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The Meaning of Social Context – Experiences of and Educational Outcome of Participation in two different Sport Contexts

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Abstract

Based on a general belief in society, about the good outcome of sport, this article critically examines the meaning – that is both the personal experience of participation and the potential educational outcome – which is derived from participation in two sport contexts under the umbrella of the Sports City Program (SCP) in Norway. With a theoretical framework based on the field theory of Bourdieu, and a qualitative methodological approach, the article indicates that there are differences within the SCP, with one pole of the SCP close to conventional sport and the other pole more distinctly different from conventional sport. In short, there are different meanings derived from pursuing different contexts of the subfield of the SCP. Different sport contexts attract different adolescents, produce different experiences and facilitate different educational opportunities. Out of the two SCP contexts investigated, the context most similar to conventional sport basis on family socialization and facilitates reproduction, while the context most distinct from conventional sport attracts other adolescents and clears the ground for self governance and an ‘adolescent lifestyle’.

Key words

participant experience, education through sport, social context, sport field, adolescent

Introduction

There is a general belief in Western societies that sport is good for many purposes. Through sport one can develop ethical values, build a good character, and become a proper citizen. For example, the European Union (Commission of European Communities, 2001) as well as the Government of Norway (St. meld. nr. 14, 1999-2000), underscores the significance of sport as a means of socialization and education of young people. However, a number of sport sociologists have shown their scepticism towards political decision makers' blind faith in sport as purely good for society (Ingham & Loy, 1993; Dyreson, 2001; Long & Sanderson, 2001; Coakley, 2002; Gatz et al., 2002; Smith & Waddington, 2004). That is not to say that these scholars do not believe in sport's possible positive outcomes, but many of them have pointed out the lack of evidence for the causal link between sport participation and the societal benefits of it.

This article examines two different sport contexts; based on the experiences of the participants, it analyses the kinds of educational opportunities that are generated within the different contexts. Education through sport is seen as a realization of general virtues through following internal demands of quality in sport. These ideas can be traced back to the teleological thought of Aristotle in which every human being ought to search for happiness and human flourishing (Loland, 2004). Therefore, theories of education through sport are theses about a mutual dependency between sport-specific values and the general ideals of humanity. Education *through* sport should be distinguished from education *by* sport, in which sport is used instrumentally as a means for something else (health, social integration), and from education *for* sport, which considers the development of sporting performance (for example achievement as an athlete or competence as a coach) (Eichberg, 2004).

In this article, education is not necessarily a process of intended and direct transmission of values; rather, it is authentic experience when, for example, socializing with peers (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003). To put it in a nutshell, every social context facilitates education (Palinscar, 1998); and a diversity of social contexts fit more or less into the rest of the adolescents' lives (Wright et al., 2003). Consequently, they generate various educational outcomes. A precondition for education *through* sport is *participation in* sport, which, in turn, depends on socialization into sport. Socialization today, especially with regard to adolescents, is often connected to individualization (Beck et al., 1994), and some claim the expressive element as significant (Schuessler, 2000). Moreover, adolescence is a process of striving for detachment and independence, where the significance of family decreases, while the role of peers becomes stronger (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). In that respect, adolescent leisure patterns can be theorized as a transmission from 'organized leisure' to 'casual leisure' during

late teen ages (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). With regard to sport participation, this is especially relevant, because the rate of drop-out from sport reaches its peak during (mid to late) teen ages (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004).

Context and case

Norwegian sport conventionally takes place during leisure time, it is voluntarily conducted, and participation is based on individual membership. Moreover, Norwegian sport is competitive at every level. Activities are provided in local sports clubs, which are organized under the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC). In this respect, two points for the forthcoming analysis are: (i) NOC is in charge of all conventional sport in Norway (in addition there is self organized and commercial physical activity), and has a monopoly of economic support from the public sector (the state's Department of Sport Policy, DSP); and (ii) a major reason for the above-mentioned drop-outs during teen years is connected to the increased seriousness and competitiveness inside conventional sport (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004).

