KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN

SPM 10

Sport Policy & Management

UNDERSTANDING THE GAME

SPORT PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

Facts, reflections and recommendations

Jeroen Scheerder
Hanne Vandermeerschen
Charlotte Van Tuyckom
Remco Hoekman
Koen Breedveld
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2011

In cooperation with

Hedera | Health and demographic research Ghent University

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SPM Report 10

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PREFACE

This report is the result of an intensive cooperation between researchers from the Research Unit of Social Kinesiology & Sport Management of the K.U.Leuven (Belgium), Hedera (Ghent University, Belgium) and the Mulier Institute (the Netherlands). Some of the data used are also the fruits of a larger international collaboration, based on the MEASURE network, as will be explained further.

Enhancing sport participation is one of the most prominent targets of sport policy all over Europe. On average, sport participation rates in Europe are rather high, as compared to other continents. Nevertheless, there are considerable differences between the EU member states. Though cultural, social, historical and economic factors can probably account for the main part of the variance in sport participation, sport policy structures are likely to exert some influence as well. In Europe, sport policy is mainly decided on a national or even sub-national level. However, as will be discussed in this report, the role of the European Union in terms of sport policy has widened over recent years, and is likely to increase further.

In order to develop effective policy making and to set realistic targets, at the European as well as the (sub-)national level, it is necessary to gain a thorough understanding of sport participation rates, trends and differences. Yet, as will be shown, the information currently available does not suffice. The present report is meant to contribute to the gathering of knowledge in this field, allowing for evidence-based policy making.

In the first chapter of this report, the European dimension of sport is analysed in all its facets. This regards both the common European influence in terms of policy making, as well as important organisational similarities within Europe. Also the academic attention for European sport participation will be discussed.

The second chapter gives important insights in the possibilities and pitfalls of doing comparative research within the field of sport participation. Though it is very instructive to make cross-national comparisons, doing good-quality comparative research is a highly demanding task.

Chapter 3 presents the results of a comparative analysis on sport participation in 23 countries, based on a fact sheets approach. This approach presents important advantages, since it is based on strong national data, while still allowing for cross-national comparisons.

Chapter 4 analyses the sport participation in the 27 member states of the European Union in the light of Beck's individualisation thesis. A special focus is put on the role of modernisation within the context of sport participation.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, summarises important methodological and empirical findings and draws conclusions. This chapter also attempts to indicate the way ahead for policy and research with regard to sport participation.

We would like to express our thanks to the national correspondents for completing the fact sheets. This report could not have been realised without their support.

CHAPTER 1

SPORT PARTICIPATION (RESEARCH) IN EUROPE

1. A European dimension of sport?

Across European countries, sport participation is a topic of high interest, and attention for trends in sport participation has been growing throughout recent years. In this report, sport participation and sport participation research are analysed from a European perspective. A first question to ask, then, before embarking in the analysis, is whether there is such a thing as a "European dimension" of sport? Should we consider all European countries as totally distinct entities, or is there something sport related which reunites them? Beyond any doubt, sport policies are still – and will continue to be – mainly a national or a sub-national matter, and hence show considerable differences cross-nationally (cf. infra). Also the organisation of mass sport varies across countries. Cross-national dissimilarities are a result of the history of a nation, the sport policy and sport policy making process as well as nation's characteristics, like weather conditions or the presence (or absence) of mountains and water. However, apart from a large set of differences, there appear to be some fundamental common grounds within sport policies and practices in Europe. In many different areas related to mass sport, there is some common European framework, which is then filled out differently in each country.

Communalities in at least three distinct areas should be considered. First, there is a common European influence in terms of *policy making*. Second, among European countries, there are interesting similarities in terms of the *main actors* involved in the organisation of sport. Third, also the *orientation of sport practice* is rather comparable across Europe. In what follows, these three items will be discussed in more detail.

1.1 The policy framework

In the different European welfare states, an expansion of governmental responsibilities has occurred, broadening the scope of interest from basic tasks to more 'secondary' issues (see f.i. Bergsgard et al., 2007). Within the framework of the welfare state, governments have come to intervene in a larger range of areas. Similarly, in the different European countries, governments have come to consider

sports – and more generally, leisure – ever more as an area of public policy. This is clearly reflected in the policy initiatives which are being taken at across Europe.

It is fair to say that the state is not the only actor involved with policy making. Rather, policy is given shape by *policy networks*. This also applies for sport policy (see f.i. Groll et al., 2010). Though the exact composition of a policy network will vary cross-nationally, as well as over time, the presence of policy networks for making sport policy constitutes a crucial communality across European countries, and should hence be taken into account.

How should such a policy network then be conceived? Policy making is done at different levels at the same time, and by different actors, and this also holds true for sport policy (see Bruyninckx & Scheerder, 2009). Of course, this is heavily linked to the idea of governance (see f.i. Henry, 2007; Ronger, 2010). Hence, the term 'governance arrangements' might be the most appropriate wording (see Bruyninckx & Scheerder, 2009). Sport policy is *multi-actor* in nature, since not only the state but also other actors, such as social partners or sport federations, are involved. Actors who traditionally belong to civil society or the private market partake in shaping sport policy (Bruyninckx & Scheerder, 2009). In the next paragraph (1.2), this will be discussed in more detail.

However, sport policy making is also *multi-level* in nature: apart from the national level, also the regional or local actors can play an important role in making policy. For example, in some countries, sport policies are for a large part decided on the local level, i.e. by municipalities. Yet, the European Union plays an active role in shaping sport policy as well.

Though some initiatives had been taken at an earlier stage, a significant European impact in determining the lines of (national) sport policy first appeared in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century. Other important policy initiatives have been taken since. In a nutshell we will give an overview of some important steps in the development of a sport policy framework in Europe.

Sport for All Charter (1975)

Contrary to other continental governments, the European Union pays considerable attention to sports. In 1966, the Council of Europe launched the Sport for All idea, which was to be translated in the European Sport for All Charter (1975) (Council of Europe, 1975; 1980). The European Sport Ministers Conference approved the European Sport for All Charter in 1975 and in 1976 the Charter became an official resolution. The Sport for All Charter is one of the key markers in the history of European sport policy. It stresses that every individual has the right to participate in sport and that sport shall be encouraged as an important factor in human development. The Charter calls for an integral approach linking sport to other policy areas such as education, health, social service, town and country planning, conservation, the arts and leisure services. And the matter of facilitating sport

is brought forward as a local task with specific attention for local needs and efficient use of sport facilities.

The Charter on Sport for All could be seen as a result of the attention for 'sports for all' in the European member states. Several European member states, especially the western and northern countries, already directed their sports policies on this topic. The European Commission is aware that sport is more a primary responsibility for member states and sporting organisations then for the European Commission, as they have no direct powers in this area. Nevertheless, the European Commission must, according to the Charter, 'take account of the social, educational and cultural functions inherent in sport and making it special and worthwhile' (Council of Europe, 1975). The idea of promoting sport to a large public and encouraging people to take part in sport activities has been spread in many European countries and continues to influence national and local sport policies until today.

The Helsinki Report on Sport (1999)

The Helsinki Report expresses the concerns of the European Commission with regard to *'safeguarding the current sport structures and maintaining the social function of sport'*, within the new economic context of sport within Europe (European Commission, 1999a). The report directs the attention towards the growing commercialisation within the field of sports, and the consequences this evolution might entail. The report therefore calls for a clarification of the legal context of sport, as well as for additional efforts for conserving and reinforcing the social and educational function of sport (f.i. in terms of fair play, ensuring equal opportunities, etc.) (European Commission, 1999a).

Nice Declaration on Sport (2000)

While stressing the subsidiarity principle, the Nice Declaration on Sport has been significant for showing the importance of sport for the European Union. It is made clear that sport is on the European political agenda. Also the instrumental value of sports, in terms of social and educational goals, receives attention in the declaration (European Council, 2000).

European Constitution (2004)

To further address the problem of social stratification and increase the awareness of the added value of sport, the European Union officially acknowledged the social, educational and cultural function of sport in a new European constitution. However, the European constitution has never been adopted nor ratified. Though ratified by eighteen member states in 2004, the rejection by Dutch and French voters in 2005 meant the end of the ratification process, and hence the refusal of the document.

The European Year of Education through Sport (2004)

The educational value of sport did receive special attention in 2004. In 2003 the European Commission declared 2004 as the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES) and invested in programs that build upon the potential social and educational role of sport in the lives of European citizens. The aim of the European Year of Education through Sport in general was to increase the awareness of the potentially beneficial links between education and sport and to use the values that are conveyed by sport to provide youngsters with the knowledge and skills which are necessary to not only further develop their physical potential and willingness to perform, but also to increase their social skills within a multicultural context.

White Paper on Sport (2007)

A first evaluation of the sport policy at the European level was published in the White Paper on Sport in 2007. It is also the White Paper where we can find a definition for sport, that has previously been established by the Council of Europe. Sport was to be understood as "all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, formal social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels." (Commission of the European Communities, 2007: 2).

This White Paper formed a starting point for a new era in sports policy at European level, being the first time the European Commission is addressing sports-related issues in a comprehensive matter. The White Paper pays attention to the societal role of sport, the economic dimension of sport and the organisation of sport. Its objective is to provide a strategic orientation on sport in the EU and to raise the awareness of the needs and specificities of the sector. In addition the White Paper had the objective to enhance the visibility of sport in EU policies, programs and actions and better illustrate the potential of sport in social and economic terms. The White Paper on sport resulted in the 'Pierre the Coubertin' Action Plan with 53 actions to be implemented or supported by the European Commission.

Lisbon Treaty and Preparatory Actions (2009)

The next milestone in the history of European sports policy is the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, giving the European Union a soft competence on sport. This implies the European Union is now able to formulate guidelines and recommendations in terms of sport. Regulations, however, cannot be formulated. The Lisbon Treaty states that "The union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures are based on voluntary activity and its social and education function" (European Union, 2007: C306/82). The competence on sport leads to the inclusion of sport in the framework of the EU Council of Ministers, with Ministers responsible for sport in the member states

meeting each other within this framework. And it is due to this Lisbon Treaty that for the first time European sports policy can be written and the door is open to an EU sport program.

To work towards this EU sport program the Commission financed Preparatory Actions for the duration of three years (2009-2011). The objective of the preparatory actions was to prepare the implementation of the new EU competence for sport and a possible future EU sport program. The evaluation of the Preparatory Actions signalled that the added value of the European Union on sports was mainly illustrated at a transnational level, especially concerning issues with a cross-border element or challenges that were faced by several member states, with no member state having the universal solution for the challenge (Evaluation partnership, 2011). In addition the evaluation showed that the studies, surveys and conferences that were financed as part of the Preparatory Actions fulfilled their role of providing the Commission and other actors with policy support and developing the EU dimension in sport.

Communication on Developing the European dimension of sports (2011)

The White Paper has been complemented by the 2011 communication of the European Commission on 'Developing the European dimension of sports' (European Commission, 2011a), focusing on the same three areas as the White Paper, i.e. the societal role of sport, the economic dimension of sport and the organisation of sport, giving additional support to the ideas already expressed in the White Paper.

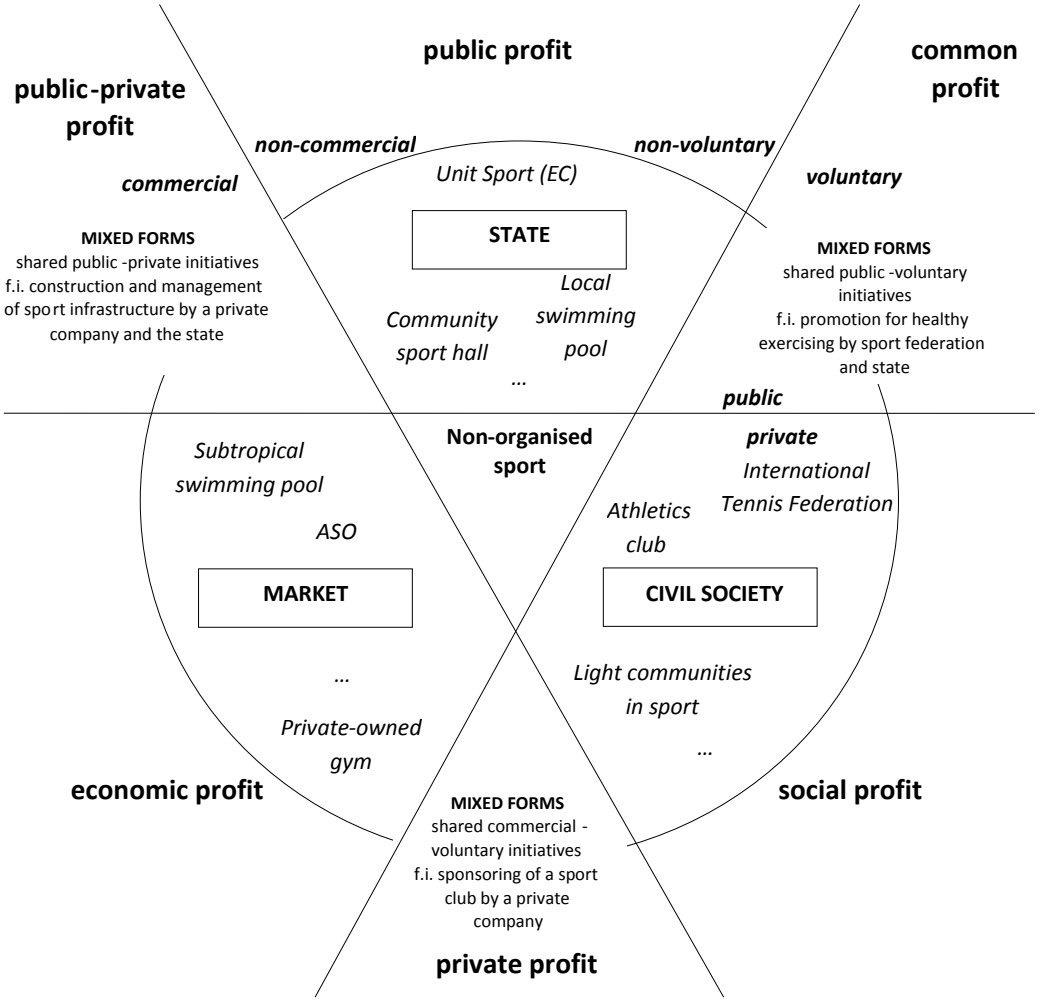
In sum, many policy initiatives have been taken and statements have been made, giving direction to the different national sport policies. In terms of policy making, major steps have been taken towards the further development of a European dimension of sport. Hence, the role of the European Union in terms of sport policy can be expected to increase. However, though it has been shown that the European Union helps setting out some of the main lines of sport policy, putting certain topics on the agenda, the concrete formulation is strictly left to the different European countries (i.e. the principle of subsidiarity). The European Commission to date mainly stimulates and encourages the national policy makers to address certain topics. It is evident that the main responsibility for sports policy is directed to the national level. However, the European Commission does stimulate national organisations to work together and share the knowledge with other parties in Europe and together contribute to the general understanding of differences in sport participation in Europe. Also 'spontaneous' policy learning from foreign countries can occur. National sport policy making can be influenced by policy initiatives in other countries, without it being formulated in any formal document stemming from the European Union.

The funding of sport in Europe is clearly a national issue. There is no substantial investment in sport on a EU level. The member states themselves invest in sports. A recent study on financing of grassroots sport in Europe signalled interesting differences between the member states resulting in different funding and outcome models (Eurostrategies, 2011).

1.2 The different actors and their role

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, multiple actors are involved in policy making with regard to sport. This also applies for the provision of sport activities. In this paragraph, the different actors in both the governance and the organisation of mass sport will be discussed. As will be shown, here again, some European common ground can be observed.

Figure 1.1 *Structural model for the mayor players in sport*



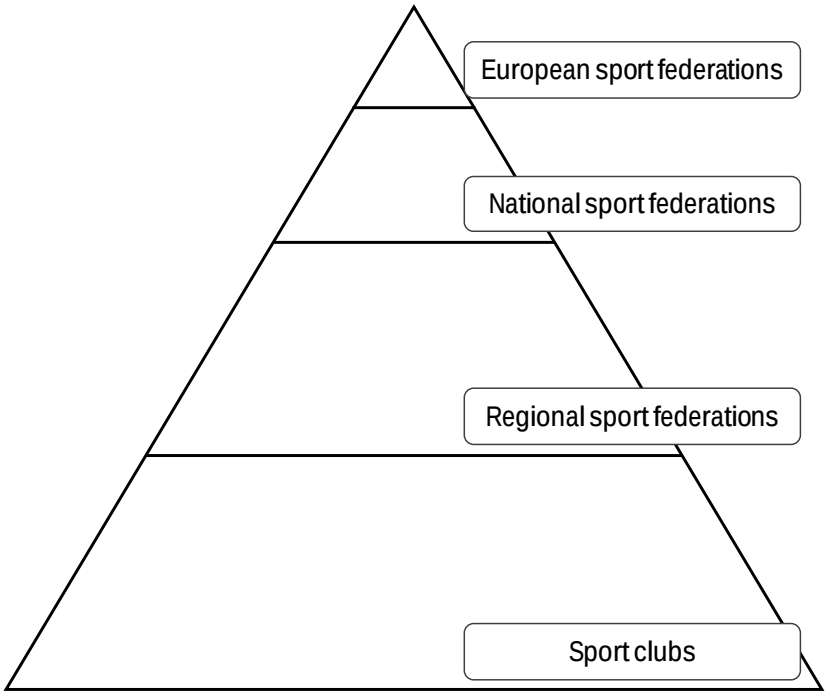
Source: Scheerder (2007: 19)

In order to capture the organisation of sports, a distinction should be made between the public sector (i.e. the state), the civic sector (i.e. civil society) and the commercial sector (i.e. the market).

Scheerder (2007a), inspired by Ibsen and Jørgensen (2002), developed a profit model for these three main types of sports providers within a welfare society (see Figure 1.1). The state generates public profit, the civic sector leads to social profit, and the market engenders economic profit. The balance between those three main actors can change over time (Scheerder, 2007a). This can for example be observed in the increasing role of the market.

The extent to which each of the three main actors – state, civil society and market – dominate the field, differs among European countries. Characteristic for the field of sport in Europe, however, is the combination of the considerable role of both the civic and the public sector (Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007). The civil society, is perhaps mainly - though not uniquely - represented by the many sport clubs and sport federations. Across Europe, 'grassroots' sport clubs are assembled in regional federations, which operate in their turn under the umbrella of national federations. The national federations are then member of a sport federation on the European level, under supervision of an international federation (European Commission, 1999b). This structure is referred to as the European Sport Model (Arnaut, 2006; European Commission, 1999b), and is represented by the form of a pyramid (see Figure 1.2). There is also a logic of competition in this model, starting at the basis, and climbing to ever higher levels of competition (elite sport).

Figure 1.2 *The European Sport Model – The Pyramid Model*

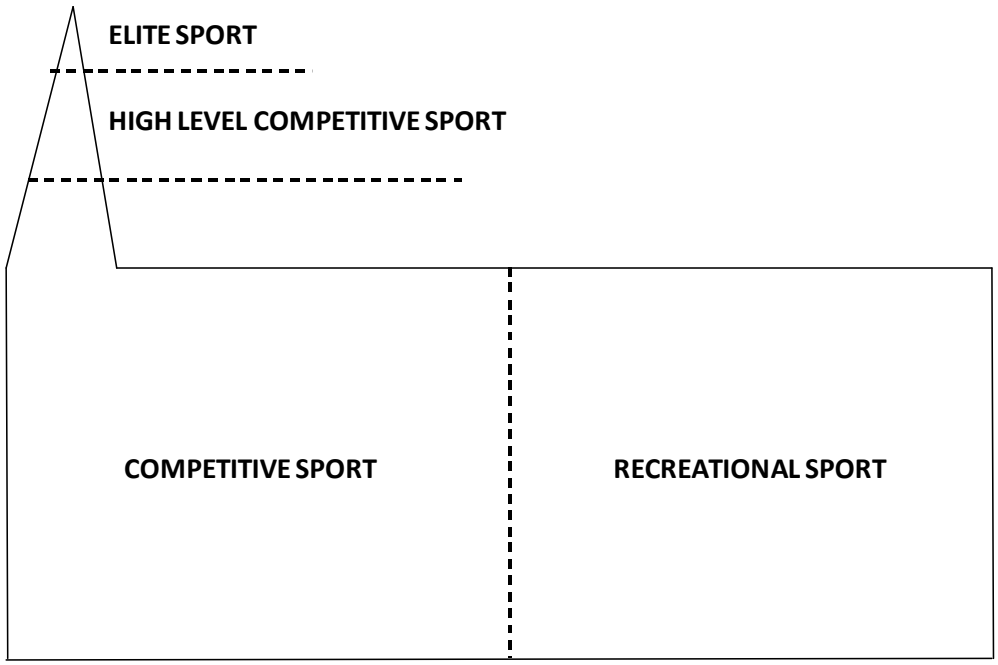


Source: European Commission (1999)

However, the European Sport Model, as it was presented by the European Commission in 1999, but also in the Independent European Sport Review (Arnaut, 2006), with its large emphasis on hierarchy and competition, received considerable criticism, (see f.i. Eichberg, 2008)[1]. Here, two main points of critique will be discussed, and some alternative views will be presented.

First, the European Model of Sport almost seems to downsize the civil society – which is in fact very broad and heterogeneous – to club sport. Though club organised sport occurs in all countries, its relative importance – as compared to the overall sport participation – shows great variation, and it is not the only basis for grass roots sports. In all countries, though highly important, club organised sport participation is a part of the picture. Therefore, rather than following a 'competitive' logic overall, as in the Pyramid model, other forms of sport participation should be taken into account. The 'Church Model', developed by Scheerder (2007a) attempts to provide a more realistic representation for sport participation as a whole (see Figure 1.3). Although the proportions can differ somewhat between countries, this representation is likely to be applicable to the European countries.

Figure 1.3 *The Church Model of Sport*



Source: Scheerder (2007: 19)

The Church model indicates that competitive sport and recreational sport activity coexist, without hierarchical order between them. Together, they form the nave of the church, or in other words, they are responsible for the lion's share of sport participation. Only a part of the competitive sport

[1] Also earlier, the hierarchical view of sport had been criticised: see f.i. Heinilä (1971), Palm (1991) and Renson (1983).

participation can be considered as forming the basis of high level competitive sport, which then at its turn might lead to elite sport (represented by the tower of the church). Moreover, the 'competitive' logic is not the only one possible logic; many people participate in sport for health reasons, social reasons, etc., but do not care so much about winning, nor performances. This type of sport participation coexists with 'competitive' sport participation, all throughout Europe. It receives a relatively considerable amount of space and gains in popularity among participants as well as policy makers. In the next section (1.3), the different types of sport practice will be discussed in more detail.

