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Sport Participation Analysis – An Empirical Study on an Academic Community

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Abstract

Introduction

Information about Sport Participation Index (SPI) is a critical factor in the sport development process. Socio-demographic data can be a cost effective instrument to increase efficiency of local policies that promote sport participation (SP). Although bibliography about SP is vast, the analysis and comparison of previous works is complex due to heterogeneity in methodologies. There is an enormous disparity in SP results in Portugal: Marivoet (2001) refers that SPI in Portugal is 27%, Almeida, & Graça (1998) refer that the non participation percentage in Portugal is 60%, and according to the Eurobarometer report (2004) Portugal presents the lowest figure of SPI, 22%, followed by Greece 26%, while the European average is 38%. This study is part of an ongoing longitudinal study that intends to monitor SP in a local community using a stable methodology that allows time frame contrasts. There is a limited availability of data about SP academic communities. The presented study intended to:

- a) characterize SP in an academic community,
- b) identify target groups in order to increase the efficiency local authority efforts',
- c) identify SP main constraints.

Methods

Polytechnic Institute of Bragança is a higher education institution with an academic community of approximately 5600 persons located in a small city, 34750 residents. Data collection was accomplished using the questionnaire developed by Alexandris & Carroll (1997) translated and adapted to the Portuguese reality by Rodrigues & Theodorakis (2002). The respondents were selected in the local campus at the different school (4). A total of 460 questionnaires were completed. This stratified sample was constituted by 45% of male participants, the 16-25 year-old group represented 43%, the aged 26-35 represented 35%, the 36-45 year-old group represented 13% and the \geq 46 year-old group represented 9%, the academic qualifications were relatively low, only 35% had a high degree qualification, the majority was single 63%, and 68% had no children.

Results

In this study we considered SP as the participation in sport activities, organized or not, at least once or more per week in the past 12 months, 40,6% of the respondents were included in this category. A large majority (68%) reported that would like to participate more in activities which they have already participated in and 63% referred that would like to participate more in activities which they have never experienced before. Groups defined by socio-demographic variables presented significant differences in their SP: gender, female participate less than male respondents ($F_{13,74}$, Sig. 0,0002). No significant differences were found as far as variables age, academic qualifications, marital status, child number and annual income are concerned. Respondents were also inquired about SP constraints in SP were also, 71% referred "Lack of Time", followed by "Lack of Infrastructures" (10%), 7 % answered "Too expensive", 3% "dislikes SP" and 5 % mentioned "other motives".

Discussion

Found differences confirm previous studies about SP (Alexandris & B., 1997 , Almeida & Graça, 1998, Marivoet, 2001). According to those studies, gender differences may be related to social constraints that female are exposed to in leisure activities.

The fact that we have found no significant differences concerning the variables age, academic qualifications and number of children contrasts with previous studies. This fact might result from sample specific characteristics. Older groups present high academic qualifications and high household income, both positively related with SP, this may result in increased SP that justifies differences with previous studies. Bibliography is also consensual in pointing that the reduction of leisure time is an important constraint in SP, this fact may, in some way, justify the lower participation presented by younger respondents.

Comparisons between SP results are difficult, studies about SP differ significantly as far as methodologies are concerned. Despite the presented limitation, we can conclude that SP is lower in females and "lack of time" is the main motive for non SP. Further studies, should focus on discovering strategies to overcome SP constraints specially time related limitation.

Academic community managers should promote strategies addressed to the elimination of social constraints related to female SP and time related constraints.

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