The Sports City Program (SCP) was initiated to provide activities for inactive and unorganized youth and adolescents (St. meld. nr. 41, 1991-1992). The aim was to reach those not attending, or those who were considering quitting, conventional sport. The implementation of the SCP follows the established structures of NOC, which corresponds to the public hierarchy (state, counties and municipalities). The activities of the SCP consist of three typologies (Skille, 2004): (i) activities for certain groups (such as aerobics or swimming for immigrant women, or adventurous activities for deprived youths); (ii) activities similar to traditional activities of sports clubs, labelled 'low threshold' (e.g. free introductory sessions for newcomers, or motivational efforts for making members continue instead of quitting); and (iii) drop-in activities where you may arrive and leave as you please.

Theoretical framework

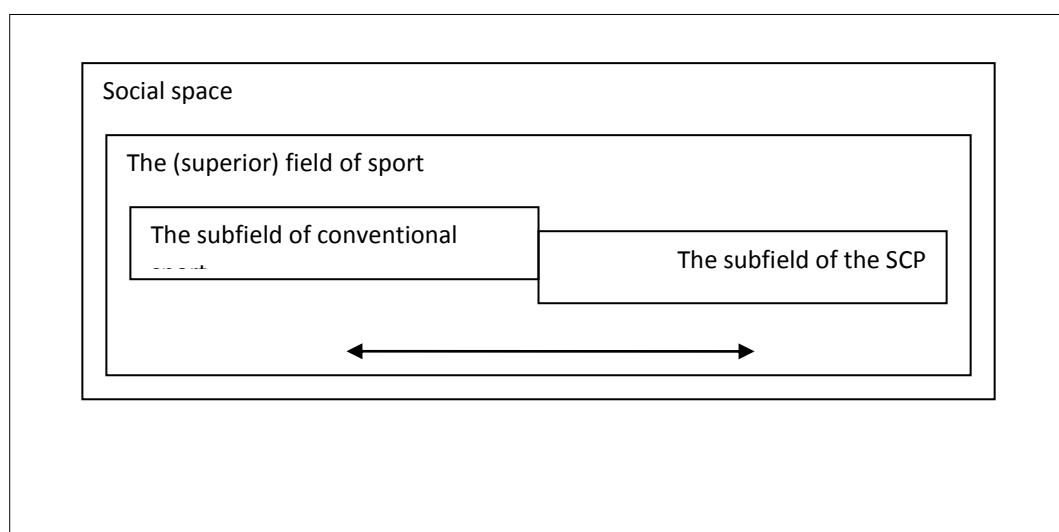
This article deals with the field of sport, and how different parts of the field are experienced and may have a beneficial educational effect. A *field* (Bourdieu, 1990) is defined by positions, which create structures between the actors who struggle for field-specific capital. Interests in a field can only be articulated by agents with a *habitus* which is adaptable to the field; the agents must have the knowledge and skills required to act in the field. Habitus is structured and structuring structures, or systems of durable and transposable dispositions, which work as an intermediary link, and which

take account of the dialectical relation between objective structures and subjective preferences for and experiences of social *practice*.

A particularly clear example of practical sense as a proleptic adjustment to the demands of a field is what is called, in the language of sport, a 'feel for the game'. This phrase ... gives a fairly accurate idea of the almost miraculous encounter between the *habitus* and a field ... (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66, italics in original).

'The feel for the game' gives the activity in the field a subjective sense, a meaning. The experience of meaning in the field depends on when and how the game of the field was learned; and it depends on how, in what context, and how often it is played (Bourdieu, 1986). This recognition is tacit because broad parts of the dispositions are internalized through unreflective socialization; the earlier a player enters the game, the greater is her/his ignorance of all that is taken for granted in the field (Bourdieu, 1990).

Bourdieu's theory, on the one hand, and the concepts of reflexivity and individualization on the other (e.g. Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck, 1992), seem at first sight to be incompatible. In addition, they have both been addressed by a number of critics. However, Lash (1993, 1994) recasts the theory of Bourdieu, and holds that the notion of reflexive modernization, in particular as it is developed and used by Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992), '... can best be developed via Bourdieu's *habitus*' (Lash, 1993, p. 204). For Lash (1994), the individualized reflexivity needs a point of departure; and this point varies. In this respect, the SCP and conventional sport are different subfields within a superior field of sport (Figure 1). Within the subfield of the SCP, the aim of this article is to compare one context near the alternative pole with one context near the conventional pole. It is therefore close to a comparison between SCP and conventional sport.