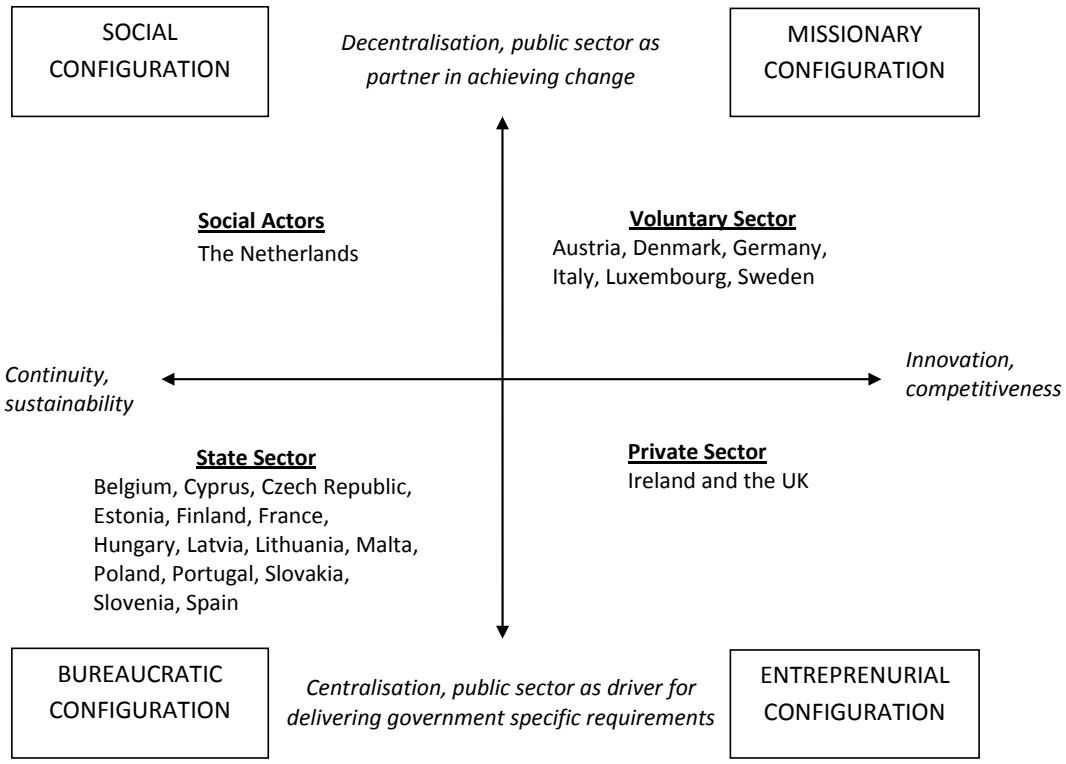
Second, also from a more organisational point of view, the European Sport Model can be criticised. Beyond the importance of sport clubs and sport federations, there is a substantial diversity in sport governance and organisation within Europe, and this should be recognised. Hence, the typology presented by the VOCASPORT Research Group (Camy et al., 2004)[2], and further developed by Henry (2009), is instructive for understanding the organisational structure of sport in European countries. This model allows to grasp the relative weight taken up by the different actors (state, voluntary sector, civil society overall, etc.) in the various European countries (see Figure 1.4).

The researchers present four configurations of national sport systems: bureaucratic, entrepreneurial, missionary and social configurations. The typology is based on four main factors, i.e. the role played by public authorities in the regulation of the system, the level of coordination and engagement of the various actors involved, the role of the different providers - public, voluntary and commercial players - and the adaptability of the system to the changes in demand (Camy et al., 2004; Henry, 2009).

According to Camy et al. (2004), the bureaucratic configuration, which is to be found in Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain, exhibits high degrees of state involvement. The public authorities take a very active, deciding role. In the entrepreneurial configuration, on the other hand, market forces are heavily involved. Here, the logic of supply and demand is rather dominant. The entrepreneurial configuration can be observed in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the missionary configuration, as can be found in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Sweden, one can find a highly autonomous voluntary sector. Finally, in the social configuration, rather than one actor being dominant, this configuration is characterised by a large collaboration between players (state, civil society or market). According to Camy et al. (2004), this configuration is only to be found in the Netherlands.

[2] The VOCASPORT project was supported by the European Commission.

Figure 1.4 *The relationship between the four VOCASPORT types of national sport systems*



Source: Henry (2009: 44), based on Camy et al. (2004)

Depending on the sport policy subsystem, different goals are put forward. Whereas in the bureaucratic configuration, the main emphasis is on accountability; the entrepreneurial configuration attaches more importance to efficiency, focusing on the output. In the missionary configuration, adaptability can be considered as the key goal, whereas in the social configuration, effectiveness and capacity building are the main focus (Henry, 2009).

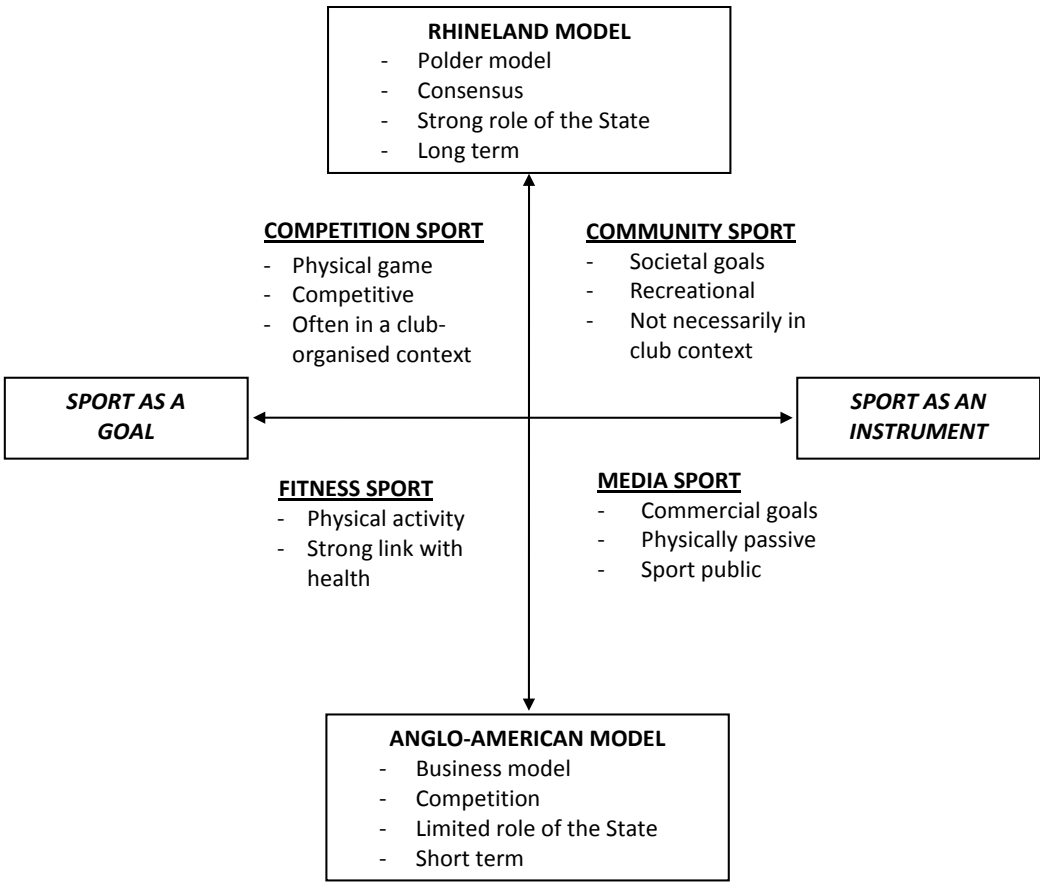
As mentioned in the model of Camy et al. (2004) and Henry (2009), the way the public sector takes up its role in sports, differs heavily across countries. Additionally, there is a large variation among the different (national) institutional bodies who are involved in sport (see Petry et al., 2004). The variety in political structures in the European states (unitary vs. federal states, etc.) still adds to the diversity regarding the involvement of the public sector (Petry et al., 2004).

In sum, all over Europe, both civil society and the state play a relatively important role in the field of mass sport, which is an important common point. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that within Europe, there is large variation in both the relative weight of these actors, as well as in the way they interact with each other (and with other players).

1.3 The orientation of sport practices

Apart from a common policy framework, albeit partial, and important similarities with regard to the different actors involved, there is also a common ground in the way sport practice is given shape across Europe, or more specifically, in continental Europe. Indeed, Westerbeek et al. (2006) identify a so-called Rhineland model of sport fields in continental Europe, which can be opposed to the Anglo-American model (Figure 1.5). In both the Rhineland and the Anglo-American model, sport can be considered in two different ways, i.e. either as an end in itself, or as an instrument to achieve other goals (the horizontal axis). However, depending on the model, i.e. the Rhineland versus the Anglo-American model, this results in different sport practices.

Figure 1.5 *Model for dominant sport fields within the Rhineland model versus the Anglo-American model*



Source: Scheerder (2007: 18), based on Westerbeek et al. (2006: 31)

When sport is considered as a *goal* in itself, in the Rhineland model, it is mainly taking place under the form of competition sport, where the *game* aspect is a central element. Competition is a key word here, and the sport practice usually takes place within a club setting. In the Anglo-American model, on the other hand, sport as a goal is usually translated into fitness sport, where the health

enhancing aspect is the key feature of the sport practice. It is a physical activity, rather than a physical game (Scheerder, 2007a, developed further from Westerbeek, 2006).

When sport is a *means* for achieving other purposes, on the other hand, in the Anglo-American model, it is often translated into media sport. In this case, business and commercial purposes are of primary importance. In the Rhineland model, by contrast, when sport is considered as an instrument, the goals put forward are mainly societal in nature (f.i. emancipation, social integration, learning certain social skills, etc.). Sport is then above all a recreational activity, which can be practiced outside the club.

Overall, as indicated by the vertical axis, and in accordance with the previous paragraph (1.2), the Rhineland model is characterised by a strong role of the government, whereas in the Anglo-American model, the role of the government is rather limited. In addition, the Rhineland model can be associated with long term thinking and consensus, whereas the Anglo-American model is characterised by competition and shorter term objectives.

However, in reality, the categorisation, as expressed in Figure 1.5, has become more blurred. Indeed, also in continental Europe, media sport and fitness sport have found their way into the sport landscape (Scheerder, 2007a), and a business logic has come to exist within the European field of sport.

1.4 Implications

Indications were found for the existence of some European dimension of sport. Indeed, with regard to three important factors, more specifically regarding the policy framework, the actors involved, and the orientation of sport practice, a common basis has been identified, which is then 'coloured' by the different countries. The resulting combination of differences and similarities calls for comparative research with regard to sport participation. To what extent have different countries managed to level up sport participation, realizing the Sport for All objective that European countries have in common? And are organisational differences in sport reflected in sport participation levels? The augmenting role of the European Union with regard to sport policy adds to the importance of these questions. Comparing different sport participation levels and investigating their determinants is likely to be highly instructive for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the different sport systems, hence leading to important insights for facilitating effective and efficient policy making, both on a national as well as a European level. Evidently, these goals require cross-national research.

2. European research on sport participation lagging behind ...

An additional common ground between European countries should be mentioned: they also share a large interest in sport participation research. Not only the scientific community and other actors within the field of sport are attracted, but also policy makers are eager to know the results. Clearly, the health benefits attributed to sport participation are crucial for understanding the current interest in sport participation research. However, also other motives, such as social benefits attributed to sport, play a role as well in explaining the fervour of policy makers.

Each country has its own research tradition in the field of sport, and different choices are made in terms of focus, operationalisation, etc. Despite the differences, we can identify an important number of recurrent topics cross-nationally. Examples are the frequency or intensity of practicing sport, the organisational context and location of sport participation, levels of physical activity, etc. However, this common concern is rarely being translated into cross-national research.

Indeed, it is striking to notice that empirical studies are mainly conducted on the national level. Clearly, there are some important counterexamples (see f.i. Nicholson et al., 2011; Scheerder & Van Tuyckom, 2007; UK SPORT, 1999; Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010), but single country studies are rather the norm. In other socially important, policy related fields on the contrary, international comparisons are often legion (see f.i. Morissens & Sainsbury, 2005; Van Tubergen et al., 2004; Wood & Gough, 2006, amongst many others). Such comparative studies are used as an instrument for identifying the determinants of particular social situations, and for evaluating good and bad policy practices. In the field of sport participation, cross-country comparisons do not occur equally often (see also Bergsgard et al., 2007).

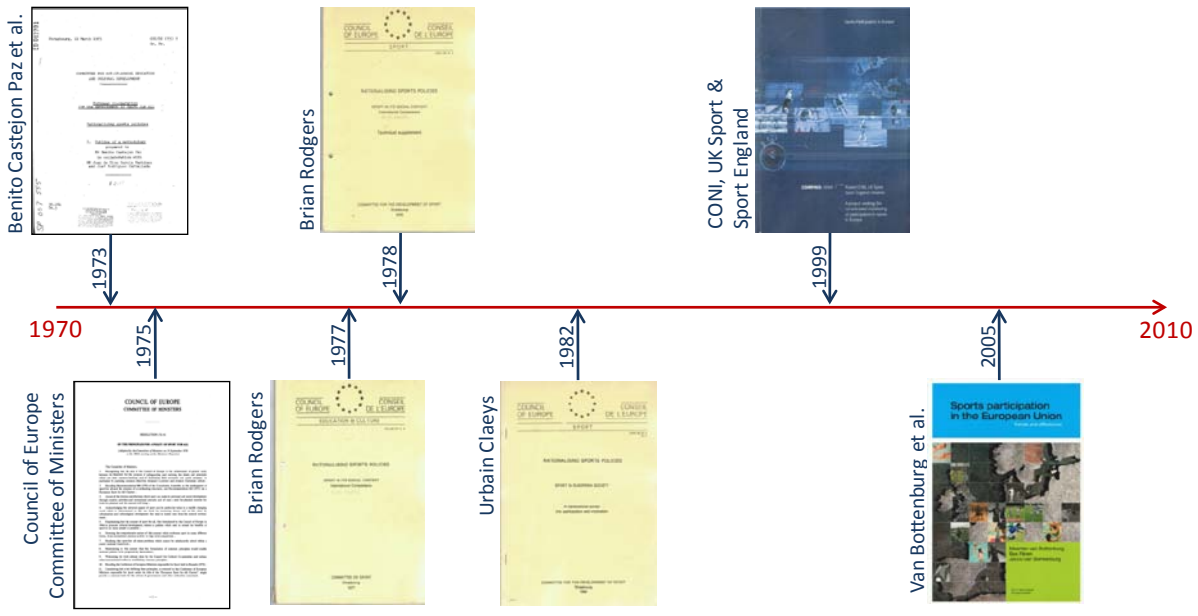
A major explanation here is that this type of research is often difficult to realize. A lack of reliable, comparable data with regard to sport participation is the main problem. Most countries do have good quality data on the national level. However, these data are hardly comparable, due to differences in population, methodology or operationalisation. An example is the operationalisation of 'sport' and 'physical activity'. Though this is a key element in sport participation research, definitions and operationalisation differ across countries. Some countries leave it up to the individual to decide whether a particular activity can be considered as 'sport', whereas other countries stick to a previously defined list of sports. In sum, there is a lack of common standards. As a consequence, national data are not always suitable for cross-national comparisons[3].

[3] In Chapter 3 of this report, methodological issues with regard to studying sport-participation cross-nationally are discussed in detail.

Evidently, some international surveys exist, which do not focus exclusively on sport, but do include some sport-related questions. The *Eurobarometer survey* and the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) are perhaps the most obvious examples here, but also the *Harmonised European Time Use Survey* (HETUS), the *European Values Study* (EVS) and the *European Social Survey* (ESS) should be mentioned in this regard. Interesting studies have already been realised based on these surveys (f.i. Gratton et al., 2011; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Scheerder & Van Tuyckom, 2007; Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010). The large advantage of using these datasets is the comparability of the data. However, these do not offer the same level of precision and detail as compared to most national data, hence implying a loss of information.

The first cross-national surveys on sport participation were launched in the seventies and eighties (see Castejon Paz et al., 1973; Claeys, 1982a; 1982b; Rodgers, 1977; 1978) (see Figure 1.6). At the end of the previous century, a unique project for comparative research in the field of sport participation has been realised, by the name of COMPASS, which stands for Co-ordinated Monitoring of Participation in Sport Statistics (UK Sport 1999; see also Gratton, 1997; Rossi-Mori et al., 2002). This initiative ran from 1997-2004, gathering comparative information on sport participation in different countries. However, it was stopped due to a lack of funding.

Figure 1.6 *Timeline of comparative research on sport participation (1970-2010)*



Trying to obtain comparable data across Europe, one could consider restarting a similar project. However, this does not seem feasible, at least not in the short term (Scheerder et al., 2010). Still,

considerable progress is being made in terms of cross-country learning, as will be explained in the next section.

3. …and starting to catch up?

During the 7th congress of the *European Association for Sociology of Sport (EASS)* in Porto, in May 2010, a group of researchers decided to form an expert group on sport participation in Europe. The initiative was launched jointly by Koen Breedveld and Remco Hoekman from the Mulier Institute (the Netherlands) and Jeroen Scheerder from the University of Leuven (Belgium) (see Hoekman et al., 2010). A second meeting, in October 2010, was hosted by the Research Unit of Social Kinesiology & Sport Management at the University of Leuven. During this meeting, international contacts were made, valuable knowledge was shared and the many debates and presentations allowed for a better understanding of specificities in different European countries with regard to sport participation (see Scheerder et al., 2010). A third meeting took place during the EASS conference in Umeå, Sweden (May 2011, see Hoekman et al., 2011a), and a fourth meeting has been scheduled during the Play The Game conference in Cologne, Germany (October 2011).

The creation of this expert group – which is called MEASURE, standing for *Meeting for European Sport Participation and Sport Culture Research* - can be considered as an important step forward in the field of sport participation research. The experts plan to continue their cooperation in the future. Not only substantive topics, but also methodological issues belong to the area of interest of the MEASURE group. This includes discussing opportunities for new data and providing easy access to information on sport participation in Europe. An example of a concrete outcome of MEASURE so far, is the special issue of the *European Journal for Sport & Society* on Sports Participation in Europe (Hoekman et al., 2011b).

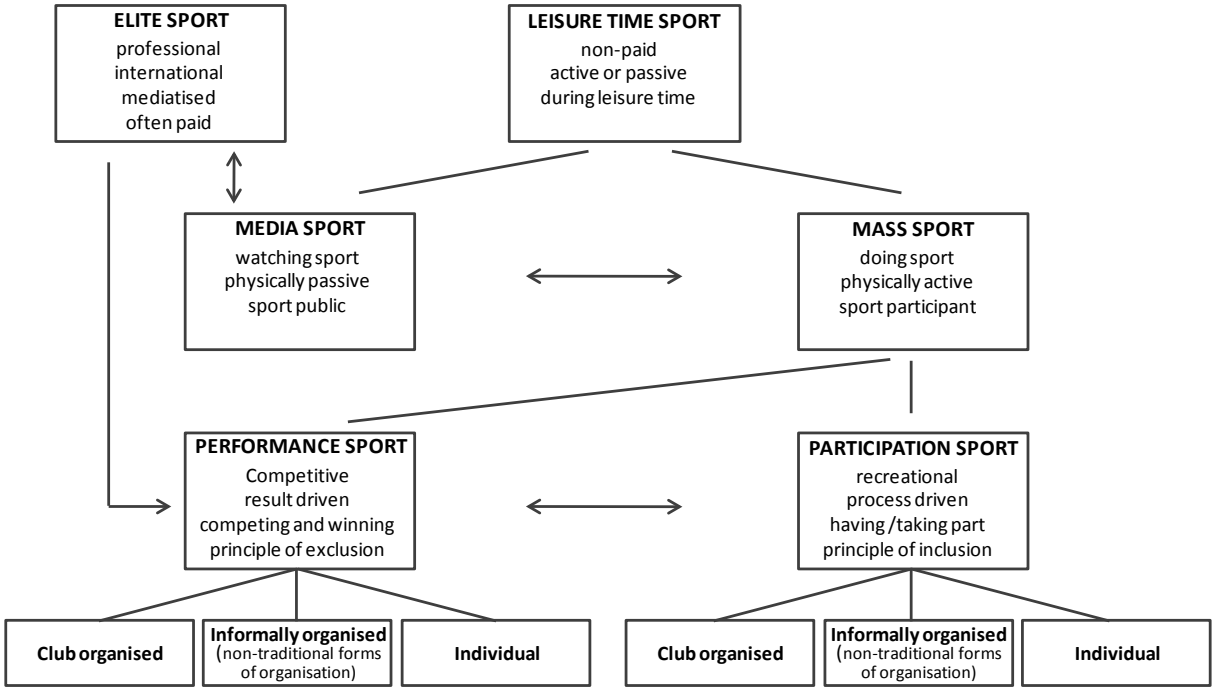
The present report can be seen along the same line, i.e. making use of international cooperation to gain cross-national scientific understanding in the field of sport participation, and allowing for knowledge exchange all over Europe. Hence, the aim of this report is to contribute to the scientific understanding of sport participation in European countries, both by monitoring sport participation as well as comparing results, and, where possible, drawing lessons.

4. Overview of this report

The focus in this report lies on leisure time sport participation, rather than elite sport. Adapted from Scheerder (2007a), Figure 1.7 presents a schematic overview of the different modes of sport participation. As indicated in the diagram, leisure time sport can be divided into media sport and mass sport. Yet, only mass sport, i.e. physically active sport participation, is subject of analysis in this report. The understanding of mass sport as adopted here includes both performance sport as well as participation sport. Performance sport refers to a sport practice with a heavy emphasis on competition, results and winning, following an exclusionary logic. Participation sport, on the other hands, is characterised by recreational sport activities, focusing on participating, pleasure and recreation, and following an inclusionary logic. Although these two types of sport participation are opposite to each other, they should mainly be seen as forming two ends of a same continuum. Indeed, apart from the 'pure' forms of performance sport on the one hand, and participation sport on the other hand, there is a multitude of possible forms of sport participation, with varying degrees of competitiveness, result/process drivenness, etc. In fact, this continuum amounts to what is represented by the nave of the church, as presented in the Church model (see Figure 1.3 earlier in this chapter).

At any point of the continuum between performance sport and participation sport, almost all types of organisational context are possible. Whether performance or participation centred, the sport activity can be exercised within the context of a club, on an individual basis, or an informally organised context (such as with family, a jogging group, among colleagues, etc). In this report, all these different possibilities are taken into account in the different analyses.

Figure 1.7 *Model for modes of sport participation*



Source: own adaptation of Scheerder (2007: 16)

The report is organised as follows. The next chapter, Chapter 2, highlights some important methodological issues with regard to comparative sport research. Common pitfalls within comparative sport research are discussed, such as for example including too many variables and too few countries, selection bias, value bias and spuriousness, amongst others. This methodological chapter is a valuable guide for researchers, providing crucial insights in how to make the best methodological choices for doing cross-national research.

