institutional factors, and factors relating to the organisation of the intersectoral action. Factors that are a reality in these organisations and factors that the participants wished to be present, were mentioned. We analysed the data using a deductive approach, with the HALL framework functioning as a starting point in order to describe the personal factors, the institutional factors, and the factors relating to the organisation of the intersectoral action that were spontaneously mentioned by the interviewees and participants. The different factors were hand-coded by one researcher (NH).

3. Results

The results for the youth workers and the local sports clubs are presented separately. For both, we have structured the results according to the three factors of the HALL framework.

3.1. Youth Workers

3.1.1. Institutional Factors

During the interviews, the youth workers mentioned two of the three institutional factors from the HALL framework: their organisation's policy and funding. According to the youth workers, it is their organisation's policy to prevent severe and chronic problems by empowering their clients (i.e., socially vulnerable youngsters) to participate in leisure-time activities and by increasing their clients' experience of social inclusion. Hence, the management of the youth work organisation wants the youth workers to guide youngsters to new social networks, such as local sports clubs. One of the youth workers, for example, said: "It is how this organisation wants to work....Empowering youngsters and their families, and involving clients in neighbourhood activities....I think they [the management] also want to

work this way because in the future the local government wants youth work organisations to work like this".

The youth workers mentioned funding in two ways. First, youth workers can apply for the Youth Sports Fund to overcome the financial barriers that the youngsters face when they receive care from youth workers. This Youth Sports Fund pays a sports club membership fee for youngsters living in families with an income below 120 percent of the Dutch minimum income. Three youth workers mentioned the Youth Sports Fund. Two of these three youth workers were positive about this fund, but also mentioned that money is not the most important factor hindering their clients' participation in sports. One youth worker, for instance, said: "We can apply for the Youth Sports Fund. That is very important. For continued sport participation, however, teammates and coaches have to keep encouraging our youngsters to go to the local sports club. This is necessary because they are not used to any kind of structure in their lives". The youth workers also mentioned economic cuts in their field. For instance, one of the youth workers said: "All of our residential care homes will be closed in a couple of months. In fact, this is the youth work organisation's last residential care home. In the future, the youngsters who live here will be placed in a foster home or will receive short-term crisis care because those types of care are cheaper than residential care". The youth workers mentioned that such uncertainties make it difficult to spend time and energy on new forms of intersectoral action with local sports clubs.

3.1.2. (Inter)personal Factors

In the interviews, the youth workers mentioned aspects relating to three of the four (inter)personal factors of the HALL framework: attitude towards intersectoral action, self-efficacy, and relationships.

In general, the youth workers had a positive attitude towards intersectoral action with local sports clubs. Four of the five youth workers mentioned participation in sport as an activity where youngsters can develop in a positive way. Youth workers, for instance, said: "It is very important that the youngsters have the opportunity to relax...that they have some kind of distraction from their problems....And sport is also important because youngsters come into contact with other people"; "Sport is a communal activity, it helps youngsters to think about something else. And it's healthy as well. All these things together make me think that participation in sport is important for our youngsters". Such a positive attitude towards the possible effects of participation in sport is, of course, a prerequisite for intersectoral action involving both youth workers and local sports clubs.

Youth workers did not say anything about their self-efficacy regarding intersectoral action with local sports

clubs. They did, however, mention several things about their self-efficacy regarding their possibilities to increase socially vulnerable youngsters' participation in sport. They felt that they lacked time to invest in contacting stakeholders in local sports clubs. One youth worker, for instance, said: "I even do not have enough time to apply for the Youth Sports Fund". The youth workers also think that other factors, which they cannot influence, hinder the youngsters' continued participation in sports. The next two quotes from youth workers show two of these factors: "And the parents...they don't do sport themselves. They do not have a clue about the importance of participation in sport so they will not encourage the youngster to go to sports activities"; "The youngsters in our caseload are not used to the routine of going to a sports club. And no-one in their environment encourages them to go". Thus, youth workers think that the youngsters' social environment has a stronger impact on participation in sport than the youth workers themselves have.