Materials and methods

This research adheres to the 'pragmatist thesis'. Ontologically, it is believed that there exists a reality independent of humans' minds *and*, at the same time, there are many socially constructed and subjectively perceived realities. Epistemologically, it is based on a rejection of the either/or understanding of methodological approaches: thus one includes both inductive and deductive logic in the research process (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A case study design and qualitative methods were applied, because they are intended to give descriptions of a few instances of phenomena (Yin, 2003). Two advantages of qualitative approaches were utilized in this research: the purpose of being explorative and flexible was employed; and work from preceding research (Skille, 2004, 2005a, b, c) was used in order to select small but purposive samples. Information was sought primarily through interviews, but also, with regard to the most unknown context for the researcher (the open sports hall), through observation. In addition, information was gathered through informal conversations, e-mails and telephone calls.

Eight leaders, representing four activity contexts, were interviewed. This information is not used directly in the presentation of results and the analysis, but it has served as background knowledge for understanding each of the contexts and the wholeness of the SCP. Based on the following criteria, two contexts were chosen for examination in more detail: (i) the activity should be provided for 16-19 years olds; (ii) the activity should be defined as part of the Sports City Program; and (iii) the activities were chosen to represent two dichotomies of the categories developed by Skille (2004). An ordinary football (soccer) team was chosen to represent 'low threshold' activity similar to conventional sport, while an open sports hall was chosen to represent drop-in activities. (It is, as stated above, almost equal to a comparison between SCP and conventional sport, see Figure 1.)

Eight adolescent participants from two different sport contexts of the Sports City Program were interviewed: four girls from the football context, and four boys from the open sports hall. These are the main informants of the study. The fact that the interviewed adolescents are all girls in one context, and only boys in the other, as well as the fact that the informants in the football context (the girls) are 'insiders' and the informants from the open sports hall (the boys) may be considered as 'outsiders', in relation to the (superior) field of sport, and how this may affect the analysis, will be outlined in the discussion. Informants were all 18 years old (over the age of majority) at the time of the interviews, participation in the study was voluntary and based on informed consent, and pseudonyms are used to protect the informants' identity.

An interview guide was developed to ensure that each of the main topics of the study was covered in every interview. These were: (i) background information such as gender, age, family

situation, school choice and future plans; (ii) descriptions of the SCP activity, and, if possible, comparison with conventional sport; (iii) family members' and peers' relations to sport; and (iv) the informants' concerns about being an adolescent, and how sport fits into their lives. The interviews with the adolescents were tape-recorded and transcribed. The analysis was done manually, in a hermeneutic procedure. First, every interview was read, to get an impression of each of the informants' experiences. Second, the transcribed texts were searched for the themes mentioned above, and interpreted in comparison to each other. Last, appropriate quotes were found to use as citations in this manuscript. In the data material, it was not possible to find statements which could be interpreted in opposition to the arguments of the citations presented in this article.

As stated above, meaning refers to both experience and education. With regard to construct and internal validity, it is considered high with regard to the experience of adolescents; there is no reason to disbelieve their expressions of their perceptions. It is more uncertain when it comes to the educational outcome, because this relies solely on the researcher's interpretations. Three efforts are, however, made to increase the internal validity (Yin, 2003): (i) a chain of evidence is established, regarding objective characteristics, socialization into sport, subjective experience, and education; (ii) a triangulation of methods were applied, by adding observations to interviews; and (iii) previous research (Skille, 2004, 2005a, b, c) was used, as a basis for making a purposive sampling, and as a basis for a systematic search for differences and similarities. The latter also increases external validity, which, however, in this kind of research is more about particularity and contextualization than about generalization (Yin, 2003).