Taking these insights to account, and opting for an 'alternative' way, fact sheets have been collected on 23 different countries within Europe. Drawing on the valuable network created by MEASURE, it has been possible to collect information on sport participation, based on national sport participation data. This approach allowed circumventing some of the common pitfalls of international comparative research, while taking advantage of the high quality of national data. The results are presented in the Chapter 3, where an overview of the level and trends with regard to sport participation across European countries is given. Also cross-national differences and similarities with regard to data collection on sport participation are discussed. In Chapter 4, the scope of countries under analysis is broadened. Based on data from the *Eurobarometer 72.3: Sport and physical activity* (European Commission, 2010a) sport participation in the 27 member states of the European Union is analysed, but this time using Beck's individualisation thesis as a framework for analysis. For example, it is

shown that the level of sport participation is connected to a country's degree of modernisation. In Chapter 5, the final chapter of this report, important findings and conclusions of the report are lined up, and policy implications are drawn. Also the future of European policy making is discussed.

CHAPTER 2

COMPARATIVE SPORT RESEARCH AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Because of the desire by policy makers and researchers to explain, among others, why some nations have higher sport participation figures, or why some are more successful in international sport competitions than others, for the past fifteen years there has been an increase in studies comparing countries, regions and cultures on sport-related dimensions.[4] Moreover, as this trend is likely to be continued, we expect to enjoy the results of even more comparative sport studies in the near future. Some of these studies compare many countries, while others analyze smaller samples or even single countries. But what are the advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these? And what are the recurring problems of doing comparative research? What rules should be followed when selecting cases for comparison? And how are the main problems of comparison overcome so that meaningful inferences and more robust empirical generalisations can be drawn? These are all issues that have been seriously underdeveloped in the sport research literature (with few exceptions such as Henry et al., 2005). This chapter wants to address this lacuna and will demonstrate, in line with Landman (2008), that comparative methods as well as the solution to many of the problems associated with it should be seen as a function of both the sport researcher's aspirations and the level of conceptual abstraction contained within a particular study. In the *first* part of this chapter, different types of comparative methods are briefly described. In the *second* part, the main problems confronting comparative sport research are outlined. In the *third* part, the strengths and weaknesses of each of the comparative methods are summarised.

1. Methods of comparison

In the literature, contradictory recommendations about how exactly to pursue comparative studies and different strategies to choose the comparative countries have been formulated (see Grimshaw,

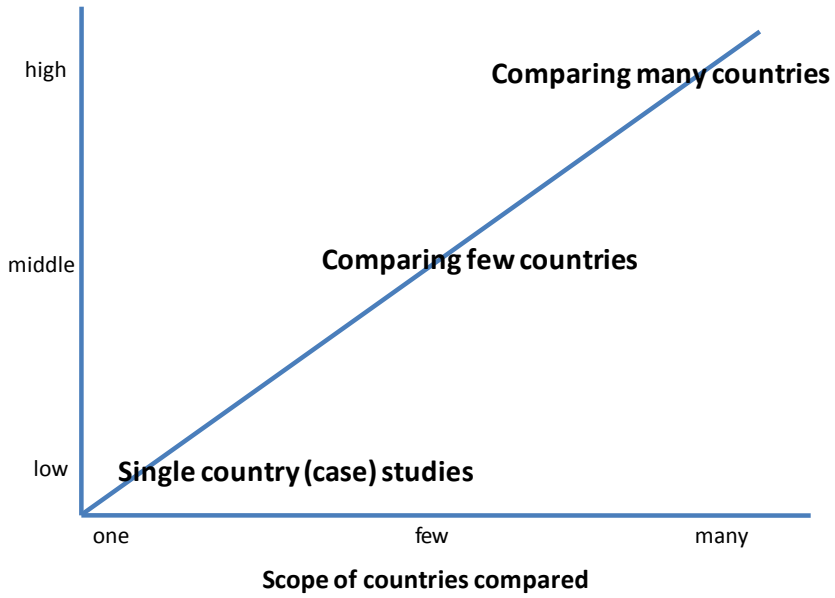
[4] On sport policy, see Bergsgard et al., 2007; Chalip et al., 1996; Houlihan, 1997 / on sport for all, see DaCosta & Miragaya, 2002; De Knop et al., 1996; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Hovemann & Wicker, 2009; Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a, 2010b; Van Tuyckom 2011a, 2011b / on elite sport, see De Bosscher et al., 2008; De Bosscher et al., 2010; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Van Bottenburg, 2002; Van Tuyckom & Jöreskog, 2010.

1973; Küchler, 1998; Peschar, 1982; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Scheuch, 1990; Smelser, 1996). According to Landman (2008), in general, the distinction between different comparative methods can be seen as a function of four factors: (i) the particular research question, (ii) the time and resources of the researcher, (iii) the method with which the researcher is comfortable, and (iv) the epistemological position he or she adopts. First, it is self-evident that different research questions require different methods. Digel and Kruse (2004), for example, are interested in the factors contributing to Australia's international sporting success, so their focus is limited to only one country, Australia. De Bosscher et al. (2010) on the other hand, are more generally interested in what sport policy factors lead to success in Olympic Games, so their focus is on as many countries as possible. Second, as everyone knows, time and (financial) resources of researchers are often very constrained, limiting the number of countries that can be researched in one project. Third, some researchers seek to show differences in number and are comfortable in using quantitative methods whereas others seek differences in kind and are not. Some like to make large comparisons (see Van Tuyckom & Jöreskog, 2010) while others like knowing the fine details of a particular country (see Green & Collins, 2008). And finally, researchers adhering to deductive theory might use different methods than those adhering to inductive theory, as well as those seeking more universal generalisations might use different methods than those seeking more contextually specific levels of explanation.

Despite the above rather practical considerations, the central distinction between different comparative methods, according to Mair (1996) and Landman (2008), depends on the key trade-off between the level of conceptual abstraction and the scope of countries being studied. The higher the level of abstraction, the more potential there is to include large numbers of countries in the study and where concepts such as sport 'travel' across different contexts (Sartori, 1970; 1994). On the other hand, when focusing on one or a few countries, the researcher needs to use less abstract concepts that are grounded more in the specific contexts. Camy and colleagues (2004), for example, identify four main configurations of national sport systems within Europe: bureaucratic, missionary, social and entrepreneurial. However, when comparing countries *within* the bureaucratic configuration, one would have to adopt more refined categories (since all countries involved are bureaucratic).

Figure 2.1 summarises the different methods of comparison by showing this trade-off between the level of abstraction and the scope of countries. Each of the methods is determined by the intersection between the level of abstraction (high, middle, low) and the scope of countries (many, few, one).

Figure 2.1 *Methods of comparison*



Source: based on Sartori (1970), Mair (1996) and Landman (2008)

2. Problems of comparison

The above introduction has made clear that the different strategies of comparison should be seen as the product of a trade-off between the level of conceptual abstraction and the scope of countries, as well as the practical factors surrounding any comparative research project. However, as there are many trade-offs associated with the different strategies of comparison, comparative sport research is also confronting some important fundamental problems, which should be addressed so that meaningful inferences and more robust empirical generalisations can be drawn. In the following part, we outline these problems including too many variables and too few countries, establishing equivalence, selection bias, spuriousness, ecological and individualistic fallacies, and value bias (Landman, 2008).

2.1 Too many variables and too few countries

The first problem is the one of too many variables and too few countries (Collier, 1991; Dogan & Pelassy, 1990; Hague et al., 1992), more generally known as *"too many inferences and not enough observations"* (King et al., 1994, p. 119) or indeterminate research design. This problem arises when more explanatory factors for the observed outcome have been identified than there are countries involved. Consider the following hypothetical example from sport research. A researcher wants to know which factors are crucial in explaining high public expenditure on sport. Based on the literature,

it seems that public expenditure on sport is high in wealthy countries controlled by left wing governments. In this example, there is one dependent variable (public expenditure on sport) and two independent variables (type of government and wealth of a country). Consequently, there are four possible combinations of the two independent variables: left-poor, left-rich, right-poor and right-rich. It would thus be impossible for a researcher to know the effect of the two independent variables on the level of public expenditure on sport if the comparison only looked at two countries. For example, if a left-poor country is compared to a left-rich country, than the type of government is not allowed to vary and vice versa. Adding a third case to the comparison (for example a right-rich country), allows both variables to vary so that the hypothesis can be tested with a determinate research design. Although this problem occurs more frequently in single and few country studies, it might also arise in studies comparing many countries since there is a only a relatively small and finite number of countries in the world.

There are several solutions to the above problem, all of which are based on the principle that the number of variables must be less than the number of countries (King et al., 1994: 119). A common solution is to raise the number of observations which can be achieved by comparing countries over time, by adding more countries to the study, or by comparing subunits of the nation under scrutiny. Recent work in comparative sport research has compared many countries over many years using techniques in so-called 'pooled cross-section time series analysis' which pool repeated observations of countries by collecting country data for long periods of time (see Leadley & Zygmont, 2005). In each example, pooling the comparison of countries over time raises the number of observations. In studies comparing only few countries, more instances of the phenomenon can be drawn from history whereas in single country studies, subunits or regions within nations can be compared (see Birchwood et al., 2008). Another solution is to reduce the number of variables by focusing only on the key explanatory factors. This can be achieved by intentionally comparing a diverse set of countries while concentrating on their key similarities (see Green, 2005).

2.2 Establishing equivalence

The second problem is the one of establishing equivalence in multiple contexts, both in the theoretical concepts that are used as in the operational indicators of those concepts (Sartori, 1970; Mayer, 1989). For example, the concept of sport participation might mean very different things across different contexts (Van Tuyckom et al., 2011). In addition, the German concept of 'Verein' can hardly be translated by the English 'sport club' or the Spanish 'asociación'. In Germany this concept contains overtones of a solidarity committee whereas in Spain it is more of a service organisation (Heinemann, 1999). Evidently, different understandings of a concept can also lead to different

operationalisations or measures being developed for that concept (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Mayer (1989, p. 57) argues that *"the contextual relativity of the meaning or the measures of indicators constitutes the most serious impediment to the cross-contextual validity of empirically testable explanatory theory"*. The question is thus whether it is possible to specify concepts and indicators that have shared meanings to allow valid comparisons? The crux of the problem, however, is not specifying identical, or even similar concepts, but *equivalent* ones so that their comparison is meaningful (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990; Landman, 2008; Sartori, 1994). A first way to achieve this is by raising the level of abstraction (Sartori, 1970) allowing a study to be more inclusive. A second solution involves focusing on a small(er) set of countries for which the researcher has thorough substantive knowledge (Sanders, 1994). This 'local' knowledge can identify gaps between theoretical concepts and their application, resulting in more meaningful comparisons. A third solution is to use 'specialist teams' in compiling cross-national datasets (Sanders, 1994), as is the case for the *World Values Survey* or *European Social Survey*. A final solution is specifying in what particular respect a certain concept is comparable (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990).

2.3 Selection bias

The third problem of selection bias arises from the intentional choice of countries (Geddes, 1990; King et al., 1994) as well as the use of historical accounts and sources that favour the particular theoretical position of the researcher. This often violates the scientific principle of using random samples. Obviously, selecting countries lies at the heart of comparison, but it is selection without reflection which might lead to serious problems of inference. The most severe form of selection occurs when a study includes only those cases that support the theory. However, also more subtle forms of selection bias occur, when for example the choice of countries relies on values of the dependent variable (King et al., 1994) or when only certain historical sources are used. Studies comparing many countries usually have a sufficient number of countries to avoid the problem of selection, and/or they can use a number of statistical techniques to eliminate the problem. However, for studies comparing few countries and case studies, intentional selection can seriously affect the type of inferences that are drawn. In these types of studies, countries are frequently chosen because they exhibit only the outcome the researcher wants to explain. Selection on the dependent variable can however lead to an overestimation of the importance of certain explanatory variables, or to an underestimation of effects that do exist (by neglecting the importance of certain explanatory variables) (Geddes, 1990: 132). Both problems yield false inferences. A striking example in this regard is the study of MacMillian and Smith (2007) who claim that existing research on the determinants of FIFA's international soccer rankings suffer from serious statistical problems such as selection bias. They correct for it by extending the data set by additional countries and new variables, yielding new

results. In general, Landman (2008: 39) sees three solutions to this problem of selection on the dependent variable. First, one should include countries in which a certain outcome has occurred as well as countries in which it has not. Only by comparing both types, the importance of explanatory factors can be determined. Second, when comparing only a few countries, the choice of countries should reflect substantive knowledge of parallel cases. Third, stronger theory might help in specifying which countries represent 'least' or 'most likely' instances of the phenomenon.

Selection bias also occurs in qualitative research relying on historical sources where the researcher chooses historical accounts which fit the theory being tested. Solutions to this form of selection bias include using multiple sources and identifying the tendencies within each source to acknowledge possible bias.

A final form of selection bias occurs from the time periods that are used in the comparison. Selecting contemporary time periods (even throughout the 20th century) and drawing inferences about longer term processes is also a form of (historical) selection bias.

2.4 Spuriousness

The fourth problem is spuriousness, also known as omitted variable bias (King et al., 1994:168), *"the omission of key variables that may account for both the outcome and other explanatory factors already identified"* (Landman, 2008: 40). A spurious explanation is thus one in which some unidentified factor is responsible for the outcome, while the identified factor is mistakenly attributed to having an effect on the outcome. It is a problem that frequently arises in comparative sport research and is related to selection bias in that the choice of cases might overlook an important underlying factor that accounts for the outcome. Two examples of spuriousness are the study of Hartmann and Depro (2006) who claim that midnight basketball programs lower city-level crime rates and the analysis of Kirkegaard (2010) who assesses a positive linear relationship between exercise habits and national government budget balance. The results of both studies, however, are likely to be associated with a variety of confounding factors.

The solution to the problem of spuriousness is related to the number of countries involved in a study. The easiest solution is specifying all the relevant variables that might account for the observed outcome. However, when a study involves only one or a few countries, this solution might overlap with the first problem of too many variables and too few countries. A second solution involves the selection of countries that fit the criteria of the theory that has been specified, but this overlaps with the problem of selection bias. The trade-offs associated with these solutions can thus often be a source of frustration.

2.5 Ecological and individualist fallacies

The fifth problem of ecological and individualist fallacies arises when a study seeks to make inferences about one level of analysis using evidence from the other level of analysis (Miller, 1995; Scheuch, 1969). This can be a serious problem since an analysis carried out at one level may overestimate relationships at another level (Robinson, 1950: 353). In the social sciences, two types of data are used: (i) individual data, comprising information on individuals mostly collected through surveys carried out on a representative sample of the population; and (ii) ecological data, comprising information that has been aggregated for territorial units such as municipalities, regions or countries (Scheuch, 1969). Ecological fallacies occur when results obtained through the analysis of aggregate-level data are used to make inferences about individual-level behaviour. For example, when a relationship between personal income and sporting success is claimed based on the correlation between a country's GDP per capita and the number of Olympic medals. Individualist fallacies, on the other hand, occur when results obtained through analysis of individual-level data are used to make inferences about aggregate-level phenomena. For example, when a study of individuals finds that higher number of years schooling is associated with higher sport participation levels, and that the government therefore decides to raise the age limit for compulsory school attendance to achieve higher sport participation percentages. Moreover, when making conclusions on the aggregate level based on measured characteristics of sampled individuals, one should be sure that the sample is entirely or highly representative of the group in order to avoid the individualistic fallacy. For instance, ascribing cultural traits to a country based on an unrepresentative sample of the population leads to incorrect inferences because of an incorrect level of analysis (Landman, 2008).

A first source of ecological and individualist fallacies is the ontological disposition of the researcher, i.e. some may assume that data at one level represents a higher degree of reality than data at another level. Scheuch (1969: 134) explains this as follows: *"Individual behaviour may be treated as being the only real phenomenon, while system properties are abstractions, or individual behaviour may be viewed as mere reflection of the only reality, namely structural properties"*. A second source is data availability, since researchers might be forced to substitute data from one level to another to be able to examine the research question.

A common solution to both types of fallacies is to use data that minimizes the chain of inference between the theoretical concepts and the measures of those concepts that are ultimately used in the analysis. Defined by Scheuch (1969: 137) as the 'principle of direct measurement', this solution implies that research specifying questions at the individual level should use individual data, whereas vice versa for research questions specifying systemic relationships (or more pragmatically, that the measurement must be as close as possible to the level of the phenomena begin examined). However,

recent advanced statistical techniques such as multilevel modeling have resolved the problem of ecological and individualistic fallacies by enabling the use of aggregate data to make inferences about individual behaviour and vice versa (see Todd et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010b).

2.6 Value bias

The final problem is that of value bias or the particular cultural, political and philosophical predispositions of the researcher which might bias the conclusions of the research. Modern empirical research, however, accepts that knowledge is not entirely 'value free'. *"What is observed is in part a consequence of the theoretical position that the analyst adopts in the first place"* (Sanders, 1995: 67). Nevertheless, the key to make valid comparison is to be as public as possible (King et al., 1994: 8) in terms of the judgments made in the comparative study, including the theoretical perspective upon which the study is based, the identification of key variables, the specification of the research design, and the limits to the type of inferences that can be drawn from it.

3. Strengths and weaknesses

Taken together, this chapter thus far has briefly identified how sport researchers compare countries and the types of problems they frequently encounter along the way. We end by summarizing the methods of comparison and by assessing their strengths and weaknesses in the light of their trade-offs for the researcher as well as their ability to make valid conclusions.

3.1 Comparing many countries

In the last decades, datasets have become increasingly complex in that larger number of countries have been included and also time has been taken into account. This makes the method of comparing many countries particularly suited to quantitative analysis of data collected on different measures that vary across many countries (see, for example the Eurobarometer surveys). In classical sport-related studies of this type, 'objective' data are analyzed to identify forms of statistical association among social, political, economic, or cultural conditions or contexts on the one hand (e.g. levels of GDP per capita across compared countries) and policy outcomes on the other (e.g. sport club or association membership rates). Typical dependent variables in such studies might be: frequency of sport participation in sport (UK Sport, 1999; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010b), levels of government expenditure in sport (Taks & Késenne, 2000), number of hours spent on physical education in schools, time allocation to sport in time budget studies (Glorieux et al., 2006), hours of sports broadcasting (Papathanassopoulos, 2002), etc.

Four main *advantages* of this method of comparison can be identified (Landman, 2008). First, comparing many countries has the ability to rule out rival explanations and control for confounding factors by means of statistical controls (see De Bosscher et al., 2010). Second, countries can be extensively covered, both in time and in space (see Stamm & Lamprecht, 2000). Third, comparing many countries has the ability to make strong inferences which possibly yield new theories or withdraw others (see Van Bottenburg, 2002). Finally, this method is able to identify 'deviant' countries or 'outliers' that do not have the expected outcomes (see Hover et al., 2010). On the other hand, there are some *disadvantages* with comparing many countries as well. First, data for many countries and many time periods are limited. Second, there might be problems with the validity of measures that are often merely approximations of social scientific concepts. Third, one needs specific mathematical and computing skills to analyze complicated data sets whose structure violates many of the assumptions of standard statistical methods (Todd et al., 2005). In addition, many see this method of comparison as inappropriate for analyzing topics involving complex causal mechanisms, historical processes, and deeper meanings and understandings that are highly dependent on the contextual specificities of discrete country cases. This type of research thus tends to ignore cultural specificities in the search for generalisation. These are weaknesses that in effect promote analysis of one or a few countries to evaluate and explain association among social, political, economic and/or cultural conditions and policy outcomes (Henry et al., 2005).

3.2 Comparing few countries

Focusing on a few countries means that the researcher can use less abstract concepts that are more grounded in the specific contexts under scrutiny (Nieβen, 1982). It involves the intentional selection of only a few countries for comparison. However, since 'few' can be anywhere between two and more than twenty countries, the distinction between comparing few and many countries is a blurred one. What specifically defines this method, is the intentional selection of countries from the universe of all possible cases using a middle level of conceptual abstraction, encompassing more of the nuances specific to each country. For example, in Houlihan's (1997) account of the sport policy systems of five countries, two policy areas (drugs in sport and physical education policy) are chosen and consequently, the nature of the policy processes in each country is evaluated. In this kind of research, emphasis is placed on capturing the specific policy history and context rather than searching for general laws. The concept of sport policy will not be considered as a set of statistically operationalised concepts, but rather as detailed qualitative accounts of individual policy systems, and perhaps the interactions among those systems (see Bergsgard et al., 2007). The danger of this approach, however, is the tendency to explain everything in terms of historical contingency. Comparison of a large number of states or policy systems is not possible because of the complexity of

detailed analysis and description, and consequently, its core problem relates predominantly to moving beyond the descriptive, and to the difficulties associated with validating and interpreting concepts to summarize complex qualitative data relating to what could be remarkably diverse policy systems (Henry et al., 2005).

3.3 Single country (case) studies

Single country or case studies are considered comparative if they "*use concepts that are applicable to other countries, and/or seeks to make larger inferences that stretch beyond the original country used in the study"* (Landman, 2008: 28) and are useful for examining a whole range of (comparative) issues: they provide contextual description, develop new classifications, generate hypotheses, confirm and infirm theories, and illuminate known deviant countries (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2004; Lees, 2006). However, due to their low level of abstraction, single country studies are most susceptible to problems of selection bias, too many variables and too few cases and indeterminate research designs yielding less secure inferences than the other modes of comparison. Moreover, 'country specialists' have to invest much time and energy in learning the local language and culture of their particular country. Despite the limitations to case studies and the recent increase of cross-national research, however, the field of sport research has benefited greatly from single country studies (see the country profiles in DaCosta & Miragaya, 2002 and De Knop et al., 1996, among others).

4. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed a major lacuna in sport research literature by giving a brief overview of comparative methods and many of the problems associated with it (including too many variables and too few countries, establishing equivalence, selection bias, spuriousness, ecological and individualistic fallacies, and value bias). Moreover, it has demonstrated that comparative methods in sport research as well as possible solutions to the problems associated with it should be seen as a function of both the sport researcher's aspirations and the level of conceptual abstraction contained within a particular study. Without privileging one method over another, it can be summarised that (i) comparing many countries is the best method when one wants to draw inferences with global applicability; (ii) comparing few countries leads to inferences that are better informed by the contextual specificities of the countries; and (iii) single countries can provide contextual description, generate hypotheses, confirm theories and enrich our understanding of deviant cases.

CHAPTER 3

CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON OF SPORT PARTICIPATION – A FACT SHEET APPROACH

This chapter presents the results of a study on sport participation across Europe, based on a fact sheets approach. The objective of the chapter is two-fold. First, a state of the art of national data collection with regard to sport participation is presented. The fact sheet approach taken in this study allows for an overview of the different methods and standards of data collection on sport participation in each country. Second, the study allows to compare general sport participation, club sport participation, competitive sport participation and sport preferences in 13 to 23 different European countries (cf. infra). The results of this comparison are discussed in this chapter. However, before going to the heart of the matter in terms of results, it is important to give a moment's thought to the methodology used. Using fact sheets to collect information and compare cross-nationally present a particular set of advantages. In this chapter, the rationale behind our choice is explained, by discussing the strengths and weaknesses behind different approaches to comparative research on sport participation[1]. As will be shown, the use of fact sheets presents a way out from the usual trade-off between advantages and disadvantages of more 'classical' approaches.