The youth workers want to have personal relationships with stakeholders in local sports clubs that have an appropriate socio-pedagogical climate. One youth worker described such a socio-pedagogical climate: "They [volunteers at local sports clubs] do not have to treat our youngsters differently. They only need to know that our youngsters sometimes behave differently than youngsters living in regular families....Our youngsters, for instance, are not used to structure and are therefore easily late. When they are late, a sport coach should not argue with this youngster because this will not motivate the youngsters to be on time. It is better if the sport coach just says that it is good that the youngster is present, and that he/she should try to be on time for the next activity". Three of the youth workers said that they had links with local sports clubs with an appropriate socio-pedagogical climate. One, for instance, said: "Nowadays, I know a couple of sports clubs with a socio-pedagogical climate that want to include socially vulnerable youngsters in their activities". These three youth workers also found personal relationships with stakeholders in the local sports clubs important when they actually guide one of their clients to a sports club. According to one of them, these personal relationships are important because sport coaches need to be introduced to the background of the youngster and because it helps them to stay informed about the development and the behaviour of the youngster in the local sports club. One youth worker, for instance, said: "Sometimes local sports clubs have trouble with our youngsters. No big trouble, but we can help sport coaches to anticipate specific behaviour from certain youngsters".

3.1.3. Organisation of the Partnership

During the interviews, three of the five youth workers

mentioned factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action among youth workers and local sports clubs. These three youth workers mentioned two of the seven organisational factors described in the HALL framework: visibility and the management of intersectoral action. Concerning visibility, one youth worker, for instance, said: "If I knew that my organisation had contact with several local sports clubs, and I knew with which sports clubs, then I would probably more frequently try to guide youngsters to these sports clubs". Another youth worker also found it important that the results of intersectoral action involving youth workers and local sports clubs were visible because this could increase their chance of getting financial support. This youth worker said: "Research into the influence of participation in sport on the life prospects of our youngsters is a good idea...really. It gives us an instrument to show why participation in sport is important for our clients. This may possibly persuade local governments to invest in inclusive sports activities".

Two youth workers mentioned a specific aspect of the management structure of intersectoral action. According to them, the youth work organisation needs someone who connects youth workers with local sports clubs. This person might also help youngsters to integrate into local sports club and support the local sports clubs in including the youngsters in their activities. One youth worker, for instance, said: "We need somebody who has the time to accompany the youngsters to the sports clubs the first couple of times. They can build up contacts within local sports clubs, some kind of network".

When the youth workers mentioned factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action, they mentioned these as being wishes. Thus, it seems that the management of the youth work organisation and Rotterdam Sportsupport have already arranged a partnership, but that concrete intersectoral action among youth workers and local sports clubs is still evolving. The next quote by a youth worker illustrates this: "I cannot do more than try to guide youngsters to a sports club and to motivate parents to support their children to participate in sport. Our management, however, is able to create coordinated action with local sports clubs and must call on us [the youth workers] to motivate sport participation among our youngsters".

3.2. Local Sports Clubs

3.2.1. Institutional Factors

The local sports clubs stakeholders who participated in the focus groups mentioned all three institutional factors described in the HALL framework. All 14 local sports clubs represented in the focus groups participate in the Sports Plus Programme. Hence, they all have the ambition and the policy to organise inclusive

sports activities. One respondent, for instance, said: “We, as the administration of this local sports club, want to do something for society”. These stakeholders agreed that, in addition to aiming for intersectoral action, local sports clubs require a sound organisational structure and a policy plan if they want to successfully organise inclusive sports activities through such action. One stakeholder, for instance, said: “To organise communal activities, a local sports club has to have sound accommodation and management, and cannot have any financial troubles”. According to the respondents, a sound organisational structure is also an important precondition for participating in intersectoral action, especially for local sports clubs as they are managed by volunteers.

The local sports clubs stakeholders mentioned funding as a precondition for successful inclusive sports activities and intersectoral action involving social work organisations and local sports clubs. One respondent said: “A grant makes it easier to start inclusive sports activities in cooperation with a public sector organisation. Especially at the start of such a project. After two years for example, when people are familiar with the sports activity, we can search for other ways to finance the project”. To increase participation in sport among socially vulnerable groups in the Netherlands, some funding organisations give local sports clubs—together with social work organisations—the possibility to apply for a fund to develop and organise inclusive sports activities targeting these groups. One of the local sports clubs that participated in the focus groups has received a grant to organise sports activities for socially vulnerable youngsters for the next two years. These sports activities are specifically designed to improve the self-esteem and self-regulatory skills of these youngsters.