The result and discussion parts, which are to follow, are more or less integrated, and will be structured around themes. They will go from rather descriptive presentations to more reflective analyses, so that the themes – which are overlapping – will be treated in an increasingly analytically manner.

Setting up the sport contexts

All the interviewed leaders considered the SCP as a possible economic source to realize ideas which would not have been realized otherwise (that is, purely by voluntary work). The SCP was considered valuable, especially for providing activities for youth who did not have parents socializing them into conventional sport. The routes taken to spend the SCP resources had some similarities across sports clubs. For example, both activity contexts presented below took place in well-established sports clubs with various activities for a number of age groups; both sports clubs had several full time employees, following a trend of professionalization in voluntary organizations; and each of the two sports clubs had one employee responsible for youth work. This was made possible by SCP funding.

The differences between the two investigated activity contexts will appear during the following presentation of them, as well as during the subsequent analysis.

Context one is a football team for girls aged 16-19. The team was part of a sports club, which was locally based, and where the same families had been members through generations. In recent years, however, many newcomers had arrived, and a division between two groups of players had developed: those who had always lived in the local area, and who had been members of the sports club for as long as they could remember; and the new ones who come from other parts of the city.

Acknowledging that many teenagers – especially girls – were on the verge of quitting, the leaders of the sports club had, during the latter years, increased the effort to keep girls inside sport. For the junior girls (16-19 years olds) two sets of efforts were developed: (i) alternative activities for the junior girls exclusively; and (ii) different efforts in activities with the aim of bonding girls in the sports club across the age groups. The alternative activities took, first, the form of training in a fitness centre (aerobic or spinning) once a week during the season's preparation period. Second, approximately once a month, the football training was substituted by another activity with an external instructor in a different milieu (e.g. wrestling, climbing, and orienteering). This was referred to as 'star training', a metaphor for going in different directions but always coming back to the centre (football).

The bonding activities across age groups took three forms. First, as Crystal described: '... our team is supposed to allow younger players to train with us ...', and, second, she continues: '... in addition, we are quite a lot of times asked to involve ourselves in coaching younger girls' teams' (Crystal). The third female activity across age groups was 'The Girls' Day'. During this arrangement, which took place every autumn, teams from the youngest (7-8 year old girls) till junior (16-19 year old girls) played against each other, using modified rules to make compatible teams across the age groups. The (women's) senior team was present to cheer and encourage the younger girls.

Context two is an open sports hall located near the centre of a city. The sports hall was open from 2 pm until 5 pm Monday-Friday, and most of the day during weekends and holidays. That is, when the school day was over the adolescents could go to the sports hall, and they had to leave when the timetable for organized sports started at 5 pm. Although the sports hall was – in principle – open to everyone, some patterns of participants were visible. (i) There was a core group of adolescents who were in the sports hall almost every day. These people were (at the time of the observation and interviewing) at the age of eighteen, and had attended the sports hall since they were in the early teens. (ii) There were some youths who used the sports hall once or twice a week. They were younger (13-15 years old) and usually knew someone in the core group. (iii) Occasionally,

there were 'real' drop-ins, who just came and left, and nobody else (in the sports hall) necessarily knew them.

Below, a randomly observed day is described, which according to the leaders of the sports club, was representative of an average day in the open sports hall. At 2 pm there were seven adolescents, six boys and one girl, from upper secondary school (approximately 18 years olds) and four youths, all of them boys, from lower secondary school (13-15 years olds), in the sports hall. The adolescents were sitting/lying and talking on some (wrestling/gymnastic) mats in the middle of the sports hall. The youths were sitting on a big (high jump) mat in a corner of the sports hall. Music was being played softly. In short: the youths and the adolescents were just hanging out after school.

After approximately thirty minutes the youths in the corner started rolling out an 'air tumbling', a big air-filled mat approximately 6 by 6 metres. After some minutes the tumbling was filled with air, and everybody was on it. The music was turned up, and within minutes there was a total change in the atmosphere; it went from soft music and just 'hanging around' to loud music and rather advanced jumping with vaults and twists. During the next ninety minutes there were many shifts in figurations in the sports hall; for some minutes the tumbling was dominated by the adolescents, and then they rested on a wrestling mat, just sitting/lying and talking, while the younger group dominated the tumbling for the next minutes. The 'slow start' (the thirty minutes of just hanging out) in the open sports hall indicates that it was as much the social group as the activity itself that was the attraction and reason for attending the sports hall.