1. Data and methods

1.1 Cross-national research on sport participation

In the previous chapters, a description was given on research initiatives regarding the comparison of sport participation rates across Europe (e.g. Gratton et al., 2011; Nicholson et al., 2011; Scheerder & Van Tuyckom, 2007; UK Sport, 1999, Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010), using different data sources.

[1] For a detailed discussion on the possibilities and pitfalls of comparative research, we refer to Chapter 3 of this volume.

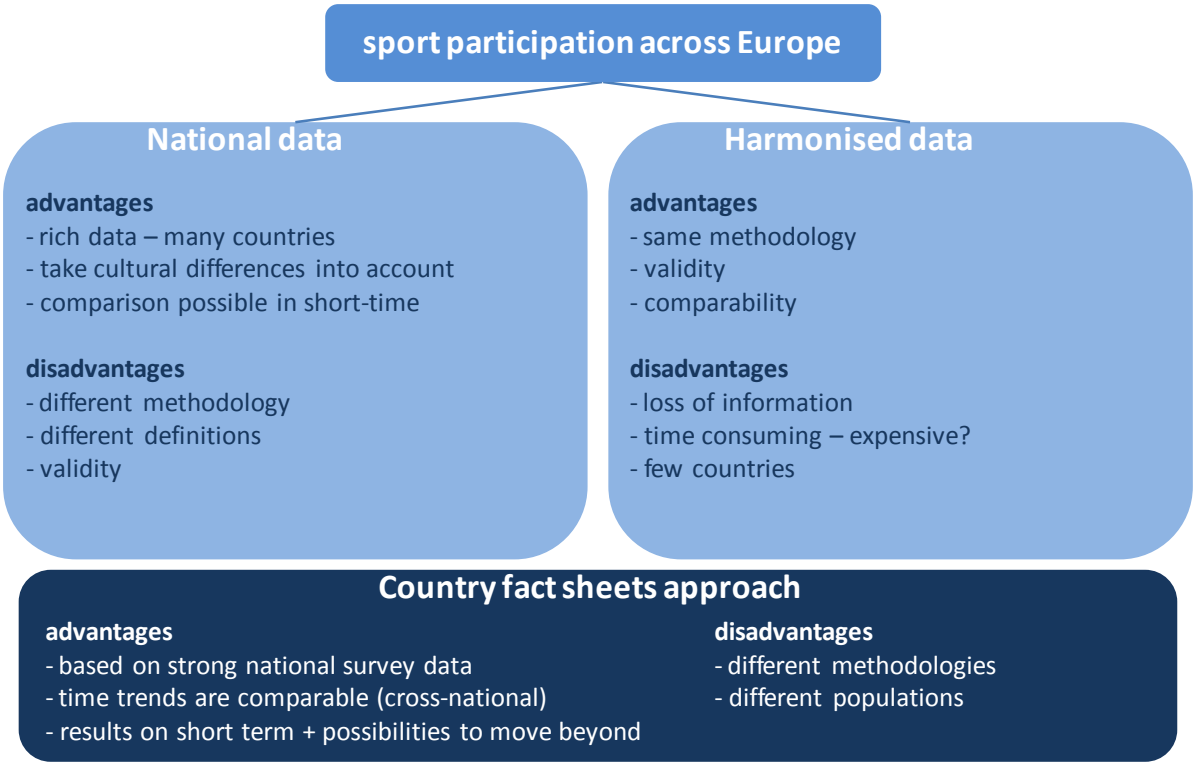
When it comes to comparative research, an important distinction to make regards the type of data which is being used: national or harmonised data. Figure 3.1 presents an overview of the advantages and the disadvantages of both types of data.

One of the key advantages of a national data approach is that country specific cultures and traditions are taken into account in the data collection and research methodologies, which often results in rich data. However, this apparent strength is also the key weakness of using cross-national data for comparative research on sport participation: data are hardly comparable, due to differences in population, data collection, definitions and operationalisations, etc. Hence, there are problems in terms of validity and reliability. Despite these disadvantages, the possibility to make cross-national comparisons on a short term, because of the availability of national data, is another strength. The studies by Rodgers (1977) and Van Bottenburg et al. (2005) are examples of this national data approach. A harmonised data approach, on the other hand, implies collecting the same data cross-nationally, based on harmonised questionnaires. Strengths of the harmonised data approach include, amongst others, the use of a similar research methodology resulting in comparability and validity of the sport participation data. However, there are also disadvantages involved, such as the loss of (country specific) information. Moreover, harmonisation can be very time consuming and expensive. Another weakness is the limited value of this approach when only a few countries are able to meet the harmonised standards. Examples of previous studies using a (more or less) harmonised approach are Claeys (1982), and UK Sport (1999). As mentioned before, the *Eurobarometer 62.0* (European Commission, 2004) and the *Eurobarometer 72.3* (European Commission, 2010a) are examples of a harmonised cross-European approach to measure sport participation and physical activity. In Figure 3.1 the harmonised data approach is put opposite to the national data approach.

The country fact sheet approach, launched by Jeroen Scheerder and Steven Vos in the autumn of 2010, is intended to deal with the weaknesses of both the national data approach and the harmonised data approach, by combining and maximizing the strength of both approaches (see Figure 3.1). Hence, the country fact sheets approach (i) starts from strong national survey data and brings it to a higher level; (ii) is focusing on time trends to guarantee comparability; and (iii) results in short term outcomes providing possibilities to move beyond. The disadvantages of this approach, i.e., the use of country specific methodologies and populations are taken into account.

By using this method for data collection, we largely surpass the habitual trade-off between comparability and in-depth precision of the data, hence obtaining a largely unprecedented tool for cross-national research in the field of sport participation.

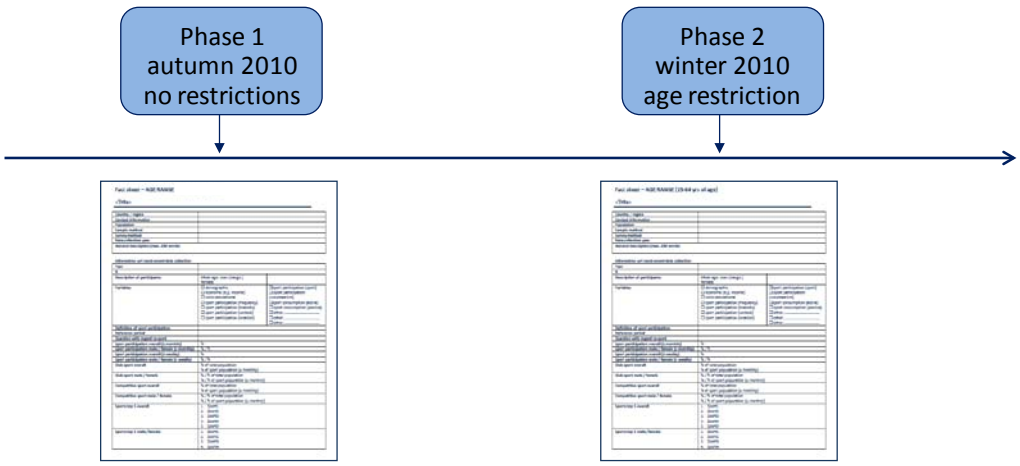
Figure 3.1 *The fact sheets approach*



1.2. Data collection

A two stage data collection was used to gather fact sheets across Europe (see Figure 3.2).

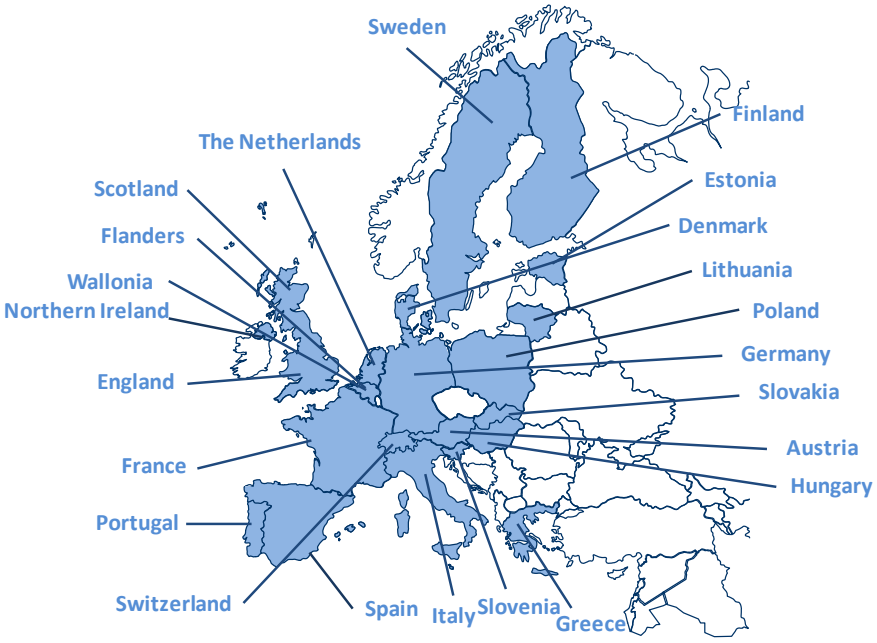
Figure 3.2 *Two stage data collection*



In a first phase, in autumn 2010, sport participation data were collected in 23 different European countries/regions. Researchers and experts on sport participation across Europe have been

contacted and were asked to fill out standardised fact sheets, based on national data of their country[2]. The standardised form included questions about the methodology used in the national data collection, the sample characteristics, general sport participation rates, club sport participation, the level of sport participation, sports preferences, as well as time trends. Figure 3.3 gives an overview of countries / regions participating in the first phase of the data collection.

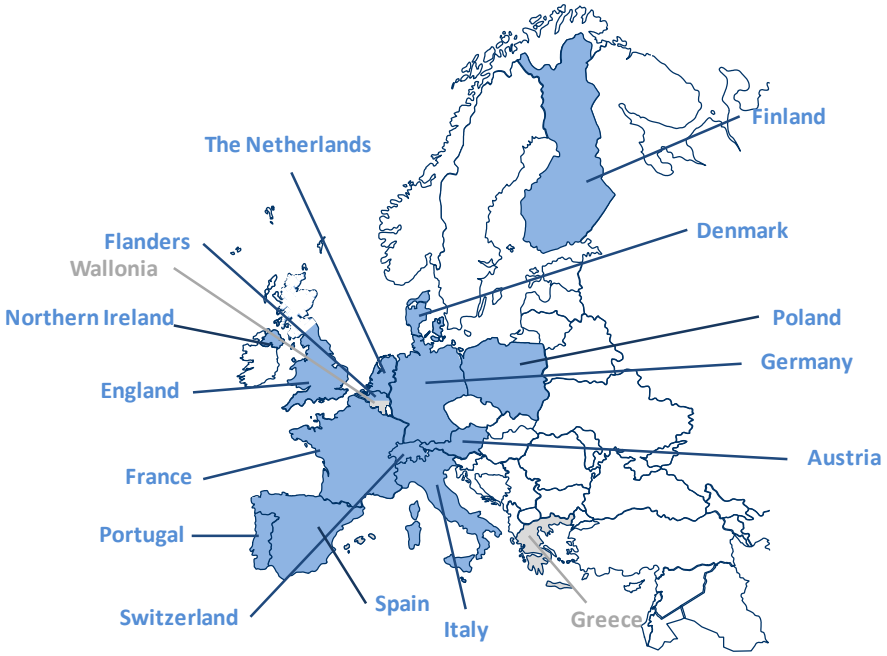
Figure 3.3 *Countries / regions participating in the first phase*



Because of the diversity in populations (e.g., the age range) and, in order to still increase the comparability between the data, a second call was launched in December 2010, starting the second phase of data collection. The national correspondents were asked to adapt the fact sheets, restricting the age range to 15-64 years of age (i.e. people at labour-active age). Fourteen countries were able to provide the requested information. Two additional countries/regions could only provide partial data, i.e. Greece and Wallonia (Belgium) (see Figure 3.4).

[2] The countries selected have not been limited to the member states of the European Union. Hence, also Switzerland belongs to the countries under study in this report.

Figure 3.4 *Countries / regions participating in the second phase*



2. Results

The fact sheets provide valuable information with regard to sport participation in Europe, from a comparative perspective. Based on the results of the fact sheets, important features of sport participation can be compared across countries, such as for example the degree of overall sport participation, competitive sport participation, sport preferences, etc. Across Europe, common trends as well as differences can be observed. However, apart from the lessons that can be drawn about sport participation itself, the fact sheets (especially from the first phase) are also very instructive from another perspective, i.e. providing insights in the practices of scientific data collection on sport participation in the various countries. In fact, the comparison of the different fact sheets leads to a state of the art of sport participation research, more specifically with regard to data characteristics. Therefore, in what follows, the characteristics of national data on sport participation will be discussed. A large variety in approaches of data collection (in terms of population, survey method, etc.) can be observed. Subsequently, in a next paragraph, the main trends and observations on sport participation across Europe, and their mutual similarities and differences, are presented.

2.1 National data collection: a variety of different approaches

As mentioned earlier, 23 countries/regions completed the fact sheets in a first phase. Table 3.1. shows the characteristics of the national data provided in this first phase (i.e. the phase without age restrictions imposed). As can be seen from the table, the participating countries vary in target population, sample size, sampling method and survey method. The differences can be considered as rather large. For example, the sample size varies from 193,947 (England) to 300 (Greece). In what follows, some of the cross-national differences in terms of data characteristics are discussed further.

Table 3.1 *Characteristics of the national data provided in phase 1 of the fact sheet approach*

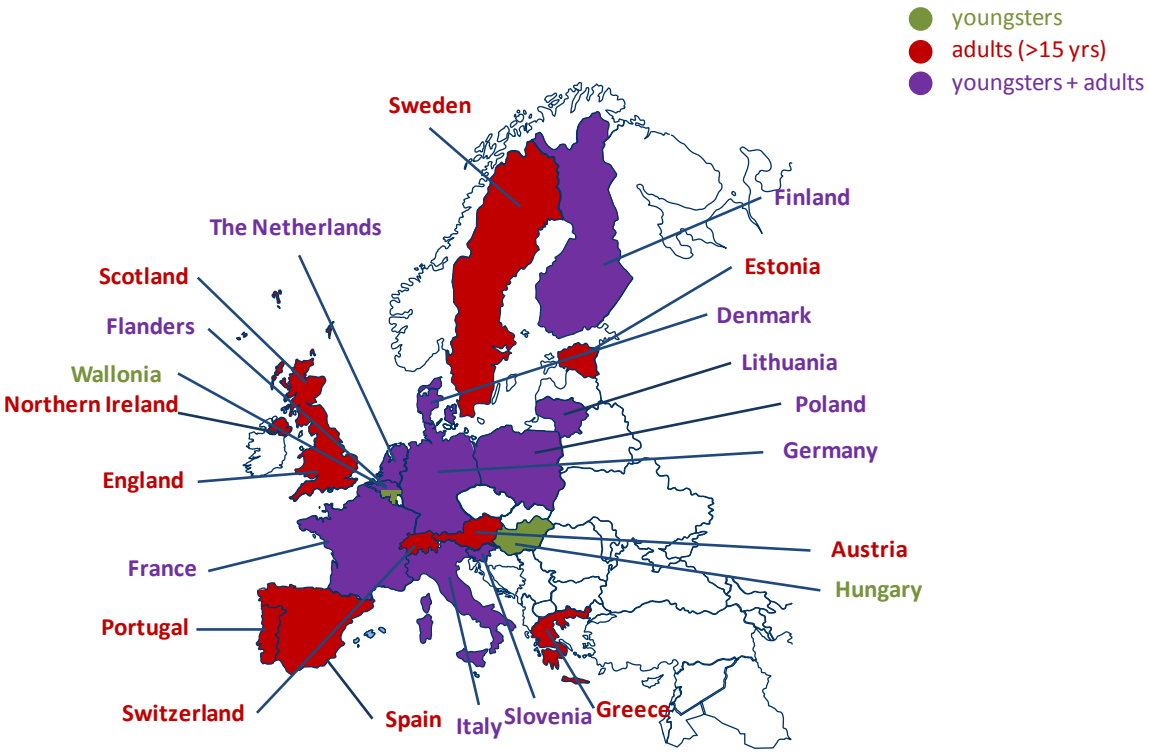
Country / Region	Population	N	Sampling method	Survey method
Austria	≥ 15 yrs	15,474	Random - population	Telephone
Denmark	7-15 yrs / > 16 yrs	1,987 / 4,147	Random - population	Written / web-based
England (UK)	> 16 yrs	193,947	Random - households	Telephone
Estonia	15 -74 yrs	1,503	Random - age group	Written
Finland	3-18yrs / 19-65 yrs / 66-79 yrs	5,505 / 5,588 / 1,013	Random - population	Telephone
Flanders (Belgium)	6-18 yrs / 23-90 yrs	3,014 / 5,851	Random - households ≥ 1 child btw 6-18	Written (via school system)
France	4-65 yrs	5,249	Random - population	Web-based
Germany	3-101 yrs / 3-90yrs	11,715 / 1,934	Random - city	Telephone
Greece	Parents (children - sport programs)	300	Random - sport progr.	Written
Hungary	15-29 yrs	8,000	Random - age group	Face to face
Italy	≥ 3 yrs	50,569	Random - households	Face to face
Lithuania	7-80 yrs	3,974	Random - population	Face to face
the Netherlands	6-79 yrs	6,380	Random - population	Written
Northern Ireland (UK)	> 16 yrs	4,653	Random - last birthday	Face to face
Poland	≥ 4 yrs	4,985	Random - households	Face to face
Portugal	15-74 yrs	3,030	Random - population	Written
Scotland (UK)	> 16 yrs	19,532	Random - population	Face to face
Slovakia	Only club sport participation			
Slovenia	≥ 15 yrs	1,286	Random - population	Face to face
Spain	15-74 yrs	8,170	Random - population	Written
Sweden	16-84 yrs	7,000	Random - population	Face to face
Switzerland	15-74 yrs	10,262	Random - population	Telephone
Wallonia (Belgium)	6-18 yrs	1,954	Random - school pop.	Written

2.1.1 Research population

Figure 3.5 provides a visual representation of the choices that have been made in the different countries/regions with regard to the research population. Whereas some countries (f.i. Portugal,

Spain, England and Sweden) focus only on adults, other countries (f.i. the Netherlands, Germany, France and Italy) include both youngsters and adults. In Hungary and Wallonia, the research population consists of youngsters only.

Figure 3.5 *Research population per country*



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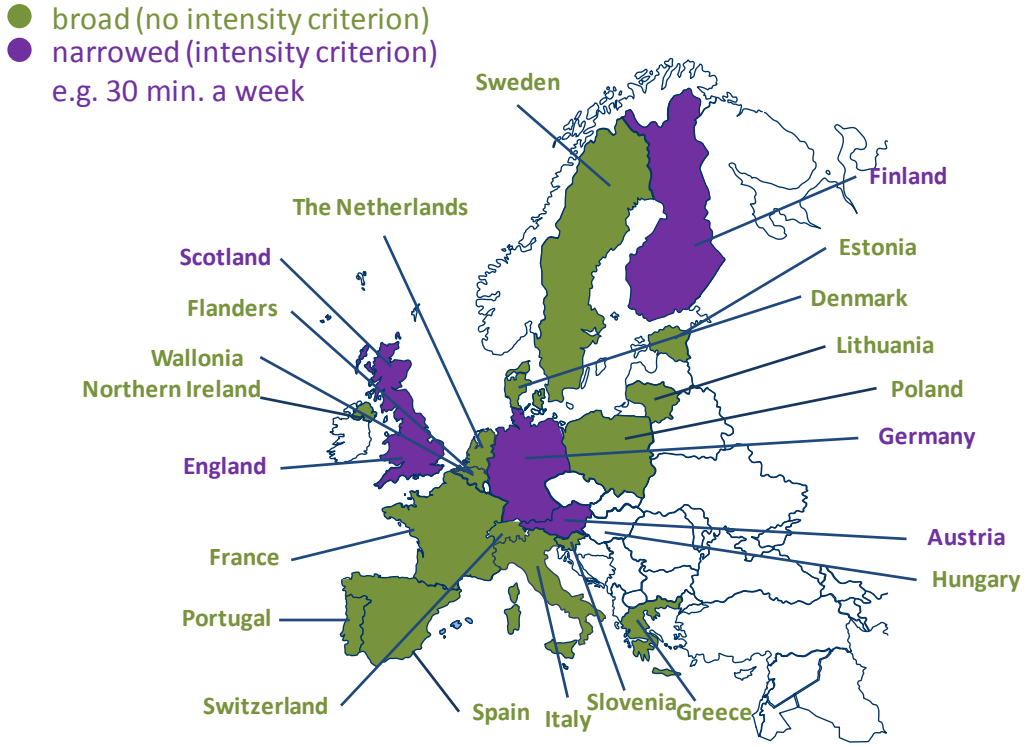
2.1.2 Definition of sport participation

When comparing results on sport participation across countries, it is fundamental to verify which definition of sport participation is in use. Indeed, as shown in Figure 3.6, there are considerable cross-national differences in this regard. Most countries use a broad definition of sport participation, without intensity criterion, whereas other countries - Austria, England, Finland, Germany and Scotland - do put restrictions, only taking activities with a certain level of intensity (f.i. 30 minutes a week) into account.

Figure 3.6 *Type of definition of sport participation, per country*



2.1.3 Collected information

The frequency of sport participation is an important, recurrent criterion for evaluating the level of sport participation in a particular country. As shown in Table 3.2, most countries report on sport participation by taking one year as a reference period, as well as measuring on a monthly and a weekly basis. Still, there are some exceptions. For some countries, information is lacking for certain categories of frequency.

Other features of sport participation which are surveyed in most countries, are club sport participation and whether or not one is involved in competitive sports. Here again, this information is lacking for some countries, whereas it is collected in the majority of the countries covered by the fact sheets. With the exception of Austria, the popularity of sports – i.e. preferred sports – are surveyed in all countries.