One specific institutional factor of local sports clubs that may hinder intersectoral action with youth work organisations is that they are open in the evening and at weekends. The stakeholders in these local sports clubs interpreted these opening hours as a problem for collaboration with professionals: “Social workers generally do not work in the evenings and at weekends, so we cannot meet or contact them at the times we are present on the site of the sports club”. On the other hand, other stakeholders in local sports clubs thought that the specific opening hours of the clubs presented an opportunity for intersectoral action involving local sports clubs and social workers. One manager of a local sports club, for instance, said: “During the day, until five in the afternoon, our site is completely empty. During this time, it is possible for social work organisations to use our facilities for sports activities with their clients”.

3.2.2. (Inter)personal Factors

In the focus groups, the stakeholders from local sports clubs all mentioned one of the four (inter)personal fac-

tors of the HALL framework. They had found that having a personal relationship with someone from the social work organisation had been very important for the success of intersectoral action. A volunteer from one of the local sports clubs, for instance, said: “I have to know who I can contact at the social work organisation if I have any questions. It is also important that his or her workplace is close to the sports club site, so we can meet easily”.

3.2.3. Organisation of the Partnership

In the focus group interviews, the stakeholders from the local sports clubs mentioned four of the seven factors in the HALL framework that relate to the organisation of intersectoral action. These stakeholders agreed that they needed some support to organise communal activities and inclusive sports activities. The sports clubs receive such support, because they partake in the Sports Plus Programme. One of these stakeholders, for instance, explained: “The support we receive helps us to initiate inclusive sports activities and to create a structure in which we can organise and carry out these activities. The person who assists us also helps to maintain contacts with social workers”. Other factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action were not mentioned by more than one of the local sports clubs stakeholders. The need to have a flexible time frame, a shared mission, and specific roles and responsibilities were not mentioned at all.

The manager of one local sports club mentioned the importance of visibility, communication structure, and building on the capacities of the organisations involved in the context of one specific partnership between a local sports club and a youth work organisation. For this specific partnership, a youth work organisation and the local sports club signed a contract which represents this visibility. They also received funding to organise the activity. The following quote shows how the organisations involved tried to build on each other’s capacities: “Youth workers guide clients to our sports club. Here [at the sports club], these youngsters participate in specific activities for a couple of weeks. After that, the aim is for the youngsters to become members of the sports club. In addition, if during the regular activities one of our sport coaches notices that a youngster has behavioural problems, we ask a youth worker how to support them. To make these activities structural, we meet with the organisations involved every couple of weeks”. This quote also shows how a communication structure can be formed.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to explore factors that contribute to successful intersectoral action involving youth work organisations and local sports clubs. Explo-

ration of the preconditions for such successful intersectoral action is necessary because neither youth work organisations nor local sports clubs can develop and organise inclusive sports activities alone. The HALL framework was used to structure the data. Hence, we explored and described factors pertaining to the organisations (institutional factors) involved in such intersectoral action, those pertaining to the individuals (personal factors) involved, and those pertaining to the organisation of this specific type of intersectoral partnership (organisational factors).

Youth workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs mentioned several institutional factors that may influence the intersectoral action of FlexusJeugdplein and local sports clubs in Rotterdam. First of all, the management of both the youth work organisation and Rotterdam Sportsupport want to facilitate collaboration between youth workers and local sports clubs. FlexusJeugdplein wants youth workers to try to increase sport participation among the youngsters that receive care from this youth work organisation. The managements of the local sports clubs participating in the Sports Plus Programme want to organise communal activities. The youth workers and local sports clubs to whom we spoke are able to apply for several types of national and local funding that help to reach the aims of both institutions. If organisations that collaborate have different funding possibilities and can apply for funds that only help them to reach their own organisational target, intersectoral action will be difficult. It is, therefore, important that there are funding possibilities available for which youth work organisations and local sports clubs can apply together. Local sports clubs, for instance, can apply for a two-year fund to develop and organise inclusive sports activities targeting socially vulnerable groups. Also, youth workers can apply for the Youth Sport Fund to pay for their clients' sports club membership fees. This ability to successfully apply for funds might be a result of the involvement of Rotterdam Sportsupport. Kelly (2013), for instance, found that involving strategic partners (e.g., Rotterdam Sportsupport) may increase possibilities to acquire local funding.