Socialization into the contexts

Previous research has shown how SCP activities differ from conventional sport in terms of gender and class differences (Skille, 2005a), and with regard to subjective preferences for participation (Skille, 2005b). With the present data and the theory of Bourdieu (1986, 1990) as points of departure, it is evident that one pole of the SCP is close to conventional sport and that the other pole is distinctly different from conventional sport. The aim of this article is to scrutinize the meanings derived from pursuing different contexts of activities within the subfield of the SCP. Meaning includes both individuals' experience of the activity context and the educational outcome (in a broadest possible sense) of participation. The discussion relies on an understanding of adolescents as undergoing education within every social setting they attend; this is not necessarily limited to intended transmission of values, as, for example, in formal teaching. There may be as much education in everyday life experiences and leisure contexts (Palinscar, 1998; Azzarito & Ennis, 2003). In line with this theoretical framework, it is believed that each context of the SCP produces some kind of education, and, every context produces education for particular groups of adolescents.

All the informants from the football context were socialized into sport by their parents, and all of the informants had parents (fathers, that is) who were or had been involved in the club.

[Club name] is very integrated, very much a family-club so to speak. It follows generations to a high degree. My grandfather is a leader in the club, and my father is a coach and . . . My father used to play at [club name] himself. And my coach knows my father from when they played together . . . (Beth).

The girls, who were already inside the football context, were encouraged to be a part of the socialization and motivation for younger girls.

. . . they [the adult leaders] asked like “Could you do that and it is great if you do it, and the young girls get motivation” and stuff. I remember when we were younger, we had a girl there sometimes, and she was much older. And then it was always like, when she came to our training, that when she came we always tried a bit harder . . . I remember it was great fun. So I hope I can be, perhaps not an idol, but at least a little motivation. (Crystal).

An important point to draw out of this citation is that according to the informants, football as an activity is fun. It is rather the surrounding circumstances, the perception of demands and commitment that generated the feeling of stress and uncertainty about the willingness to continue. This issue will be treated in the next section.

Unlike the football girls, none of the participants in the open sports hall were members of the sports club (which owned and administrated the sports hall), or had parents working voluntarily in any sports club. The core group members of the open sports hall stated that the reason for attending the open sports hall was their breakdance, which may be interpreted both in terms of the activity itself and by the subculture surrounding it, and sub cultural jargon like ‘step’, ‘beat’ and ‘synchrony’ were often used during the interviews. The motives for breakdance were explained as: ‘It is fun, and we train our own way, without anyone telling us what to do’ (Chris).

The fact that the open sports hall is free of charge and may be attended when and if the adolescents pleased to, reinforced the perception of freedom. ‘To put it this way . . . I don’t think so many would have come here [to the open sports hall] if it had not been free of charge’ (Dylan). When it is not paid for, by parents who are active in the sports club, as in the case of the football context, there is no connection between the commitment to parents and the obligation to the sports club. The activity in the open sports hall was based on an interest developed during adolescence, within the adolescent group, as compared to the activity of the football context, which was based on

interests developed during childhood, within family upbringing. To put it in a nutshell, in the open sports hall the meaning was developed by the adolescents themselves; while in the case of the football context, it was to a high degree based on other people's (parents and other adults) organization of activity. In that respect, the open sports hall can be interpreted as contextual, while the football context can be seen as partial, with regard to the adolescent's life as a whole.