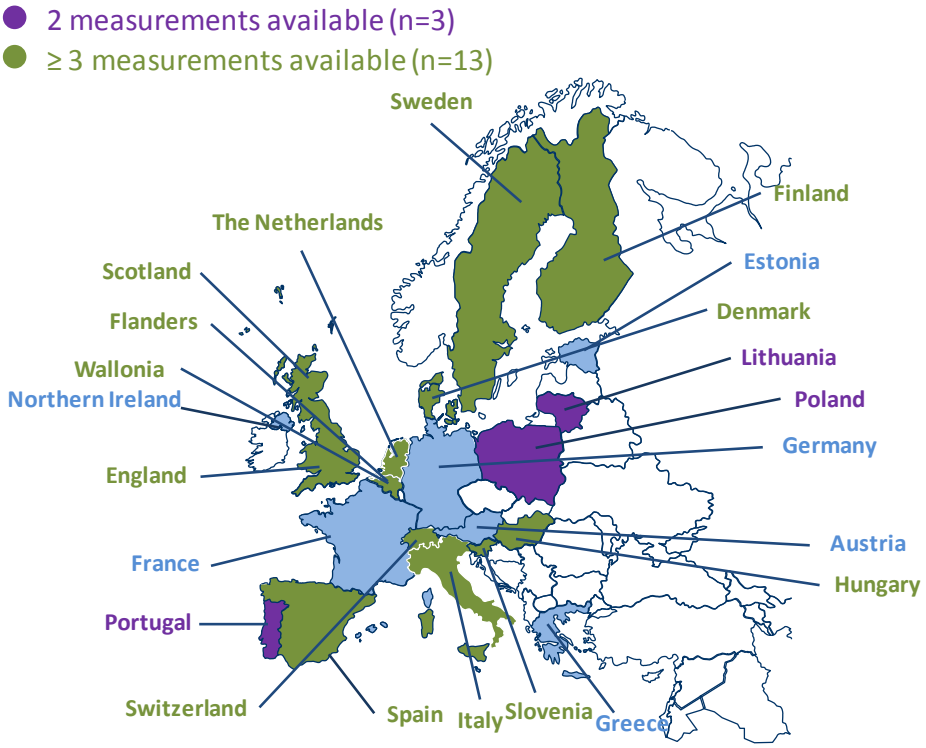
Table 3.2 *Collected information per country/region*

Country / Region	Reference period one year	Sport participation ≥ weekly	Sport participation ≥ monthly	Competitive sport	Club sport	Popularity of sports
Austria	X	X				
Denmark	X	X	X	X	X	X
England (UK)			X	X	X	X
Estonia		X				X
Finland		X	X	X	X	X
Flanders (Belgium)	X	X	X	X	X	X
France	X	X	X	X	X	X
Germany		X			X	X
Greece	X	X	X			X
Hungary		X	X	X	X	X
Italy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lithuania			X			X
the Netherlands	X	X	X		X	X
Northern Ireland (UK)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Poland	X		X	X		X
Portugal	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scotland (UK)			X	X	X	X
Slovenia	X	X	X	X		X
Spain	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sweden	X	X	X	X	X	X
Switzerland	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wallonia (Belgium)		X	X	X	X	X

2.1.4 Availability of trend data

In social sciences, it is often instructive to look beyond the present moment, and depict the evolution over time, observing trends in a particular field. With regard to sport participation, both scientists and policy makers are keen to know the evolution over time. However, financial or other constraints can impede collecting comparable data at different points in time.

Figure 3.7 *Availability of trend data, per country*



As can be observed in Figure 3.7, whereas most countries can rely upon three or more measurements in time, three countries – Lithuania, Poland and Portugal – have only two measurements available. A third set of countries – Austria, France, Germany, Greece and Northern Ireland – do not dispose of comparable data over time at all. Table 3.3 gives a general overview of the different measurements per country/region.

Table 3.3 *Waves of data collection per country*

Country / Region	Most recent data collection	Time trends wrt sport participation
Austria	2006/7	
Denmark	2007	1964 1975 1987 1993 1998 2007
England (UK)	2009/10	1987 1990 1993 1996 2002 || 2005/6 2007/8 2008/9
Estonia	2006	
Finland	2009/10	1991 1994 1997/8 2001/2 2005/6 2009/10
Flanders (Belgium)	2009	1969 1979 1989 1999 2009
France	2007	
Germany	2009	
Greece	2007	
Hungary	2000	2000 2004 2008
Italy	2006	1995 2000 2006
Lithuania	2007/9	2001 2007/9
the Netherlands	2007	1979 1987 1995 1999 2003 2007
Northern Ireland (UK)	2009/10	
Poland	2009	2000 2009
Portugal	1998	1988 1998
Scotland (UK)	2007/8	1994/6 1996/8 1998/00 2001/3 2003/5 2006/8
Slovenia	2008	1973 1996 2001 2006 2008
Spain	2005/6	1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005
Sweden	2006	1976 1982 1990 1998 2006
Switzerland	2007	1978 1984 1990 1994 1999 2007
Wallonia (Belgium)	2006	1983 1991 2006

2.2 Sport participation across Europe: similarities, differences and trends

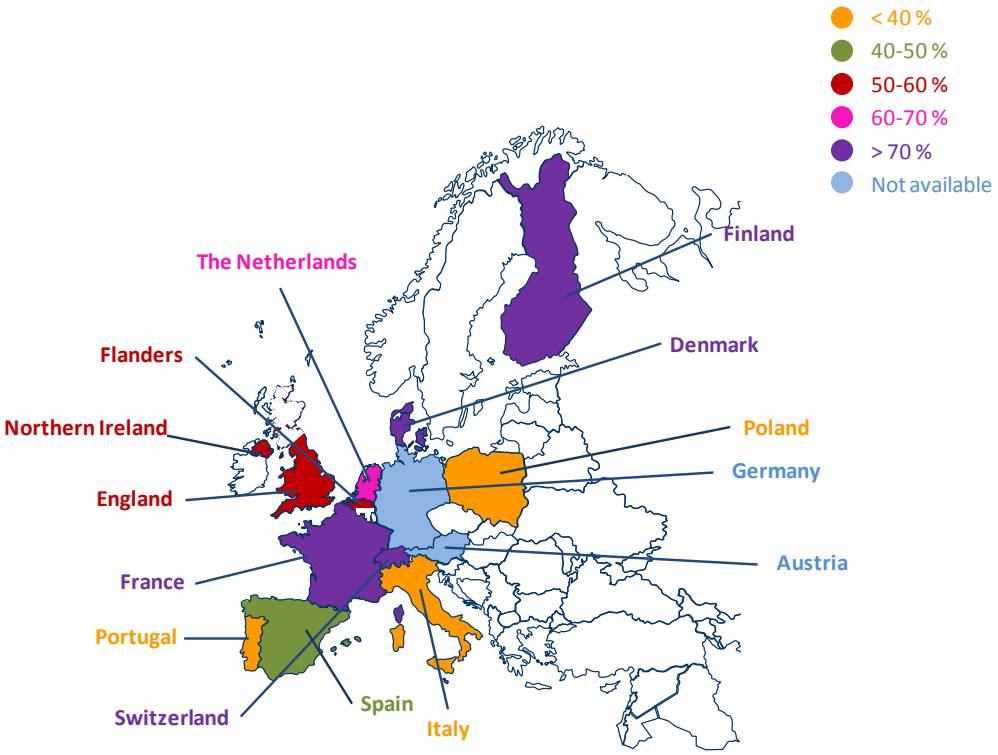
In this second paragraph, an overview of the main results with regard to cross-national similarities, differences and trends in sport participation will be presented. For this section, the second phase of the fact sheets constitute the main source of information, since only in this phase, an age restriction was imposed, enhancing the comparability of the research population (i.e. age 15-64).

2.2.1 Sport participation

Figure 3.8 indicates the level of sport participation in the different European countries. More precisely, the figure presents the share of the total population participating in sports at least once a month. Denmark, Finland, France and Switzerland have the highest scores, with more than seven out of ten people (of the overall population aged 15-64) participating in sports at least once a month. These countries are followed by the Netherlands. Between six and seven out of ten citizens from the Netherlands practise sports at least on a monthly basis. With a less than forty percent share of the

population participating in sports at least once a month, Italy, Poland and Portugal[3] show the lowest sport participation level. England, Flanders (Belgium), Northern Ireland and Spain can be situated in between. These results are in line with an earlier study of Van Bottenburg et al., 2005), based on the Eurobarometer survey 62.0 (2004), who find that Denmark, Finland and Sweden[4] have the highest share of citizens participating at least once a month in sport, whereas Greece[5], Italy and Portugal present the lowest shares of monthly sport participation. Similarly, based on the special Eurobarometer survey 72.3 (European Commission, 2010a) and ISSP data (International Social Survey Programme) from 2007, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland can be identified as the frontrunners in monthly sport participation[6] (see Hover et al., 2010; cf. infra).

Figure 3.8 *Sport participation, at least on a monthly basis, in percentage of the total population*



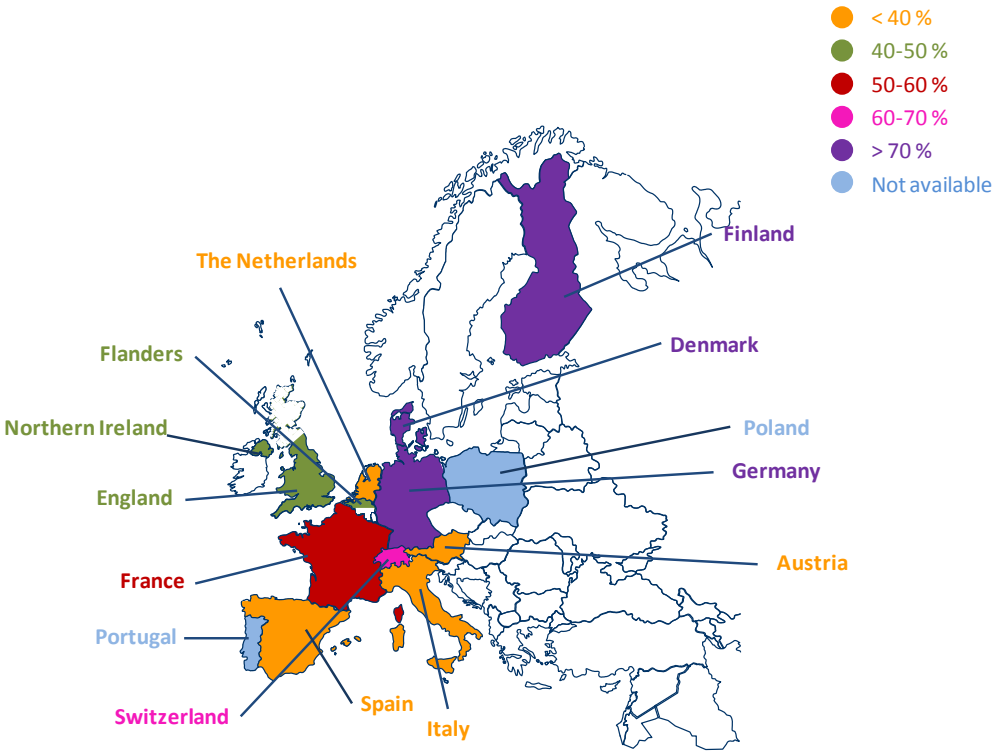
Looking at (minimum) weekly sport participation provides a rather similar picture (Figure 3.9). The countries Denmark, Finland and Switzerland still present the highest share of the total population

[3] It should however be taken into account that data for Portugal are based on a survey in 1998. More recent national data were not available for this country.
[4] There is no fact sheet available for this country.
[5] There is no fact sheet available for this country.
[6] Based on ISSP data, also New Zealand was identified as having very high sport participation rates, with 84 percent of the population being active in sports at least once a month.

participating in sport at this frequency. Germany is also added to this list now. [7] Italy closes the ranking again, this time joined by Austria and Spain, and, remarkably, the Netherlands. The lower weekly sport participation rate in the Netherlands can be assumed to be caused by the used definition in the factsheet; people were only considered to be a weekly sport participant when participating 59 times or more often in sport on a yearly basis. Using a boundary of for instance 40 times a year, which corresponds more or less with the number of active weeks in a sport season, will bring the percentage of weekly sport participants close to 50 percent.

Poland and Portugal could not provide the information.[8] In the research of Hover et al. (2010), comparing the European member states, Finland and Sweden were found to have the highest weekly sport participation (72%).

Figure 3.9 *Sport participation, at least on a weekly basis, in percentage of the total population*



With regard to the level of sport participation, earlier studies, such as Gratton et al. (2011), UK Sport (1999), Van Bottenburg et al. (2005), Van Tuyckom & Scheerder (2010a, 2010b), have discerned a geographical structure in the ranking order on sport participation. More precisely, generally

[7] Recall that there were no data available on monthly participation for Germany.
[8] Evidently, the lack of this variable in the data of these countries is informative in itself, since it indicates – considering the expected sport participation level – a further specification in 'higher' participation categories was not perceived as necessary by the researchers.

speaking, participation rates tend to be higher in Nordic countries, and lower in Southern European countries. Similarly, though there are some exceptions[9], central and eastern European countries tend to have lower sport participation rates than western European countries. This is also reflected in the current findings, based on the fact sheets. The Nordic countries are indeed ahead in terms of sport participation: Denmark and Finland score the highest on sporting activity, along with Switzerland. Italy, Poland, Portugal[10] and Spain – i.e. southern European countries and a central European country – are found at the bottom of the ladder in terms of sport participation.[11,12] This tendency is again confirmed by analyses on the Eurobarometer survey 72.3 (European Commission, 2010a), as presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

An explanation for the apparent geographical 'ranking' in sport participation might be found in the level of prosperity. Table 3.4 gives the top fifteen of countries with the highest adult sport participation, based on ISSP data for 2007. The ISSP data contain information on sport participation, based on unified questions, within 34 countries worldwide. Among the countries are Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Uruguay, United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Flanders, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Croatia, Slovenia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Cyprus, Israel and South Africa. From Table 3.4, it appears that European countries rank on top. The countries from other continents that find themselves in between the better ranked European countries, are New Zealand, Australia and the United States. In other words, the more prosperous countries have in general a higher sport participation rate. An analysis of Hover et al. (2010) on the ISSP data and data of the World Bank clearly showed the positive correlation between national economy indicators and sport participation rate. The most resemblances in sport participation were found between Europe and the continents North-America and Australia. Asian and Southern American countries as well as South Africa (as the only African country) show lower sport participation rates than the European average. It seems that Europe is one of the frontiers of sport; there is a notable higher sport participation in Europe than in other parts of the world.

[9] Slovenia is clearly an exception here, showing high rates of sport participation. Also Czech Republic and Slovakia can be considered as exceptions, though to a lesser extent (Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a).
[10] The reader should recall that data for Portugal were collected 1998, there were no recent national data available.
[11] Possibly, Austria should also be added to this list, but there are no data available for monthly participation. As for the Netherlands, they are not considered as a country with low sport participation, given their high score on monthly participation.
[12] It should be noted that there were no Eastern European countries included in the analysis.

Table 3.4 *Sport participation among adults (18-80 yrs of age) per country, top 15 based on ISSP (2007)*

Country	Sport participation	
	>1 a month	>1 a week
Switzerland	85	70
Sweden	85	60
New Zealand	85	67
Finland	84	62
Norway	82	57
Australia	80	57
United Kingdom	78	54
Netherlands	77	57
United States	76	55
France	75	47
Germany	74	53
France	75	47
Austria	72	48

Source: Hover et al. (2010)

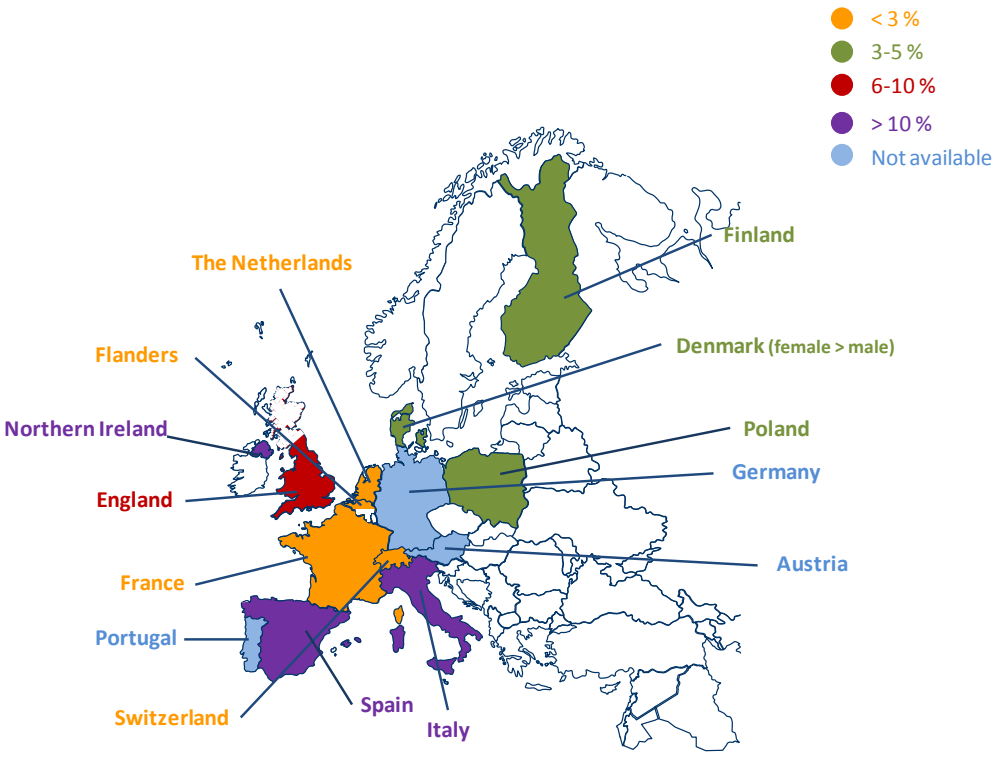
Apart from the geographical ranking in sport participation, earlier research has shown sport participation is socially stratified in Europe (see f.i. UK SPORT, 1999, Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a; 2010b), for example in terms of gender, age, occupation, or education. In this research, the gender gap has been subject of study. Generally speaking, all over Europe, men participate more often in sports than women. This appears from the data based on the fact sheets, and was also repeatedly found in earlier research (see f.i. UK SPORT, 1999, Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a; 2010b, see also Chapter 4 in this report). For example, when comparing sporting activity, based on the Eurobarometer survey 64.3 (European Commission, 2006), Van Tuyckom & Scheerder (2010a) find an average gender gap of eight percent in Europe among the 27 member states of the European Union.

However, our findings indicate the gender gap varies greatly per country. Figures 3.10 and 3.11 present the gender difference in sport participation per country, hence allowing for cross-country comparisons. Focusing on monthly participation (Figure 3.10), Flanders, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland show the lowest gender difference, i.e. less than three percent. Yet, remarkably, Denmark shows an inverse pattern, with a higher level of sport participation for women than for men. The southern countries, Spain and Italy[13], present the highest difference in the level of sport participation between men and women. Also Northern Ireland presents a high level of gender

[13] For Portugal, this information was not provided.

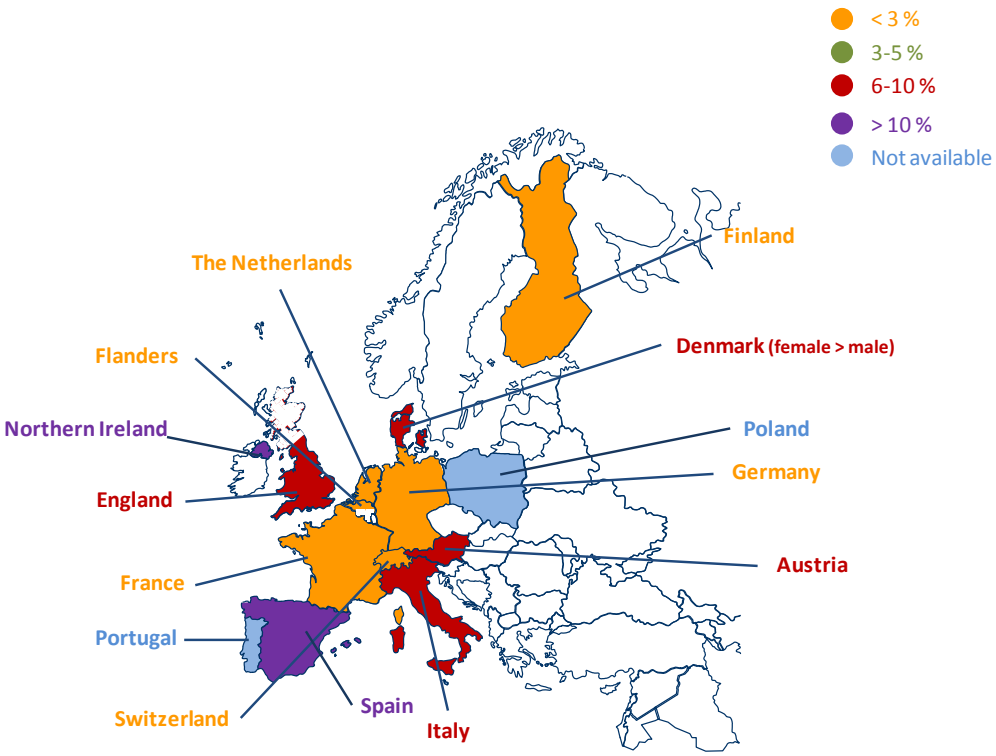
inequality. In these countries, the gender gap amounts to more than ten percent. England, Finland and Poland occupy an intermediate position.

Figure 3.10 *Gender gap in monthly sport participation, in percentages (male > female)*



Looking at weekly participation (Figure 3.11), Finland, Flanders, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland present the lowest gender difference (less than three percent). In these countries, compared to men, women are almost equally likely to be weekly sport participants. Denmark shows an inverse gender gap again, with women belonging more often to the group of weekly sport participants than their male counterparts. Spain and Northern Ireland, on the other hand, show the highest level of inequality, with a gender gap of more than ten percent.

Figure 3.11 *Gender gap in weekly sport participation, in percentages (male > female)*

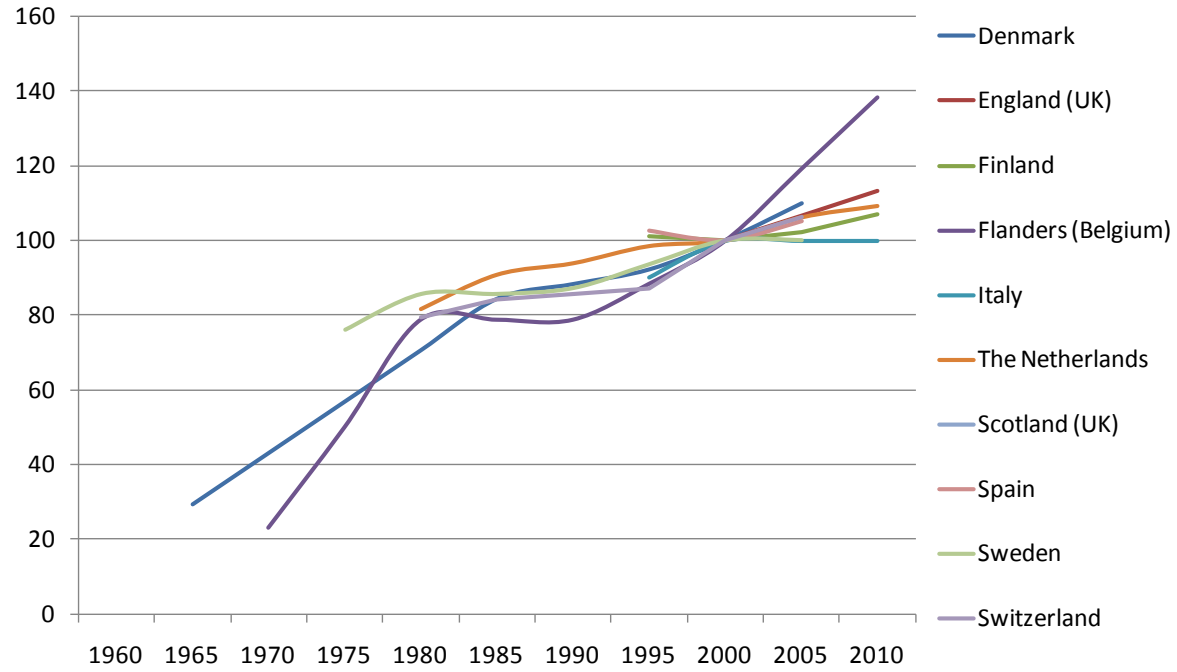


The findings seem to suggest some association between the level of sport participation and gender equality in sports : countries with high levels of sport participation tend to have a smaller gender gap in sport participation, whereas countries with lower levels of sport participation often report larger gender inequalities. This does not hold true for all countries. Northern Ireland for example, has a rather high rate of sport participation, but presents a large gender gap as well. Still, in most cases, the gender gap seems to be inversely related to the level of sport participation. Different explanations are possible here. For example, in countries where practicing sports is equally popular among men and women, overall participation is likely to be higher, due to a higher participation rate of women. However, other factors possibly play a role as well. Common influencing factors might be at play. For example, higher levels of prosperity (and/or perhaps more extensive social protection) might be associated both with a higher overall gender equality (f.i. in terms of available leisure time) and with higher levels of awareness of the importance of physical activity. Yet, further research is needed to investigate this relationship.