Regarding personal factors, we found that both youth workers and stakeholders in local sports clubs have positive attitudes towards collaborating with each other. Volunteers in the local sports clubs that partake in the Sports Plus Programme have the ambition to help reach social policy goals such as the social inclusion of socially vulnerable youngsters. In addition, youth workers have positive attitudes towards increasing sport participation. They want to use it to increase social inclusion and consider the local sports club a place where socially vulnerable youngsters can develop in a positive way. The youth workers believe that their clients can develop their self-esteem and certain skills through sports activities. Although research indeed

shows that sport participation by youngsters is associated with several beneficial outcomes such as social inclusion (Feinstein et al., 2005), academic achievement (Bailey, 2006), and social and emotional well-being (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013), no consensus has been reached on the evidence for a causal relationship. In addition, the mechanisms that explain how sport programmes positively affect life skills of socially vulnerable youth remain unclear (Lubans, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2012). Interestingly, the youth workers are only positive towards intersectoral action with local sports clubs if these pay attention to a positive socio-pedagogical climate and to the social skills of the coaches. A positive socio-pedagogical climate and good coaching skills strengthen the possible positive effects of sport participation on socially vulnerable youngsters (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Smith, Cumming, & Smoll, 2008). A second personal factor that was mentioned by the youth workers and the local sports clubs stakeholders was self-efficacy in relation to increasing socially vulnerable youngsters' participation in sport. Both groups say that they lack the time to build and maintain the personal relationships that are necessary for intersectoral action and inclusive sports activities. Moreover, some youth workers lack the self-efficacy that would give them the confidence that they could influence socially vulnerable youngsters' participation in sport. Some youth workers find that other factors such as the youngsters' family and peers have a stronger impact than they themselves do on these youngsters' sport participation. As Hunter, Neiger, and West (2011, p. 527) noticed as well, "some local health professionals may feel powerless in addressing the social determinants of health. It is daunting to consider disparities in income, educations, or housing quality".

Only two of the seven factors relating to the organisation of the partnership were mentioned by the youth workers and the local sports clubs stakeholders. First, Rotterdam Sportsupport makes the communal ambitions and activities of the local sports clubs that participate in the Sports Plus Programme visible through a signed contract and a small billboard in each sports club. This contract and billboard made the communal actions "real" for the stakeholders in the local sports clubs. Second, a CSC functions as a neutral leader—or boundary spanner (Williams, 2013). This CSC tries to create contacts between youth workers and local sports clubs and collaborates with the Rotterdam Sportsupport pedagogues to help local sports clubs in creating a positive socio-pedagogical climate.

In addition to the factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action that are currently present, youth workers and local sports clubs stakeholders also mentioned factors that they would like to be present. Youth workers want to increase the visibility of local sports clubs with which the youth work organisation has contact. In addition, both youth workers and the

local sports clubs stakeholders need some operational support for intersectoral action. Thus, there is a need for people (i.e., boundary spanners) who can manage the intersectoral action. According to Williams (2013), these boundary spanners also play an important role during decentralisation processes and policy reforms. For instance, boundary spanners can manage tensions that occur through new relationships between organisations that possibly coincide with these decentralisation processes. Hence, an exploration of the possible role of these boundary spanners during the coming reforms in Dutch local social policies deserves attention.

This study has two limitations. First, we explored the factors that contribute to intersectoral action involving youth work organisations and local sports clubs from open interviews and focus groups about communal activities of local sports clubs and collaboration between youth workers and local sports clubs in general. We did not specifically ask about all the factors in the HALL framework. The interviewees and the participants nevertheless mentioned several of the factors without being prompted. In future research, it is necessary to find out whether the other factors that were not mentioned in the interviews and focus groups, are relevant for this specific intersectoral action. Second, the data presented in this study are limited and relate to one case, the city of Rotterdam. However, as Rotterdam is investing in the social value of sport and intersectoral actions involving social sector organisation and local sports clubs in a programmatic way, the results of this study can be helpful for other cities that want to invest in this type of intersectoral action. A final important point is that inclusive policies and activities will only be successful if the target groups (e.g., socially vulnerable youngsters) want to participate themselves. Thus, sport participation is a way to increase the social inclusion of these youngsters only if participating in a local sports club fits with the physical and psychological abilities and with the wishes of the youngsters.