Summing up socialization into the activity contexts, the football context attracts adolescents with a habitus which is compatible with the subfield of conventional sport, and the open sports hall facilitates activity for adolescents with a habitus which is different from that which is usually required for entrance to the (established and conventional) field of sport. In that respect, it may seem like the football context generates experiences which are related to commitment and obligations, and educates reproduction of the sports club's values, while, on the contrary, the open sports hall generates experiences of self governance and emancipation, and educates the adolescents to value the expressivity of an 'adolescent lifestyle'. Moreover, this raises some critical questions (which I think it is important to ask, although I do not necessarily answer them, but they will be indirectly discussed in the next section). Does the football context, by constraining the space for emancipation and by focusing so much on the improvement of football skills, develop young football players without taking into account the general development of adolescents as free humans? Or does the open sports hall, by allowing adolescents to have fun without linking it to any form of obligations, encourage free riding?

Commitment or emancipation

The efforts made, by the football leaders, to focus on girls and with the aim to keep girls inside sport, were generally perceived as positive by the participants. As Dolly noted: 'Yes, I definitely think so. At least for the girls who do not rank football first, it makes them stay [inside sport] a bit longer'. However, there was a continuous negotiation for each adolescent individual about the contradictions of continuing versus quitting, and obligations versus freedom. The fact that there had been a division between two groups of players at the team (the old insiders and the newcomers), and the fact that football took much of the participants' time (approximately four times a week), combined with an increased feeling of boredom, led the informants to think about quitting.

The problem is that many girls quit [playing] football when they are, say, twelve-thirteen years old . . . they do not find it fun anymore. It is supposed to be so [serious] . . . sometimes there is too much focus on being best and winning and stuff (Ann).

It appears that the conventional rationale of sport, and its pyramid of achievement, is not necessarily compatible with a teenage girl's demands and desire to spend her free time. This becomes especially apparent with regard to the increased demands perceived from football. For example, as Crystal told in this story from when she was 14:

Football, yes . . . now I am going to say some shit actually (laughter) . . . because the cross-country skiing leaders said it was okay that we did something else during summer time . . . because we got training through other sports. But . . . the football leaders said the same, but when we came back [to football] after the winter season, and had trained hard and were in good physical shape . . . It was like: "Oh yes, you are still here?" and 'weren't [you] here during winter time?" and stuff. And then I tried to show up, going directly from ski training to football training. But that burns you out, and I wasn't that old. . . . I don't know . . . I felt I had to choose (Crystal).

For Crystal, football had been a factor of stress in recent years, and in many respects she wanted to quit football. But something was holding back the realization of the idea of quitting:

C: And then I often think about quitting. But there are many things holding me back, so I just don't make it [quit].

I: What are the most important things holding you back?

C: My dad is quite important, that he is so involved, in the whole team. So if I quit, I don't think he will manage to quit. And I think it is difficult, like "Dad, I want to scale down [the football involvement]". I don't feel that would be cool. And I don't know what to do if I quit football.

This citation shows that one important factor – her father, and his relationship to the sports club – that had brought her into football (during childhood) was later perceived as a constraint to making her own and independent choices (in adolescence). The fact that family members and the club leaders are the same persons seems to be important, while trying to understand how the girls felt obliged and felt pressure from leaders of the sports club to be involved in the club in new roles.

With regard to the core members in the open sports hall, they all agreed that conventional sport 'was nothing for me'. They attended the open sports hall almost every day, including the weekends, as well as during holidays (if they were not away, with parents or others). Although they used it regularly, they expressed the advantage of flexibility and freedom:

We do not have fixed time schedules . . . It is actually quite essential to us to just come and go when and if we want to. . . . I don't think I could have made it, such a fully-organized form with scheduled training times . . . regarding what we are doing (Al).

Also Dylan, who was not a member of the core group – he was an adolescent from another part of the city (category (ii)) and usually took part in conventional sport, but in his home part of the city no sports clubs offered an open sports hall – attended the open sports hall for recreational purposes. He too appreciated and underscored the flexibility. The adolescents did not come to the sports hall because some time schedule told them so; they came because they wanted to.

The fact that we are allowed to decide ourselves is absolutely crucial. For if it had been like that somebody steered and stuff, well I don't think anybody would be here at all. If somebody had said “now you have to be aware and relax” and “don't do that” . . . I don't think there would have been many here (Dylan).