Given that sport is a societal phenomenon, influenced by the socio-cultural context in which it is taking place, sport participation varies considerably over time. Taking a time trend perspective,

based on the first phase of the fact sheets[14], it is striking to see that sport participation has risen considerably in virtually all countries over the last decennia (Figure 3.12)[15]. For some countries, mainly Italy and Sweden, sport participation seems to be stagnating now, whereas in other countries or regions, such as England, Finland or Flanders, sport participation is still continues on the rise. Remarkably, none of the countries/regions under study show a decreasing pattern.

Figure 3.12 *Evolution in sport participation (% 2000 = index 100)*



2.2.2 Club sport participation

With regard to club sport participation, Denmark seems to lead the way, with a club sport participation level of over forty percent of the total population. Denmark is followed by the Netherlands and France, where three to four citizens out of ten take part in club sport. In the research of Hover et al. (2010), however, based on the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2010a), the Netherlands were found to have the highest club sport participation (27 percent). Also in the study of Van Bottenburg et al. (2005), based on the *European Social Survey*

[14] This implies that no age restrictions were adopted. Consequently, for some countries, only adults are taken into account, whereas other countries focus on youngsters, or a combination of both (see Figure 2.5).

[15] For this graph, for most countries, a year is taken as the reference period for sport participation. However, as mentioned earlier, the definition of sport participation differs across countries. Therefore, when interpreting this graph, one should compare the evolutions rather than the absolute levels of sport participation across the different countries.

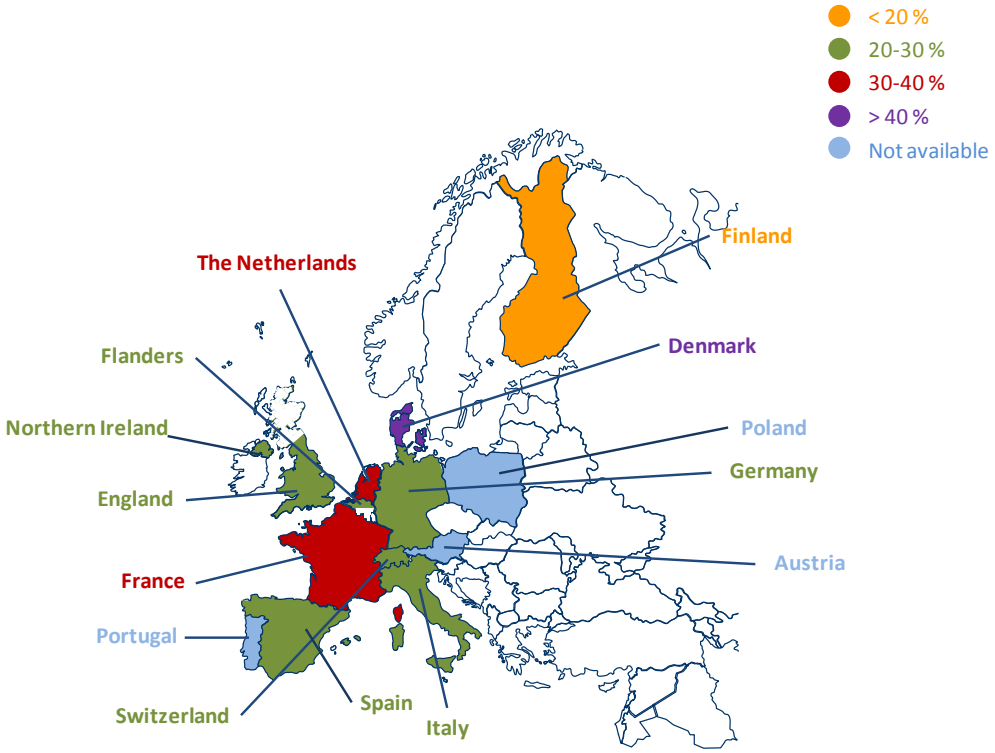
(2002), the Netherlands narrowly surpasses Denmark in terms of club sport participation. Based on analyses on the Eurobarometer survey 72.3 (2010), presented in Chapter 4 of this volume, the top three of club sport participation is formed by the Netherlands (1), Denmark (2) and France (3).

It is not entirely clear in which European countries the lowest club sport participation rates can be found. Based on the fact sheets, Finland comes out as the country with the lowest club sport participation level: less than one in five Finnish citizens aged 15-64 state to be an active member of a sports club. There is no information available on Austria, Poland and Portugal. In the study of Van Bottenburg et al. (2005), however, Poland and Portugal still had a lower score than Finland, whereas Austria was situated somewhere in the middle.[16] In the study of Van Bottenburg and colleagues, as well as in our findings from the analyses based on the Eurobarometer survey, presented in Chapter 4, Spain and Italy appear to be below Finland in terms of club sport participation, whereas from the fact sheets, it appears that not only England, Flanders, Germany, Northern Ireland and Switzerland, but also Italy and Spain can be situated in the middle, with a club sport participation of twenty to thirty percent. In other words, based on the fact sheets, the figures for club sport participation in Italy (22%) and Spain (31%) are substantially higher than based on the *European Social Survey* (see Van Bottenburg et al., 2005) or the *Eurobarometer survey* (see Chapter 4).

It is interesting to note that a high monthly or weekly sport participation rate is not necessarily followed by a high rate of club sport participation. The clearest example is Finland. This country is a frontrunner with regard to general sport participation, but relatively few people are member of a sports club. Also in Germany and Switzerland, the level of club sport participation is rather low, compared to the degree of overall sport participation. This is in line with earlier findings from Hover et al. (2010). This finding provides an interesting argument for questioning the European Sport Model (Arnaut, 2006; European Commission, 1999b). It illustrates that there can be a large grass roots sport participation, independently of club sport participation.

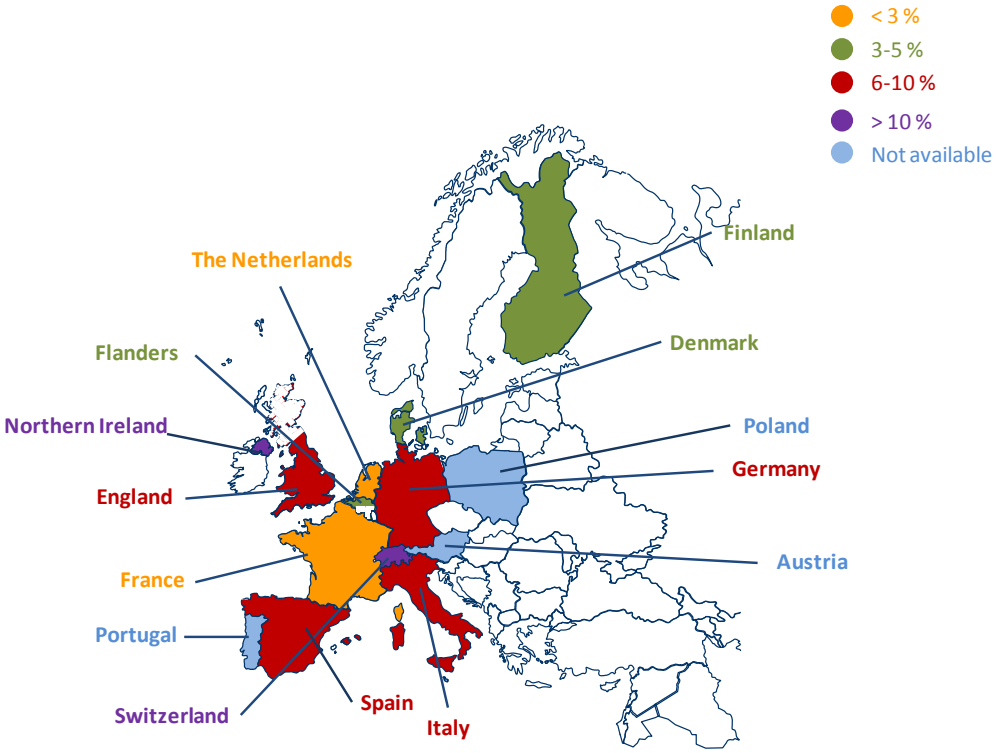
[16] However, as shown in Chapter 4, at the European level, other countries such as Greece, Hungary, Malta and Romania score even lower with regard to club sport participation.

Figure 3.13 *Club sport participation, in percentage of the total population (% 2000 = index 100)*



As shown above, men tend to participate less than women in sports. Also with regard to club sport, a gender gap can be observed (Figure 3.14). The gender gap in club sport participation is the highest in Switzerland and Northern Ireland, where it amounts to more than ten percent (thirteen and sixteen percent respectively). In the Netherlands and France, club sport participation is the most egalitarian. In these two countries, club sport is almost equally attractive to women as to men; the gender gap is less than three percent. Also in Finland, Denmark and Flanders, the gender gap is rather low (three to five percent).

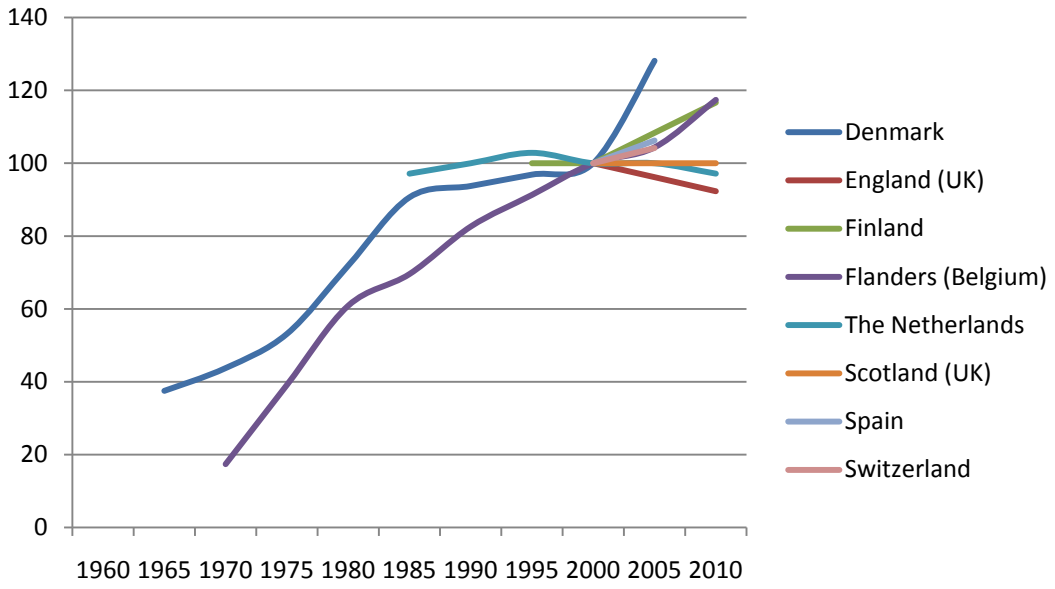
Figure 3.14 *Gender gap in club sport participation, in percentages (male > female)*



The findings of the UK SPORT study (1999) suggested that the gender gap was more important for competitive and/or organised sports, as compared to sports participation in general, at least for the countries under study. This tendency is not confirmed by the current findings, based on the fact sheets. Overall, the gender gap is not systematically higher for club sport participation as compared to general sport participation. Switzerland is the only exception here. Yet, it is possible that the gender gap is higher for competitive sports. This, however, cannot be verified from the fact sheets.

When comparing over time, the evolution of club sport participation shows a large variation among different countries (Figure 3.15). In contrast to general sport participation, there is no common trend to be observed. Five countries (regions) - Denmark, Finland, Flanders, Spain and Switzerland - show a rise in club sport participation rates, whereas in England, and to a lesser extent in the Netherlands, a negative trend can be observed. Scotland shows a stable pattern of club sport participation over the years. This implies that the overall observed rise in sport participation cannot always be explained by a rise in club sport.

Figure 3.15 *Evolution in club sport participation (% 2000 = index 100)*



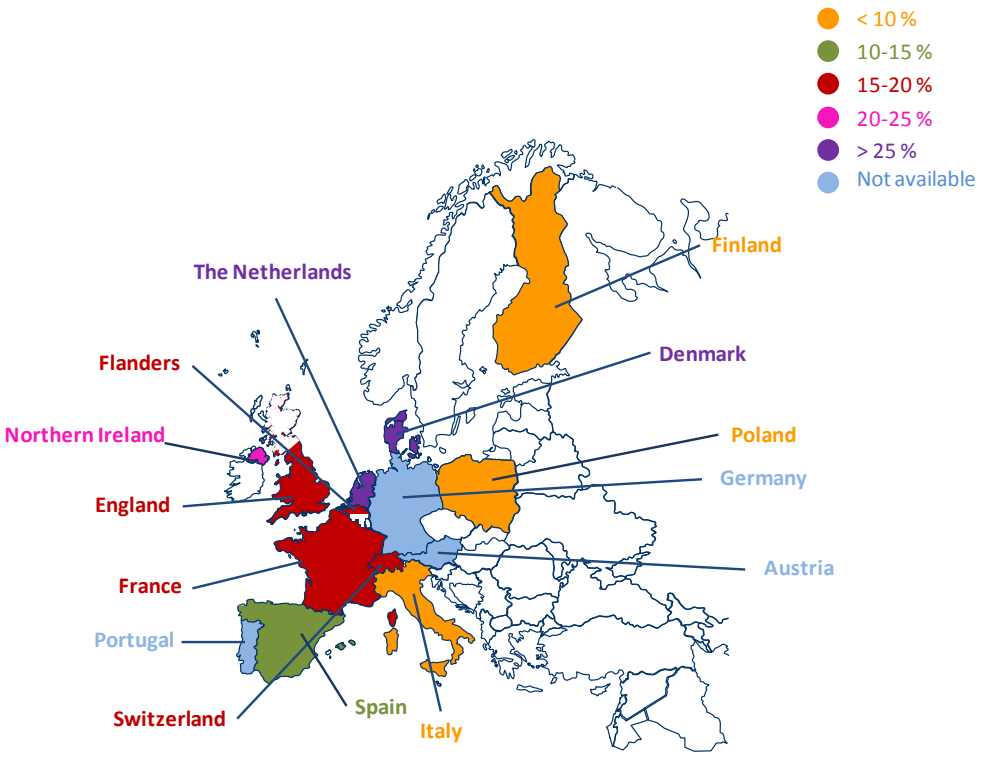
2.2.3 Competitive sport participation

Denmark and the Netherlands present the highest share of the population active in competitive sports. Indeed, in these countries, more than one citizen out of four (aged 15-64) takes part in competitive sports (Figure 3.16). These are also countries with a high level of club sport participation. Also in Northern Ireland, the share of the population taking active part in competition sport is relatively high (20-25%). The lowest participation levels for competitive sports are found in Finland, Italy and Poland (less than ten percent). England, Flanders, France, Spain and Switzerland occupy an intermediate position.

The picture of Finland emerging from the fact sheets, i.e. a country with high levels of frequent sport participation, but mainly outside of organised and/or competitive sport settings, is fully in line with the findings of the UK SPORT study (1999). Here too, Finland stood out as 'the best pupil of the class'[17] in terms of intensive sport participation, whereas its score on club sport participation and competitive sport participation was found to be low. This implies that Finland has a strong culture of non-organised, or at least non-traditionally organised sport practice.

[17] Compared to Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Figure 3.16 *Competitive sport participation, in percentage of the total population*



2.2.4 Sport preferences

Interestingly, there are important similarities with regard to sport preferences between the countries under study. As demonstrated in Table 3.5, when comparing the top five of most popular sports, a similar list of sports occurs. For example, running appears in the top five of all twelve countries that provided information about the popularity of sports, with the exception of Spain. Also swimming is a very popular sport in Europe: it is included in the top five of all countries, except from Finland. Running and swimming are closely followed by cycling, which is mentioned in ten countries. Cycling does not belong, however, to the most popular sports in Denmark, nor Northern Ireland. Finally, also fitness and walking are often mentioned, by nine and eight countries respectively. This is congruent with earlier research findings: based on data by the Eurobarometer data (1999), Van Bottenburg et al. (2005) identified walking (1), cycling (2), swimming (3-4), 'keep fit' (3-4) and football (5) as most popular sports. Running was not part of the top five of most popular sports in this study, but was only to be found in ninth place. However, given the international boom in running sport (see Scheerder & Van Bottenburg, 2009), it is not surprising that running has climbed up the popularity ladder. Indeed, since the end of the previous century, a 'second running wave' is taking place (see Scheerder, 2007b; Scheerder et al., 2007; Van Bottenburg, 2006; Van Bottenburg et al., 2006). Based

on ISSP data for 2007, Hover et al. (2010) found walking and going to the gym as most popular sporting activities.

The comparison of preferred sports leads to a second important observation. Apart from the recurrence of the same sports, it should also be noted that citizens of all countries under study have mainly expressed preferences for individual sports, rather than team sports or duo sports[18].

Another common feature of the most popular sports is their emphasis on fitness and health enhancement.

Table 3.5. *Top five of most popular sports, per country*

Country / Region	1	2	3	4	5
Austria	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	Walking	Running	Fitness	Aerobics	Swimming
England (UK)	Gym	Swimming	Football	Cycling	Athletics / running
Finland	Walking	Cycling	Gym / weight exercise	Cross-country skiing	Jogging
Flanders	Running	Recreational cycling	Swimming	Fitness	Walking
France	Swimming	Cycling	Pétanque / bowling	Walking & trekking	Running / jogging
Germany	Cycling	Running	Fitness	Swimming	Gymnastics
Italy	Fitness / aerobics / gymnastics	Football	Swimming	Cycling	Running / jogging
the Netherlands	Swimming	Cycling	Fitness / aerobics	Running	Walking
Northern Ireland (UK)	Swimming / diving	Walking	Exercise bike / running machine / spinning class	Jogging	Dance
Poland	Cycling	Jogging / walking	Swimming	Football	Volleyball
Portugal[19]	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	Swimming	Football	Cycling	Fitness	Mountain-eering
Switzerland	Cycling	Hiking / walking	Swimming	Downhill skiing	Running / jogging

[18] Duo sports are sports which require at least one opponent. Duo sports are divided in combat sports on the one hand (martial arts, wrestling, …) and racquet ball games on the other (badminton, tennis, …). Team sports, such as basketball, (beach) volley, football and handball, require at least two opponents. Moreover, team sports are characterised to a larger extent by features as competition, organisation, and the like.

[19] We do not have information on sport preferences in Austria. The top five of Portugal was not included in the table either, since the information dates from 1998. At the time, the top five of most popular sports were football (1), swimming (2), athletics (running/walking) (3), fitness activities (4) and gymnastics (5).

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, a comparative analysis of sport participation across Europe has been presented, based on a fact sheet approach. This approach allowed circumventing the habitual trade-off between comparability and the high quality of national data. From the analysis, we can conclude that there are rather large disparities in terms of sport participation within Europe. The results confirm the geographical divide in terms of sport participation, which has been found in earlier research (see Gratton et al., 2011; UK Sport, 1999; Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a; 2010b). Overall, Nordic countries are found to score higher in terms of sport participation, as compared to southern European countries. Interestingly, sport participation has augmented in all countries under study during the last decades. This should stem policy makers positive. Moreover, in most countries, sport participation continues to be on the rise. Nevertheless, sport participation is still socially stratified: in virtually all countries, a gender gap in terms of sport participation could be identified, with women participating less in sports as compared to men.[20] The size of this gender gap, however, differs largely between the studied countries.

Concerning club sport participation, Denmark, France and the Netherlands could be identified as being 'best pupils of the class'. Finland, on the other hand, has a low score on club sport participation. The case of Finland illustrates that high sport participation is not necessarily associated with high levels of club sport participation, indicating the popularity of non-organised and informal sport activities.

With regard to sport preferences, it is striking to observe the many similarities across Europe. The top five of most popular sports is very alike. In all countries under study, individual, health-enhancing sports such as running, swimming, cycling, fitness and walking come to the front as the most popular sports.

This chapter has also provided some insights into the practice of scientific data collection on sport participation. This meta-analysis has illustrated the large variety in approaches of data collection across Europe, which demonstrates the general difficulty of making cross-national comparisons on sport participation, based on currently available data.

[20] Denmark is the only exception here.

CHAPTER 4

MODERNISATION AND SPORT PARTICIPATION – BECK'S INDIVIDUALISATION THESIS

1. Individualisation and the consequences for sport

The process of individualisation is regarded by many as one of the most important socio-cultural developments of the post-war period. However, far from being a recent development, individualisation was already an issue with which the founding fathers of social science (i.e. Durkheim, Simmel, Weber) were concerned. Recently, however, some authors (the most important are Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash; see Beck et al., 1994) have claimed that the current process of individualisation differs in important aspects from the modernisation process that took place a century ago. Modernity is undergoing profound changes, with fundamental consequences for the social world, life forms and social interactions. It ultimately prompts the transition towards a new phase of (post-industrial) modernity of which individualisation is one of the defining characteristics, and which has been described as 'Risikogesellschaft' (Beck, 1986) or 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' (Schulze, 1993). Individualisation is both the consequence and the motor of processes of change in late-capitalist societies. This power to self-change is what Beck calls 'second' or 'reflexive modernity' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2000), and means that "*a change of industrial society which occurs surreptitiously and unplanned in the wake of normal, autonomised modernisation and with an unchanged, intact political and economic order implies the following: a radicalisation of modernity, which breaks up the premises and contours of industrial society and opens paths to another modernity"* (Beck, 1994: 3).