5. Conclusion

This article shows that youth workers believe that sport participation is important for the development of socially vulnerable youngsters. This article also shows that some of the interviewed local sports clubs and volunteers in those clubs want to organise inclusive sports activities. Unless these clubs and their volunteers have positive attitudes towards the social value of sport and have the ambition to organise inclusive sports activities, many of the factors relating to the organisation of intersectoral action presented in the HALL framework will not be present in the desired intersectoral action involving youth workers and local sports clubs. It seems that identifying “what to do” (i.e., inclusive sports activities through intersectoral action) is easier than finding out “how to do it” (i.e., ac-

tually guiding socially vulnerable youngsters to local sports clubs through collaboration between youth workers and local sports clubs) (Koelen, Vaandrager, & Wagemakers, 2009). There seems to be a missing link that might be filled by—as Williams (2013) calls them—boundary spanners. Future research is needed to further explore the factors that fulfil the potential of intersectoral action involving youth workers and local sports clubs stakeholders, and how to manage this specific intersectoral action.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the youth workers that participated in the interviews and the people from the local sports clubs that participated in the focus groups.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Akkerman, A., & Torenvlied, R. (2013). Public management and network specificity: Effects of colleges' ties with professional organizations on graduates' labour market success and satisfaction. *Public Management Review*, 15(4), 522-540.
- Bailey, R. (2006). Physical education and sport in schools: A review of benefits and outcomes. *Journal of School Health*, 76(8), 397-401.
- Blok, M., Wagemakers, A., Leeuwe, M. v., & Scholten, M. (2014). Eigen Kracht-interventies in het Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin. *Tijdschrift voor gezondheids wetenschappen*, 92(4), 156-162.
- Breedveld, K., Bruining, J. W., Van Dorsselaer, S., Mombarg, R., & Nootebos, W. (2010). *Kinderen met gedragsproblemen en sport. Bevindingen uit de literatuur en uit recent cijfermateriaal*. 's-Hertogen bosch: Mulier Instituut.
- Buyse, W., & Duijvestijn, P. (2011). *Sport zorgt. Ontwikkeling van vier waardevolle sportaanpakken voor jongeren in jeugdzorg*. Amsterdam: DSP-Groep.
- Chavis, D. M. (1995). Building community capacity to prevent violence through coalitions and partnerships. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 6(2), 234-245.
- Downward, P. (2007). Exploring the economic choice to participate in sport: Results from the 2002 general household survey. *International Review of Applied Economics*, 21(5), 633-653.
- Eime, R. M., Young, J. A., Harvey, J. T., Charity, M. J., & Payne, W. R. (2013). A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: Informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. *International Journal of Behavioral*

- Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 10. doi:10.1186/1479-5868-10-98
- Feinstein, L., Bynner, J., & Duckworth, K. (2005). Young people's leisure contexts and their relation to adult outcomes. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 9, 305-327.
- Harris, S., Mori, K., & Collins, M. (2009). Great expectations: Voluntary sports clubs and their role in delivering national policy for English sport. *Voluntas*, 20(4), 405-423.
- Hartog, F. d., Wagemakers, A., Vaandrager, L., Dijk, M. v., & Koelen, M. A. (2013). Alliances in the Dutch BeweegKuur lifestyle intervention. *Health Education Journal*, 73(5), 576-587.
- Haudenhuysse, R. P., Theeboom, M., & Coalter, F. (2012). The potential of sports-based social interventions for vulnerable youth: Implications for sport coaches and youth workers. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 15(4), 437-454.
- Hermens, N., & Gilsing, R. (2013). *Sportclubs in de jeugdketen. De mogelijkheden van pedagogische ondersteuning van sportverenigingen*. Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut.
- Hunter, B. D., Neiger, B., & West, J. (2011). The importance of addressing social determinants of health at the local level: The case for social capital. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 19(5), 522-530.
- Kelly, L. (2013). Sports-based interventions and the local governance of youth crime and antisocial behavior. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 37(3), 261-283.
- Koelen, M. A., Vaandrager, L., & Colomé, C. (2001). Health promotion research: Dilemmas and challenges. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 55(4), 257-262.
- Koelen, M. A., Vaandrager, L., & Wagemakers, A. (2009). What is needed for coordinated action for health? *Family Practice*, 25(SUPPL. 1), i25-i31.
- Koelen, M. A., Vaandrager, L., & Wagemakers, A. (2012). The healthy alliances (HALL) framework: Prerequisites for success. *Family Practice*, 29(1), 132-138.
- Lubans, D. R., Plotnikoff, R. C., & Lubans, N. J. (2012). Review: A systematic review of the impact of physical activity programmes on social and emotional well-being in at-risk youth. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 17(1), 2-13.
- Petitpas, A. J., Cornelius, A. E., Van Raalte, J. L., & Jones, T. (2005). A framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development. *Sport Psychologist*, 19(1), 63-80.
- Provan, K. G., Fish, A., & Sydow, J. (2007). Interorganizational networks at the network level: A review of the empirical literature on whole networks. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 479-516.
- Roussos, S. T., & Fawcett, S. B. (2000). A review of collaborative partnerships as a strategy for improving community health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 21, 369-402.
- Rütten, A., Abu-Omar, K., Frahsa, A., & Morgan, A. (2009). Assets for policy making in health promotion: Overcoming political barriers inhibiting women in difficult life situations to access sport facilities. *Social Science and Medicine*, 69(11), 1667-1673.
- Smith, R. E., Cumming, S. P., & Smoll, F. L. (2008). Development and validation of the motivational climate scale for youth sports. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 20, 116-136.
- Super, S., Hermens, N., Verkooijen, K., & Koelen, M. A. (2014). Enhancing life prospects of socially vulnerable youth through sport participation: A mixed methods study. *BMC Public Health*, 703. Retrieved from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/703>
- Vaandrager, H. W., Koelen, M. A., Ashton, J. R., & Revuelta, C. C. (1993). A four-step health promotion approach for changing dietary patterns in Europe. *European Journal of Public Health*, 3(3), 193-198.
- Vandermeersch, H., Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2013). Who's joining the club? Participation of socially vulnerable children and adolescents in club-organised sports. *Sport, Education and Society*. doi:10.1080/13573322.2013.856293
- Vettenburg, N. (1998). Juvenile delinquency and the cultural characteristics of the family. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 10(3), 193-209.
- Wicker, P., Hallmann, K., & Breuer, C. (2012). Micro and macro level determinants of sport participation. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 2(1), 51-68.
- Williams, P. (2013). We are all boundary spanners now? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 26(1), 17-32.

About the Authors



Niels Hermens

Niels Hermens is part time PhD candidate at the chair group Health and Society of Wageningen University, and researcher at the Verwey-Jonker Institute. His research focuses on how social care organisations, sports organisations, and local governments work together to organise inclusive sport activities. In addition, he studies the relationships between sport participation and the quality of life of young people.

**Sabina Super**

Sabina Super is full-time PhD candidate at the chair group Health and Society of Wageningen University. Her research focuses on the effect of sport participation on the life prospects of socially vulnerable youngsters and on the role of social conditions in strengthening this positive effect of sport participation.

**Dr. Kirsten Verkooijen**

Kirsten Verkooijen is Assistant Professor at the chairgroup Health and Society of Wageningen University, the Netherlands. She studied Health Sciences with the two specializations Health Education and Health Promotion and Mental Health Sciences at Maastricht University. Hereafter she did her PhD on Identity and health risk behaviour in adolescence at the University of Southern Denmark. Her current research deals with implicit and explicit cognition, social influence, motivation and identity development with a special focus on sport and exercise behaviour.

**Dr. Maria Koelen**

Professor Maria Koelen is Head of the Chairgroup Health and Society of Wageningen University. She studied Social Psychology and Methodology at State University Groningen and received her PhD at Wageningen University. She has special interest in the social, natural and built environment of health and its interaction with lifestyle, health development and quality of life. Most of her research is based on salutogenesis and the life course perspective.