The informants would like to have access to the sports hall also after 5 pm, but they understood the limitations, because of conventional sports' time table and requirement of facilities. In short, there was a mutual understanding between the adolescents in the open sports hall and the rest of the sports club. Although there was no formal relationship to the sports club for the open sports hall attendants, the word 'trust' came up to describe the relationship between the leaders of the club and the participants of the open sports hall. The freedom felt by the members of the core group, which allows them to develop a kind of hegemony and to learn self-governance, has its counterpart in the perception of the constraints by some of the others who attend the sports hall.

Insiders and outsiders

It must be emphasized that although it is useful to illustrate the analytical points by the use of dichotomies, the two contexts cannot be properly understood as being *either* solely reproductive/conventional *or* purely innovative/alternative. The football context is influenced by alternative forms of sport, and the open sports hall does indeed build on established structures. In addition, as there are differences across contexts, there are also different processes of generating experiences and education within each context. This is shown by the categorization of participants within each of them; members of the insider group of the football team have a stronger commitment to the club than their new team mates, and the core group of the open sports hall has a different experience of the open sports hall compared to those attending it only every now and then.

Regarding the commitment to the sports club there was a difference between the two groups of players within the football team, namely the insiders and the newcomers: 'I cannot point out exactly what it is but, it is like . . . Perhaps they do not belong that much in the club. They don't have the same relationship' (Crystal). Clearly, Crystal felt she was an insider who belonged to the club from when she was a child, while she considered some of the other girls as outsiders. Also regarding the adolescents participating in the open sports hall, who were not members of the sports club, the core group members acted like insiders in many occasions; they were part of the everyday milieu in the sports hall, and some of them were hired as instructors for children's sport parties in the sports club. The core group members' impression of the open sports hall concept was unanimously positive. However, there were different aspects of participation related to inclusion versus exclusion. This may have implications for the meaning of social context, both in the respect of the adolescents' perceived experience, and of the educational outcome. In that respect, and an important point to recall during the present analysis is the fact that the present data tells the story of those who were included, and voice is not given to those who may feel excluded from attending the open sports hall.

The different organizational solutions near the poles of the subfield of the SCP mirror societal change in a wider respect. While some settings facilitate reproduction and others encourage innovation, the sum is a more complex – but still patterned – system of fields and subfields (cf. Lash, 1990, 1993). And these settings are pursued and filled by different kinds of adolescents (cf. Lash, 1994). To put it another way, we might sketch a chain of connections as follows: education through sport depends on experience; experience depends on participation; participation depends on preferences; and preferences depend on structural elements as well as the process of socialization. In short, the experience and educational outcome of participation in SCP activities depends on the entry into it. This links to Bourdieu's (1986) idea of social space and the concept of fields. People in similar positions of social space develop similar habituses and end up in similar fields, subfields and poles within subfields. That is, although there may be more options, and although there may be examples of people from similar positions in social space making different choices and ending up in different sport contexts, these data point out that the structuring elements of habitus actually have an explanatory value.

One of the structuring – and ascribed – elements of habitus, is gender. While research into female football has focused upon, for example the image problem of feminine stereotypes (Harris, 2005), the definition of female footballers as lesbians (Caudwell, 1999), or efforts of understanding gender in relation to ethnicity and race (Scraton et al., 2005), the female football players in this study are considered as insiders. Football is the most popular sport for girls (and boys) aged 13-19 in Norway (NIF, 2005; NFF, 2005), and in the present data, the gender issue is most evident in the case

of the open sports hall. Therefore the subsequent analysis will focus on that context. The observation data indicates that when there is sport offered in the neighbourhood, in principle open for everyone, the dominance of boys is significant.

This is an unintended consequence of the program, because new sport supplies were created with the intention of removing some of the obstacles perceived within conventional sport, and especially those which were reported (most often by girls) as reasons for quitting conventional sport (Skille, 2004). These are obstacles such as too much focus on serious training and performance, in short, on competitiveness (Hansen, 1999; Seippel, 2004). According to the boys in the open sports hall, the girls did not fit in because the activity was too exhausting. These were interesting claims, whilst the boys themselves held the reason for attending the open sports hall was to relax and hang out with peers. While sport has historically and conventionally been associated with masculinity and worked as a male preserve, so has the public sphere (Dunning & Sheard, 2005). In that respect, the open sports hall becomes a double barrier for female participation, by adding 'public' to 'sport'.