Although the overriding importance of individualisation for the present phase of modernity has been stressed by Beck and others, it is not easy to derive a clear definition of individualisation from their writings. Therefore, in the following, we try to infer some concrete elements from the discussion on individualisation. In sum, individualisation stands for social de-standardisation, for a de-structuring of social allocations. The development of the welfare state – with its increased standard of living, massive educational expansion, increased mobility, growing freedom and development of the tertiary sector – has replaced many traditional institutions like the family, the local community, the

church and social classes as the defining collectivity of people's identity (de Beer, 2007). In today's complex consumer societies, class consciousness or ritualised status passages become barely interpretable. When in last instance also love, partnership and family become involved in the modernisation process, the actors can no longer trust on tradition, but instead have to organize individual life courses and are self-responsible for the composition of their biography (Schwier, 2003). The de-structuring of traditional institutions thus prompts people towards a self-directed way of living. According to Müller (1992: 33), to a considerable extent, *"eine Biographisierung des Handelns und Erlebens"* is taking place, as *"für Flexibilität und Kreativität, die neuen Gütespiegel eines guten Lebens, [es gibt] noch keine Katechismen"*. Each individual is searching for identity, self-development and personal joy at his/her own risk, and appearing conflicts (e.g., an unhappy love or unemployment) are largely interpreted as personal failures. The chances and obligations for the creation of a personal biography – and their associated social restrictions – thus contain 'riskante Freiheiten' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994).

Sport-related research has endorsed this individualisation theory almost without any reservations (Bette 1993; 1999) since throughout the second half of the 20th century, sport has changed considerably in character. The seemingly unrestrained growth of mass sport, the increasing inclusion of women and elderly, the rapidly changing sport scenes, the increase in significance of a slim and healthy, individually fashioned body as well as the multitude of sport-related motives and interests are all indicators making the image of a de-structured sport in an individualised society extremely plausible. However, the growing literature on de-structuring and individualisation of sport activities lacks a firm empirical underpinning. Therefore, Baur & Braun (2001) have launched some assumptions that can be examined under the scrutiny of empirical data. The assumptions can be summarised with the following keywords: (i) sportisation of lifestyles, (ii) de-institutionalisation of sport participation, (iii) 'multiplication' of sporting contexts, and (iv) socio-structural de-structuring of sport participation. We will discuss each of these below.

First, with the increasing variability of the current sport scene, the chances have increased for people to find sport practices which they can coordinate with other affairs (e.g., household, children, etc.) in quite individual combinations and incorporate in their lives. Since everyone can choose his/her own way of being involved in sport, many researchers assume that sport involvement has become a regular part of the daily life of people.

Second, in the course of individualisation in postmodern societies, institutions and organisations have lost their dominating force and people are increasingly participating in sport in a more informal way. Apart from club-based sport organisations (which still remain an important cornerstone for the practice of sport in Europe), people increasingly began to practice sport in a more spontaneous and

individualised fashion, with as a result that jogging, cycling or skateboarding in the streets, badminton in the parks and volleyball on the beach – later followed by fitness and aerobics at home or in the gyms - all became part of the extensive package of practiced sport available. These offer more 'individualistic sport opportunities' because people can arrange their informal sport activities themselves and integrate them into their lives, giving them more flexibility.

Third, the pluralised sport culture offers a multitude of opportunities so that people can arrange their sport activities themselves, compatible with their own individual lifestyle and consistent with their own interests. The *homo optionis* in post-traditional societies is forced to create a 'do-it-yourself biography' and the 'sport hopping patchwork sport player', playing badminton in a sport club, going to the fitness club for power training, and going surfing in the weekend, etc. seems to become the new prototype (Schwier, 2003). With the expanding sporting options, the concentration on a single sporting context (e.g., the sport club) is given up in favour of more varied contexts.

Fourth, the disintegration of socio-structural and socio-cultural differentiations are considered typical in individualised societies. Also in the field of sport it is assumed that clearly defined social differences (e.g., age, gender, educational attainment, etc.) tend to disappear. While it was once not perceived as appropriate for, for instance, (elderly) women to take part in sport and exercise, throughout the course of the 20th century, the behavioural norms liberalised and sporting behaviour became a positively valued phenomenon (Nagel, 2003). Nowadays, sport has become an integral part of our society and seems to have perpetuated all social groups.

In this chapter, we will examine each of the above assumptions within a cross-national, European Union context. However, although it endeavours to remain founded upon common values and principles, the European Union does not wipe out the historical, social and institutional peculiarities of individual member states. Even though all member states can be classified as post-modern societies, their developmental paths are highly influenced by their unique cultural, political or environmental characteristics. This proposition - known as the *divergence hypothesis* of modernisation theory (see Horowitz, 1966; Moore, 1966; Odum, 1971) - stands in opposition to the idea that socio-economic, cultural and political development is a uni-linear process taking on almost identical forms in all societies with regard to various characteristics such as labour force structure, level of development, technology, urbanisation level, etc. - known as the *convergence hypothesis* of modernisation theory (see Inkeless & Rossi, 1956; Lenski & Lenski, 1987; Rostow, 1960). In line with the divergence hypothesis, we expect individualisation processes to have different consequences in each of the European Union member states, depending upon their degree of modernisation. Unfortunately, modernisation is a key concept on which sociologists will never fully agree. In general, it refers to social changes that occur when traditional societies transform into modern ones through

subprocesses such as industrialisation, urbanisation, democratisation, bureaucratisation, etc. Therefore, some authors stress the development of industrialisation and technology (Nolan & Lensky, 2008), while others emphasize the greater division of labour and the accompanying increase in interdependency (Elias, 2000) or focus on urbanisation (Poggi, 1990). In this chapter, we will not go into this debate, but will instead look at several measurable aspects of modernisation and their relationship with sport participation; see also Van Tuyckom (2011).

2. Data and methods

2.1 Measures

Sport-related variables. The dependent variables are self-reported measures of (i) sport participation in general, (ii) sport participation in fitness centres, (iii) sport participation in clubs, (iv) sport participation in parks or out in the nature, and (v) uni-context or multi-context sport participation. They are all derived from the most recent Eurobarometer survey in which sport participation was assessed. *Eurobarometer 72.3: Sport and physical activity* (European Commission, 2010a) was carried out in October 2009 at the request of the European Commission and covers the population of the respective nationalities of the European Union member states, aged 15 years and older. A multi-stage, random probability sample design is applied and all interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes. Data on individuals aged 18 and older were selected (*N*=26 013), yielding at least 477 (Cyprus) and at most 1 512 (Germany) conducted interviews (European Commission, 2010a). Sport participation in general is assessed by means of the question 'How often do you exercise or play sport?' Answer categories were: 5 times a week or more, 3 to 4 times a week, 1 to 2 times a week, 1 to 3 times a month, less often, and never. For analytical purposes, the original question is dichotomised with respondents answering 'never' defined as not participating in sport, and all others as sport participants. As for the context of sport participation, respondents are asked where they engage in sport. 'In a fitness centre', 'in a club' and 'in a park, out in the nature' were among the answer categories. In addition, a variable is created measuring whether respondents were participating in sport in one or in multiple contexts.

Modernisation-related variables. A first set of modernisation indicators are economic variables, i.e. GDP per capita, public sector expenditure on health, students in tertiary education, and unemployment rate. A second set are variables related to urbanisation, i.e. urban population, population density, total passenger cars, paved roads, and forest area. A third set of modernisation indicators are policy variables, i.e. voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, control of corruption, and an average governance

indicator. For all 27 European member states, common indicators for modernisation were selected from international databases of health, economic, and other governmental organisations. Summary statistics (median, minimum, maximum) and sources for the different indicators can be found in Table 4.1 (see also Van Tuyckom, 2011).

Table 4.1 *Description and summary statistics (median, minimum, and maximum) of the variables included with their sources (all year 2005)*

Indicator	Source	Description	Median	Min	Max
Economic variables					
GDP	HFA	Gross domestic product, US$ per capita	22 358,0	3 109	61 752
Public sector expenditure on health	HFA	Public sector expenditure on health as % of total government expenditure	13,6	6,0	19,2
Students in tertiary education	UNECE	Includes post-secondary education leading to an award not equivalent to a First university degree, a first university degree or equivalent, or a post-graduate university degree	38,6	5,8	58,9
Unemployment rate	HFA	Unemployment rate in %	7,7	4,4	17,7
Urbanisation variables					
Urban population	HFA	% of urban population	69,1	51,0	97,2
Population density	HFA	Average population density per km²	108,4	15,5	1261,0
Total passenger cars	UNECE	Passenger vehicles (per 1000 population)	455,4	149,1	644,4
New passenger cars	UNECE	New passenger car registrations (per 1000 population)	29,5	0,3	93,9
Paved roads	WDI	Paved roads (% of total roads)	98	23	100
Forest area	WDI	Forest area in km² (% of total area)	32,1	0,9	66,5
Policy variables					
Voice and accountability	WGI	Extent to which citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media	1,2	0,4	1,8
Political stability	WGI	Likelihood that government will be destabilised or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and Terrorism	0,8	0,2	1,6
Government effectiveness	WGI	Quality of public services, civil service and degree of its independence from political pressures, quality of policy formulation and implementation, and credibility of government's commitment to such policies	1,1	-0,1	2,2
Regulatory quality	WGI	Ability of government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development	1,2	0,2	1,8
Rule of law	WGI	Extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by rules of society, in particular quality of contract enforcement, property rights, police and courts, as well as likelihood of crime and violence	1,1	-0,2	2,0
Control of corruption	WGI	Extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as 'capture' of the state by elites and private interests	1,0	-0,2	2,4
Average governance indicator	WGI	Calculated as the arithmetic mean of the six average indicators for each country	1,1	0,0	1,9

Control variables. The individual-level variables age, educational attainment (i.e. age when finished education) and gender are introduced to control for cross-national differences in the composition of sport participation-determining characteristics.

2.2 Analysis

The effects of national-level characteristics on individual-level outcomes can be conveniently evaluated via the use of a hierarchical linear model (HLM), a statistical procedure enabling net effects to be estimated at one level of analysis while controlling for variation at another level. This procedure thus enables to estimate country-level effects while controlling for cross-country variations in the composition of individual-level characteristics (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). For instance, the proportion of women finished school after the age of 21 might exceed the proportion of men finished school after the age of 21 in some countries, but falls below in others. Differences in the average gap in sport participation across countries may partly reflect variations in the educational gender gap. By controlling for education in level 1, we eliminate this possible effect, i.e. the sport participation levels of males and females with the same level of education in all countries are compared.

Before estimating a two-level model, it is appropriate to ask whether in fact significant variation in the dependent variable across contextual units (here countries) exists and, if so, what proportion of the total variance is accounted for by the country level. To gauge the magnitude of variation between countries in sport participation, it is useful to begin by estimating an unconditional or empty model, that is, a model with no predictors at either level (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This produces point estimates for the grand mean as well as provides information on the variance at the individual and country-levels. The individual-level model is thus simply

$$(sportsparticipation)_{ij} = \beta_{0j} \quad (1)$$

and the country-level model is

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \nu_{0j}, \nu_{0j} \square N(0, \tau_{00})\rho \,. \quad (2)$$

This model is equivalent to a one-way ANOVA with random effects. Here γ_{00} is the average log-odds of sport participation across the 27 European countries (grand mean), while ν_{0j} is the variance between countries in country-average log-odds of sport participation. The results from the empty model for sport participation in general are γ_{00} =0.362 (se=0.121), $\hat{\tau}_{00}$ =0.603 (se=0.777). Thus, for a country with a random effect ν_{0j} =0, the expected log-odds of participation in sport is 0.362, corresponding to an odds of exp(0.362)=1.437 or a probability of exp(0.362)/1+exp(0.362)=.590. This

result shows that on average, six in ten adult citizens of the 27 included European member states are participating in sport. The same procedure can be done for the other dependent variables, yielding the following results: 10.32% of European adults participates in sport in the context of a fitness centre, 7.80% in the context of a sport club, and 50.29% in a park or out in the nature. In addition, 28.99% of the respondents takes part in sport in more than one context.

In addition, the results show that there exists statistically significant variance at the country-level, making it clear that the multilevel nature of sport participation should not be ignored. In order to understand how much of the overall variance in sport participation is attributable to either the individual or the country level, it is useful to calculate the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC)[1]. The ICC measures the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable that exists between countries. As noted in other research (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a), it is not surprising that the individual level accounts for a great deal when data are measured at the individual level, as in the case of the present study. Nonetheless, the proportion of the variance in participation in sport in general that exists between countries is very large: 15.44% (that is 100x0.603/(0.603+3.29)). Thus, 15% of the variance in general sport participation is between countries and 75% of the variance is at the individual level. The same procedure can be done for the other dependent variables, yielding the following ICC's: 15.71% for sport participation in the context of a fitness centre, 16.65% for sport participation in the context of a club, 10.55% for participation in a park or out in the nature, and 6.37% for participation in more than one context. These results is congruent with previous research into sport participation in Europe (Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a) and imply the need for more research aimed at explaining this cross-national variation.

Our two-level model can be represented by a set of equations, as follows:

$$(sportsparticipation)_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(men)_{ij} + \beta X + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (3)$$

At the individual level, the dependent variable is sport participation of individual *i* in country *j*, and β_{0j} is the intercept denoting the average sport participation level. 'Men' denotes whether the

[1] The intra-class correlation coefficient for linear multilevel models is obtained by the following formula: $\rho = \frac{\tau_{00}}{\tau_{00} + \sigma^2}$ where σ^2 is the individual-level variance. However, in nonlinear models, such as our Bernoulli model, this formula is less useful because the individual-level variance is heteroscedastic (Raudenbush & Bryk 2002). Snijders & Bosker (1999) describe an alternative definition of the ICC for nonlinear models as follows: $\rho = \frac{\tau_{00}}{\tau_{00} + \pi^2/3}$. This definition treats the dependent variable as an underlying latent continuous variable following a logistic distribution of which the variance is $\pi^2/3$.

individual is male (coded as 1) or female (coded as 0), and its coefficient β_{1j} represents the average gap in sport participation between men and women. The vector X denotes other individual-level explanatory variables (i.e. educational attainment and age), β denotes their coefficients, and ε_{ij} is the error term. This equation allows the intercept, β_{0j}, and the gender effect, β_{1j}, to vary across countries (i.e. to be random) while the effects of all the other variables are constrained to be the same across countries (i.e. to be fixed). At the second level, country-level characteristics (in this example only GDP per capita) explain these random effects, as presented in equation 4:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_0(GDPpercapita) + \nu_{0j} \quad (4)$$

In equation 4, β_{0j} denotes countries' average sport participation level, 'GDP per capita' is the Gross Domestic Product, in US$ per capita, and ν_{0j} is the error term.

All equations are separately estimated. Since the dependent variables are binary, the models we estimate are hierarchical generalised linear models (HGLM). Specifically, we estimate Bernoulli models with a logit link function (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002: 292-296). The models presented here are estimated using the software Hierarchical Linear Models for Windows (version 6.08) developed by Raudenbush et al. (2000).

3. Results

3.1 Sportisation of lifestyles

Europeans nowadays are offered a differentiated sport culture in which they can put together their very own personal sport programs. Since so many choices exist, we would expect that the number of Europeans taking part in sport is very large. Turning to the results from Table 4.2, we notice, however, striking cross-national differences. Sweden emerges as having more people taking part in sport (93%) than any other European nation, followed by Finland (91%) and Denmark (79%). Besides the three Nordic countries, in six other member states, sport participation percentages exceed 65%: Slovenia (72%), Austria (71%), Ireland (70%), Belgium (69%), the Netherlands (68%) and Germany (65%). At the other end, Greece (30%), Bulgaria (36%), Portugal (40%), Hungary (40%) and Poland (43%) have the fewest citizens participating in sport.

3.2 De-institutionalisation of sport participation

Following the de-institutionalisation hypothesis, the described sport expansion would have to take place in favour of a variety of informal sport activities, i.e. in parks, out in the nature. Again, Table 4.2 shows striking differences with respect to the settings in which citizens in the different member states choose to exercise. Exercising at a fitness centre is most popular among Swedish respondents (27%), followed by those in the Netherlands (19%), Italy (18%), Finland (18%), Denmark (18%), Cyprus (17%) and Ireland (15%). Meanwhile, respondents in Hungary (2%), France (2%), Poland (3%), Lithuania (3%), Latvia (3%), Romania (4%), Slovenia (5%) and Estonia (5%) use fitness centres the least in the European Union. Sport clubs are particularly well used in the Netherlands (22%), Denmark (17%), France (16%), Germany (16%), Austria (14%), Ireland (13%), Luxembourg (13%), Belgium (13%) and Finland (12%), although they are not popular options in Greece (2%), Hungary (2%), Malta (2%), Romania (2%), Bulgaria (2%), Spain (2%) and Italy (3%). Finally, 84% of respondents in Slovenia say they exercise in parks or outdoors, followed by 79% of those in Finland, 68% in Estonia, and 66% in Denmark and 65% in Austria. In contrast, this form of exercise is least popular in Greece (28%), Romania (29%), Malta (31%), Lithuania (36%) and Hungary (37%).

3.3 'Multiplication' of sporting contexts

Those who want to keep up with 'trends' can no longer concentrate on one sport (or sporting context); variability is much more in demand. Sportisation has been associated with a multiplication of sport activities, meaning that Europeans get involved in different contexts. However, here again, Table 4.2 shows apparent cross-national differences across member states. In Finland, 49% of people say they take part in sport in two or more contexts, while 48% of Danish and 41% of Slovenian and 41% of Bulgarians say the same. Those countries with the smallest proportions of multi-context users are Italy (11%), Portugal (17%), Romania (17%), Malta (18%) and Belgium (19%).

Table 4.2 *Sport participation percentages for each of the 27 European Union member states (sorted by general sport participation level)*

	in general	**in a fitness centre**	**in a club**	**in a park, out in the nature**	**in 2 or more contexts**
Greece	30,2%	11,8%	1,70%	27,9%	25,0%
Bulgaria	36,2%	8,7%	2,40%	47,0%	40,5%
Portugal	39,6%	11,4%	5,00%	41,6%	16,8%
Hungary	40,0%	2,0%	1,90%	37,2%	21,2%
Poland	42,8%	2,6%	4,60%	45,0%	21,0%
Italy	45,7%	17,8%	3,40%	40,5%	10,5%
Romania	47,6%	3,6%	2,20%	29,1%	17,3%
Cyprus	48,2%	16,9%	3,90%	46,5%	26,9%
Latvia	51,8%	3,3%	4,10%	52,2%	25,9%
Lithuania	52,9%	2,8%	4,10%	35,9%	30,1%
Estonia	54,4%	5,0%	8,00%	67,9%	38,0%
Spain	56,3%	10,4%	2,40%	53,9%	33,3%
Malta	58,5%	6,6%	2,10%	30,6%	17,9%
Czech Republic	59,6%	10,3%	4,80%	60,2%	34,0%
United Kingdom	61,3%	11,7%	9,40%	43,2%	24,2%
Slovakia	61,4%	12,4%	4,20%	47,5%	30,7%
France	62,4%	2,2%	15,80%	52,9%	28,9%
Luxembourg	63,3%	7,5%	12,70%	57,9%	23,9%
Germany	65,3%	11,3%	15,60%	61,9%	33,1%
the Netherlands	68,2%	18,8%	22,10%	42,6%	32,6%
Belgium	69,3%	6,6%	12,60%	39,1%	18,8%
Ireland	70,4%	15,4%	13,10%	44,7%	26,3%
Austria	70,9%	12,4%	13,90%	64,5%	33,5%
Slovenia	72,2%	4,5%	4,90%	84,2%	41,2%
Denmark	79,2%	17,5%	17,10%	66,6%	48,4%
Finland	91,2%	17,6%	11,60%	78,9%	48,7%
Sweden	93,3%	27,4%	6,50%	57,3%	32,7%

3.4 Socio-structural de-structuring of sport participation

With the 'pluralisation' of sport culture and the increasing availability of options, opportunities to take part in sport have opened up for everyone. This has led some researchers to state that social differences in sport involvement are levelled out. An analysis of the socio-demographic data reveals strong differences with respect to overall sport participation (see Table 4.3). First, men take more part in sport than women (OR 1,718 with $p \leq .001$). Second, there is a strong link between education and sport participation: higher levels of education go hand in hand with higher sport participation levels. Third, sport participation steadily decreases with age (OR ranging from 0,706 to 0,377 with $p \leq .001$). Moreover, the same conclusions can be drawn for club-sport participation. Contrary to our assumptions, one can thus not recognize in sport, that socio-structural differentiation criteria have

become irrelevant. The pluralisation of the sport culture does not automatically imply the leveling out of tendencies in sport involvement in general or in sport clubs. However, when looking at more individualised, informal ways of participating in sport, the picture changes. For participation in fitness centres, for instance, Table 4.3 shows that less male than female respondents participate (OR 0,117 with $p \leq .001$). However, fitness centre participation also increases with education and decreases with age. With respect to sport participation in a park or out in the nature, education is no longer significant. Moreover, here again, women exceed their male counterparts (OR 0,632 with $p \leq ..01$). In addition, people are more likely to use outdoor spaces as they grow older (OR ranging from 1,278 to 1,950 with $p \leq .001$).

Table 4.3 *Results of multilevel Bernoulli regression models, individual- and country-level effects*

	in general	**in a fitness centre**	**in a club**	**in a park, out in the nature**	**in 2 or more contexts**
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL EFFECTS					
Intercept	1.178***	0.117***	0.081***	0.632**	0.416***
Men	1.282***	0.899*	1.516***	1.017	0.945
Educational attainment (ref.cat.=finished school younger than age 15)					
Finished school between age 16 and 19	1.705***	1.862***	1.348*	1.022	1.106
Finished school after age 20	3.119***	2.995***	2.049***	1.053	1.324***
Still studying	3.826***	2.567***	1.833**	0.896	1.610***
Age (ref.cat.=18-24)					
25-34	0.739**	0.794**	0.706***	1.278***	0.963
35-44	0.547***	0.579***	0.581***	1.536***	0.928
45-54	0.414***	0.412***	0.459***	1.541***	0.888
55-64	0.328***	0.292***	0.454***	1.909***	0.782*
65+	0.213***	0.227***	0.377***	1.950***	0.695***
COUNTRY-LEVEL EFFECTS					
Economic variables					
GDP per capita (log)	1.693***	1.682**	2.059***	1.194	1.057
Public expenditure on health	1.112***	1.033	1.163***	1.024	1.001
Students in tertiary education	0.997	0.988	0.983	1.007	1.009
Unemployment rate	0.946*	0.928	0.938	1.014	1.010
Urbanisation variables					
Urban population	1.019	1.011	1.025*	0.994	0.998
Population density	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.999***	0.999***
Total passenger cars	1.002*	1.003*	1.003***	1.001	1.000
Paved roads	1.000	1.000	1.008	1.001	0.999
Forest area	1.013	1.004	0.993	1.023***	1.010
Policy variables					
Voice and accountability	3.901***	2.642**	6.182***	1.584	1.337
Political stability	3.622***	1.655	2.547**	1.748	1.365
Government effectiveness	2.699***	1.864**	3.207***	1.531***	1.351
Regulatory quality	3.319**	2.828***	5.080***	1.779*	1.541
Rule of law	2.409***	1.743**	2.869***	1.394*	1.223
Control of corruption	2.284***	1.621**	2.525***	1.436**	1.297
Average governance indicator	3.345***	2.086**	4.040***	1.652**	1.396
INTRACLASS CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS	15.44%	15.71%	16.65%	10.55%	6.37%

3.5 Role of modernisation

First, the findings regarding national economic characteristics suggest that the probability to take part in sport is significantly higher in countries with higher levels of GDP per capita (OR 1,693 with $p \leq .001$), public expenditure on health (OR 1,112 with $p \leq .001$) and a lower employment rate (OR 0,946 with $p \leq .05$). These results are consistent with previous research showing that the percentage of the population that never participates in sport is related to the degree of affluence in the country concerned (Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom, 2011). In sum, the sportisation of lifestyle thus seems to depend upon the country's level of affluence. Sport participation in a fitness centre is influenced by GDP per capita (OR 1,682 with $p \leq .01$), participation in a sport club by GDP per capita (OR 2,059 with $p \leq .001$) and public expenditure on health (OR 1,163 with $p \leq .001$). Particularly interesting, however, is that none of the economic variables is associated with sport participation in a park or out in the nature and sport participation in multiple contexts. When taking more individualised features of sport participation (de-institutionalisation and 'multiplication' of sporting contexts) into account, it thus seems that a country's wealth is no longer determining.