It could be expected that alternative sports, which are apparently in step with societal changes and the demands of modern adolescents, have other power relations than conventional sports. Research into other typical youth sports, such as skateboarding and snowboarding, has shown that the male dominance does not diminish, but it takes other forms (Anderson, 1999; Beal, 1996). As in the case of the open sports hall, the boys clearly felt that it is their territory. This is evident in the way they behave in the sports hall, which includes the relationship to the sports club employees, access to other rooms in the building, etc. In sum, sport and the public sphere seem to reinforce each other and the function of male dominance within each of these spheres. When having said that, it should be noted that the open sports hall facilitates education for the happy attendants – which the male participants actually are – that would hardly be offered in any other sport context. The educational outcome of the open sports hall lies in the development of young people, who learn to acknowledge a system of reciprocity. That is, the adolescents must and apparently like to, adhere to the rules in the sports hall and the sports club, although they are not formal members and have no written obligations.

Concluding remarks

In sum, this article has related the question about who does what and why to experiences and educational outcomes of sport participation. People with different social positions (cf. Bourdieu, 1986) attend different fields, different subfields and different poles within a subfield. While this may look like social determinism, I would rather argue that the perspectives of Bourdieu and of reflexive

modernization are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, adolescents are active decision makers whose actions reflect their own preferences (cf. Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck, 1992). On the other hand, adolescents are situated in cultural contexts and their choices are made in relation to their perception of external opportunities and internal dispositions for different kinds of practice; that is, their habitus (cf. Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Lash, 1990, 1993, 1994). Following this logic, it could be expected that the open sports hall, while established as it is now, may lead to reproduction of activity, and other kinds of educational outcome, compared to the football context. Determinism is also rejected by the empirical fact that there is an example, even in this small material, of adolescents participating in both subfields. (Dylan attends the open sports hall of the SCP, and participates in conventional sport.)

The general belief in society about sport as good is not easy to deal with, empirically, among other reasons because educational outcome differs across sport contexts. This article has investigated how habitus, for eighteen-year-old adolescents at a given point of time, explains participation in two contexts of the Norwegian Sports City Program, and what kinds of meaning that might be generated out of it. It is important to bear in mind that the adolescents will continue their development, and so will the sport contexts. The transmission into commercial leisure, approximately when turning sixteen (Coleman & Hendry, 1999), gives rise to other opportunities for attending new contexts of sport or physical activity. For example, research about commercial training centres, shows that these are most popular for females, first and foremost related to the down toning of competitiveness compared to conventional sport (Ulseth, 2004). And, unlike in the open sports hall, where competitiveness is also down toned, the training centres apparently offer activities and organizational solutions which attract women.

Further research into meaning of social contexts should include more concrete contexts and focus on how the participants develop their own contexts and how they produce meaning within these, in the sense of both experience and education. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to scrutinize the educational outcome over time. And studies should be conducted to detect how complex interrelationships work; the central organization of sport policy more generally or a specific program, on the one hand side, should be seen in relation to the local provision of activities on the other, together with local contexts (more broadly understood than with reference to a sports club). This leads to a more general question about how levels of policy and organization in an analysis interact (Skille, 2005c), and how different agents – with different local contexts – respond differently to central sport policy.

For example, previous research about the SCP at the political and organizational level sketched differences between cities (Carlson & Haaland, 2004), with regard to the local SCP consultants' relationship to the municipality's sport department, the state's Department of Sport Policy, and the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports. In addition, it is indicated that the adolescent population of one city is more homogeneous and therefore perceived as easier to deal with (by the sport providers), by comparison with the multicultural adolescent population of another city (Skille, 2005c). All these elements may influence the provision of sport, and the meaning derived from participation in the different activity contexts provided. Returning to the idea of Aristotle, all abovementioned elements may influence the adolescent individual's opportunity for reaching happiness and human flourishing (within sport).

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