Second, there is growing evidence that urbanisation affects the levels of sport participation (Van Tuyckom, 2011). In this study, we used the percentage of the urban population, the population density, the forest area, the number of paved roads and the number of total passenger cars as proxy measures of a country's level of urbanisation, assuming that the more (densely populated) urban regions a country has, the higher the sport participation rates will be. Our results, however, only suggest that countries with a higher number of passenger cars have higher sport participation rates (OR 1,002 with $p \leq .05$), providing only weak evidence for an association between urbanisation and general sport participation.

The total number of passenger cars is also the sole determinant for sport participation in fitness centres (OR 1,003 with $p \leq .05$). Participation in sport clubs, on the other hand, is associated with the total number of passenger cars (OR 1,003 with $p \leq .001$), as well as the urban population (OR 1,025 with $p \leq .05$). Sport participation in a park or out in the nature, on the other hand, seems to have different determinants, in particular population density and forest area: the less dense and the more forest area, the more sport participation (OR 0,999 and OR 1,023 with $p \leq .001$). Moreover, population density is also related to sport participation in multiple contexts: the less dense, the more sport participation in two or more different contexts (OR 0,999 with $p \leq .001$). So when taking more individualised features of sport participation (de-institutionalisation and 'multiplication' of sporting contexts), it seems that population density as a proxy for urbanisation, does matter.

Third, we included six aggregated indicators addressing different aspects of the quality of a country's governance. Significant associations were observed for all six indicators with sport participation in general, participation in a fitness centre and participation in a sport club. Participation in a park or out in the nature, on the other hand, is related with only four of the indicators. Moreover, none of the indicators is related with sport participation in multiple contexts, suggesting that governance effectiveness does not matter in this regard. Although the complexity of the indicators makes it difficult to interpret the results, the findings in Table 4.3 suggest higher levels of sport participation in general, in fitness centres, in sport clubs and (although in a slightly lesser degree) in a park or out in the nature in countries that can be described, among others, by more independent media and a higher capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies. A better stability and higher effectiveness of a government thus seem to provide better opportunities for policy makers to focus on key public health problems such as physical activity.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we investigated sport participation levels across the 27 European Union member states within a multilevel framework, departing from Beck's individualisation thesis and with a special focus on the role of modernisation with respect to the assumed (i) sportisation of lifestyles, (ii) de-institutionalisation of sport participation, (iii) 'multiplication' of sporting contexts, and (iv) socio-structural de-structuring of sport participation. We conclude that the assumed *sportisation of lifestyles* is still not reserved for everyone. Moreover, all assumptions appear to differ substantially across countries. Our second research question asked to what extent the different assumptions vary according to the national degree of modernisation. Our findings indicate that modernisation indeed contributes to cross-national differences in sport-related outcomes. In particular, the results show that living in countries with higher levels of GDP per capita has positive repercussions to both sport participation in general and participation in fitness centres. However, when looking at individualised features of sport participation (de-institutionalisation and 'multiplication' of sporting contexts), a country's level of affluence is no longer determining. However, population density as a proxy of urbanisation pops up as a determining factor (the less urbanisation, the more sport participation out in the nature, and the more participation in two or more different sporting contexts. Finally, also a good quality of a country's governance seems to be beneficial for people's sport participation. The interpretation of the different indicators is, however, less straightforward.

Unfortunately, the interrelatedness of several of the national level indicators prevented us from fully separating the influences of several modernisation variables by simultaneous estimation in a single

model. Nevertheless, this study has meaningful implications for sport participation research using a multilevel framework and for research on sport and individualisation in general. First, the results suggest that sport participation levels vary considerably across countries and depending on their degree of modernisation. This implies that conclusions on the relationship between individualisation and sport cannot be generalised to different populations on the basis of single country studies. This is consistent with the divergence hypothesis of modernisation theory (Horowitz, 1966; Moore, 1966; Odum, 1971). Second, our results show that the ways through which modernisation influences sport appear to be complex and highly dependent on the exact type of activity that is examined. Third, in order to test general hypotheses about the influence of national characteristics, distinguishing other indicators in addition to GDP per capita (as done by Van Bottenburg et al., 2005) has proved to be fruitful: the findings present a more comprehensive picture of the role of modernisation.

Future research should, however, deal with some limitations of the present study. First, unfortunately, our cross-sectional data did not allow us to analyse changes in sport participation over time. To adequately study how sport biographies in sport clubs, commercial sport providers or informal contexts develop and change against the background of societal modernisation processes, longitudinal data is necessary. Second, the modernisation indicators provide only part of the explanation for cross-national differences in sport participation. Future research should therefore also consider different forms of integration of sport and its organisations in the political constitution of a country, the way in which the parties involved in the system are co-ordinated, the complementary organisation of different ways of life, the legitimacy of social relations, the meaning and function of the family, the position of women, the integration of religion, the forms and institutions of socialisation and significance of sport, the employment and production structures, the varying provision of sporting facilities, etc. (see Camy et al., 2004; De Knop et al., 1996; Heinemann, 1999; 2003; Tokarski et al., 2009, among others). Nevertheless, the present study indicates that further investigation of national-level indicators may contribute to a better understanding of the cross-national differences - and their underlying mechanisms - in sport participation.

CHAPTER 5

A FLASH BACK AND A LOOK FORWARD – POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Sport is unmistakably part of the European identity and has a clear European dimension. Many sports are rooted in European soil and Europe is home to some of the larger international sporting competitions, such as the Champion's League, the Tour de France and Wimbledon. In addition Europe has a unique sport structure, with (voluntary) sport clubs as a solid base. With the European Union and the member states embracing the added value of sport, regardless of different historical developments and trajectories of sport within Europe (e.g. gymnastic tradition in Germany, school sport in England and traditional games and sports at the regional level, f.i. in the Basque Country, Flanders, Friesland or Scotland). This makes sport an interesting research topic on European level. In the previous chapters we have focused on the communalities and differences between European countries with regard to sport participation and to sport participation research as well as methodological issues of comparative studies. In this last chapter we bring together in coherence the outcomes of the previous chapters and formulate the policy implications of the study.

1. European sport policy

In the first chapter we have pointed out the similarities within Europe on the policy framework, the main actors involved in the organisation of sport and the orientation of sport practice. In this way, we introduced the Church model of sports, discussed the main subfields within the Rhineland sports model and referred to the different types of national sports systems. With regard to the policy framework it is evident that major steps have been taken in the last years. However, the European Sport for All Charter in 1975 (Council of Europe, 1975) was a starting point for many countries to embrace and institutionalise the idea of Sport for All. The Charter stresses that every individual has the right to participate in sport and that sport shall be encouraged as an important factor in human development. Even today many national policies are guided by this Sport for All idea.

Another milestone in the history of European sport policy is the Lisbon Treaty[26] (European Union, 2007) that entered into force in 2009. The ratification and adoption of the Lisbon Treaty gave the European Commission for the first time in history a soft competence on sport. Herewith the European Commission could develop guidelines and recommendations on sport, which allowed for more attention for sport policy. Prior to this Lisbon Treaty the 'White Paper on Sport' (Commission of the European Communities, 2007) has been important in creating possibilities for a knowledge based sport policy, with encouraging work on a *Sport Satellite Account* and paving the way for a Eurobarometer survey on *Sport and physical activity* in 2009 (European Commission, 2010a).

In 2011, in its communication 'Developing the European dimension in sport' (European Commission, 2011a), the European Commission expressed its conviction that in order to implement the sport provisions in the Lisbon Treaty, comparable EU-wide data on social and economic aspects of sport are very much required. While respecting the competences of individual member states, the European Commission beliefs that a sound European evidence base will support member states' actions, as well as help developing the sector. This calls for data and monitoring systems at European level.

The European Commission's viewpoints were confirmed in an EU Conference on Sport Statistics in March 2011[27]. Representatives, both from policy and research highlighted the demand for a European sport monitoring function to strengthen evidence-based policy making, and provided valuable ideas for its possible content. Monitoring (data collection and dissemination of outcomes) is essential both to policy development and to policy evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental aspects for an evidence-based sports policy.

The role of the European Union in terms of sport policy is restricted, as the principle of subsidiarity should be taken into account. The European Union puts certain topics on the agenda, for nations to use and implement to their own liking, and is seeking where action at the EU level can provide significant added value with regard to societal aspects of sport, sport and health and sport's economic dimension.

[26] see http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm
[27] Information about the conference: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/news/news1017_en.htm.

2. Sport participation

As a result of the alleged contribution of sport to society, health and economy, the most prominent target of sport policy is related to the sport participation rate. Building on the Sport for All idea, nations focus on increasing the levels of sport participation and physical activity for all groups in society. Nations differ however on sport participation rates and popularity of specific type of sports. These differences are a result of the history of a nation, the sport policy system and the sport policy making process as well as the nation's characteristics, like weather conditions or the presence (or absence) of mountains and water.

Different studies highlight differences in sport participation throughout Europe. In this report (see Chapter 3) we have presented two methods to compare sport participation rates in Europe: (1) based on national data, and (2) based on harmonised data. Both methods offer valuable possibilities for comparative studies on sport participation within Europe.

An example for harmonised data is the Eurobarometer survey 72.3 (European Commission, 2010a) in which 1 000 respondents per member state have answered to questions on sport and physical activity in one and the same study. This method is useful to compare static outcomes on sport participation between the member states. The national data method, on the other hand, is based on the outcomes of sport participation research conducted most recently per European country. Collecting the existing national datasets results in what we have called the country fact sheets approach in this report. This method is suitable for comparing the shape of the trend-lines between the European countries.

In addition, the factsheets also provide valuable insights in the practices of scientific data collection on sports participation in the 23 participating European countries. The collection of national factsheets with data characteristics offers, on a reasonable short term, a state of the art of sport participation research in Europe. This overview is therefore not only valuable with regard to the insight in the outcomes of sport participation and the interesting differences and similarities in the development of sport participation over time in 23 European countries. It also provides a valuable methodological insight in sport participation research in Europe. It could be worthwhile to walk further down this path and scrutinize the methodological differences and similarities and the possible impact on the outcomes of the study. The cooperation of experts out of so many countries should be treasured and further explored. This strong cooperation illustrates the power of the

MEASURE network[28], which was the initiator of this data gathering and which members provided most of the data. This way of data gathering has the advantage of being time efficient without having any costs for data collection. The method builds upon data that is already collected and regulates the dissemination of this data in such a way that it is valuable and feasible given the available resources. Unfortunately, the absence of resources can also be seen as a limitation to further explore the available data. Ideally MEASURE should be funded in some way to bring these factsheets a step further by conducting secondary analysis on the data, and contribute further to the knowledge on differences in sport participation.

So far, all the studies on sport participation in Europe (e.g. European Commission, 2010a; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; UK Sport, 1999; Van Bottenburg et al., 2005; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010a; Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010b) point to geographical differences for sport participation in Europe. In the previous chapters we have once more pointed out that the Nordic countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland and Sweden) – along with Switzerland – rank higher in terms of sport participation than the Southern European countries (e.g. Italy, Portugal and Spain). Similarly, central and eastern European countries tend to have lower sport participation rates than Western European countries.

Interesting to see is that the comparative studies not only point out differences between nations, but as well interesting similarities within Europe. For instance we see a recurrence of the same types of sport as most practiced, and in addition the European citizens in general seem to prefer individual sports over team sports or duo sports. More precisely, the active participation in non-organised recreational sports practices and so-called light sporting communities increasingly gained in popularity during the last decade.

However, despite all the aspirations and policy targets of governments in the last decades equal levels of sport participation between social groups still seems out of reach. Social differences in sport participation are stronger than assumed and for all countries it holds true that sport participation is still socially stratified. Governments have not been able to solve these differences over time and therefore it remains a challenging prospect to truly achieve the Sport for All objectives.

[28] For more information on MEASURE see www.measuresport.eu or Hoekman et al. (2010), Scheerder et al. (2010), Hoekman et al. (2011a).

3. Policy impact on differences in sport participation

It seems that Europe, as shown in the comparison in this report based on ISSP data, is one of the frontiers on sport. There is a notable higher sport participation in Europe than in other parts of the world. It could be argued that this high sport participation is due to the acknowledgement of the instrumental value of sport and the acceptance of the Sport for All Charter by all the member states of the European Union. In addition it could be suggested that the European (sport) policy has been effective in mobilizing the member states and their citizens to embrace sport as an important policy field and free time activity. However, there also exists a huge variation in sport participation rates within Europe, which is not necessarily to member states' policies. And other studies provide proof that sport participation rates correlate with economic indicators of a country (Hover et al., 2010), which makes it questionable to conclude that European policy is the reason for higher sport participation rates in comparison with other continents. In general, it remains unclear to what extent European policy has influence on the policy making process and policy content, with regard to sport, of the member states. Let alone what the influence is on sport participation in general. The analysis of sport policy on a national level or European level is not as common as research in other areas of public policy (Houlihan et al., 2009). While you could say that the engagement of the population with sport as a participant, spectator, volunteer or employee is more evident in sport than in other sectors. In addition, sport is not seen as just a leisure activity, it has many means by helping governments to positively influence individuals and social groups and is policy wise related to health, welfare, education, economy and environmental planning. Despite the increased involvement of the national governments, as well as the European Union, in sport and the (alleged) contribution of sport to other policy fields, the academic interest in the analysis of sport policy is limited. In order to achieve evidence-based policy making an increased attention for policy outcome is necessary, which among others calls for a better understanding of differences in sport participation and policy actions that could stimulate the participation in sport.

In order to develop a public policy to increase sport participation rates and in order to set reasonable targets it is necessary to have a basic understanding of differences in sport participation and the development of sport participation rates over time. Sport participation research is in this matter an important instrument to guide and to evaluate policy actions. Most European countries have, to some extent, data available on sport participation as we have shown by the presented factsheets on sport participation. The richness of these national datasets should be cherished and further explored, as we have mentioned before. The factsheets evidently show that the trend-lines of sport

participation provide good opportunities to compare the development of sport participation over time throughout Europe.

4. Towards evidence-based and research-based policy

It is important to bring together the knowledge on sport participation research to improve the understanding of differences in sport participation between countries and social groups, as we have tried to do in this report. This knowledge can on the one hand function to raise the interest in sport participation among policy makers. On the other hand with the new EU competence on sport, policy makers of the EU will have a growing need for European sport participation results. It is up to sport researchers to feed the policy makers with essential information on sport participation in Europe to help them to develop effective sport policies. The heightened interest in sport should be well supported with valuable data to support evidence-based policy making. Policy makers are most interested in how differences in sport policy are the reason for different outcomes on sport participation indicators. In order to achieve evidence-based policy making it is important to know more about effective ways to increase sport participation and how and to what extent sport can contribute to other policy targets.

The European Commission has clearly stated in the Preparatory Actions (European Commission, 2009; 2010b; 2011b) that the added value on European level is one of the main criteria to support or initiate activities or networks. Activities that could be done by a member state without the support of the European Commission should preferably be done by the member state. So far, European sport policy has been successful in mobilizing the member states to embrace sport as an important policy field and convince their citizens of the benefits of sport. Despite the increased involvement of the government as well as the European Union in sport and the contribution of sport to other policy fields, the academic interest in the analysis of sport policy is still rather limited. In general, sport is seen as a powerful vector for social integration and an efficient instrument for health improvement, even though, the evidence base for the sport policy is rather thin.

Partly this is due to the fact that sport participation research is a delicate matter where several issues have to be taken into account. Especially when sport participation research is also conducted for the purpose of comparison or benchmarking with other countries. As has been outlined in Chapter 2, comparative methods face problems associated with among others too many variables and too few countries, establishing equivalence, selection bias and ecological and individualistic fallacies. And in their analysis of sport participation research in Europe Van Bottenburg et al. (2005: 213) already

concluded that “it is not the lack of information that forms the greatest stumbling block with respect to the supply of data in the field of sport in most of the 25 EU member states, but a lack of longitudinal and comparable data”. The lack of comparable data is due to the fact that all countries authorize their own research dealing with the for that specific country relevant issues. Sport policy has been, and still is, mainly a national responsibility, even though the European Commission is looking for ways to approve their added value on sport for their member states. As sport policy was in the past only a national responsibility, sport participation research was also only a national matter. When developing national sport participation surveys, the nations hardly contacted each other to exchange ideas. As a result a lot of different methods and approaches were used to conduct sport participation research. In order to achieve longitudinal data the nations tried as much as possible to stick to the original way of collecting sport participation data. This resulted in several interesting nation trend-lines on sport participation (see Chapter 3). On European level there is not such a trend-line available. There is however a rather comparable dataset on sport participation in the member states based on the Eurobarometer surveys. The first Eurobarometer survey on sport and physical activity was in 2004 (European Commission, 2004) followed by a new Eurobarometer survey in 2009 (European Commission, 2010a). Unfortunately, the questions on physical activity and sport were dissimilar between these two surveys, which make the surveys incomparable over time. In the most recent Eurobarometer survey of 2009 the sports participation and physical activity in 27 member states were presented. This allows for a comparison of the member states to some extent. However, due to different interpretations of the concept of sport and physical activity the participation rates could differ, which still makes it difficult to conclude that one country is more active in sport than another. We can only hope that for next Eurobarometer surveys the comparability with previous surveys and herewith the gathering of longitudinal data will be taken into consideration. Given the increased policy interest in sport it would make sense to consider a more thorough questioning on sport and physical activity and herewith enrich the data collection on sport in the Eurobarometer. In addition it could be worthwhile to offer better guidance for the translation of the questionnaires in order to keep the interpretation differences of the concept of sport and physical activity restricted to a minimum.

5. Increased attention for data gathering

The European Commission is well aware of the challenging task that lies ahead to develop European sport policy and has faced the limitations of the available data. Mainly because there is an increasing request to demonstrate in tangible and quantifiable terms the outcomes of policy actions, which asks

for data, information and knowledge on sport participation and the added value of sport. However, the evidence base for sport needs strengthening as we have concluded previously. In order to further develop the European dimension of sport and European sport policy, the statistical and information needs have to be inventoried. In addition, the European Commission faces increasing demands of policy makers and sport-stakeholders to support the development of a sound knowledge base for sport. Finally, the new EU Work Plan for Sport also calls for an evidence base for sport, with among others proven effectiveness of previously programs as part of the Preparatory Actions, which could strengthen evidence-based policy making in the field of sport[29]. Inter alia the European Commission launched a tender for a study on the feasibility of a future sport monitoring function in the EU. This study is a new milestone in the history of European sport policy. The outcome of this study will help the European Union to pave the way to evidence-based policy making, identifying the main sport information and data needs for EU policy making purposes to be included in a possible future sport monitoring function. The intention and ambition of the sport monitoring function should be to catalyze a transformation to evidence-based sport policy.

With regard to spreading the knowledge on sport several networks can be identified that contribute to the level of knowledge on sport and physical activity in Europe (e.g. Workgroup on sport and economics, HEPA, MEASURE). As this report is utmost focused on sport participation we will highlight the importance of a network like MEASURE for the dissemination of knowledge on sport participation and the contribution of this network to the general understanding of differences in sport participation. MEASURE is a fruitful initiative that clearly points out the value of sport participation data, among others with the collection of the factsheets. Over 50 experts are part of this expert group representing 23 European countries. The network has proven to be valuable in increasing the interest for sport participation. One of the examples is the special issue of the *European Journal for Sport & Society* on Sports participation in Europe (see Hoekman et al., 2011b). With the proper resources this network could further contribute to the understanding of differences in sport participation and a solid evidence base for policy making purposes.

6. The way ahead for sport policy and sport research

The coming sport policy will most evidently focus on three different areas that were also clearly stated in the White Paper on Sport and in the documentation on developing the European dimension

[29] Council of the European Union (2011) 9509/1/11

in sport, namely: (1) societal aspects of sport, (2) sport and health, and (3) sport's economic dimension. Even though the European Commission has an increased interest in sport and is more than in the past developing sport policy, they make it clear that sport will remain primarily a national responsibility. The European Commission draw up some general policy lines on sport, while the concrete policy programs on sport are decided upon by the member states. However, this does not mean that the national sport policy making is not influenced by the European sport policy. National sport policy making could very well benefit from knowledge exchange that is arranged by the European Commission through one of their supported networks.

The new Work Plan on sport will be focused on providing added value at European level. This added value in particular seems most common in supporting networks that contribute to the knowledge exchange between the member states on different segments of the field of sport. In a first evaluation of the Preparatory Actions (The Evaluation Partnership, 2011) it was concluded that transnational networks as well as studies, surveys, conferences and seminars had a clear added value in increasing the knowledge base on sport and developing the European dimension of sport.

However, to develop a solid evidence base for sport more investments in data collection and dissemination are necessary. Special attention for data collection and dissemination of knowledge is justified as in this report we have evidently shown that more research and data collection is necessary to obtain a full understanding of differences in sport participation throughout Europe. In addition a sport monitoring function in the EU would be beneficial in establishing to what extent the policy programs on the European level result in the requested added value on European level. The sport monitoring function could provide the data that is necessary to visualize the added value and herewith legitimize further investments in sport.

Sport policy at European level can be considered to be in the early stages. This also holds true for the data collection on sport on European level. Dissimilar questionnaires of the Eurobarometer survey prove that it lacks a long term vision on collecting data on sport which could provide answers to relevant questions for evidence-based policy making. It would be recommendable to develop this vision in the near future given the current rapid development of sport policy in Europe. The tender on a future sport monitoring function shows that the European Commission is well aware of the need to develop this vision and come to a 'Work Plan on Sport Research' besides the Work Plan on Sport. Given the achievements of MEASURE in the short period of their existence (e.g. data of factsheets and special issue on Sports Participation in Europe) it should be beneficial to incorporate this network, at least as an advisory board, in the process of developing a Work Plan on Sport Research.

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