

**Area Variations in Sports Participation
Summary and Implications****Research Unit
15 Aug 2006****Introduction**

- 1 In 2003/04 additional funding from the Scottish Executive allowed **sportscotland** to commission a boosted sample in its continuing sports participation survey large enough to explore for the first time patterns of participation at local authority level. A minimum sample of 640 adults was surveyed in each of the 32 local authority areas, including significantly larger samples in major population centres such as Glasgow. These sports questions are included in the Scottish Omnibus Survey run by TNS (formerly System Three).
- 2 Initial analysis of the results of the boosted participation survey showed substantial differences in rates of participation by adults (aged 16+) among local authority areas. This came as no surprise. Levels of participation in sport – as in other leisure activities – vary according to socio-economic factors. For sport, age is particularly important, while gender, relative deprivation, educational level, disability and accessibility of provision are all significant. As local authority areas vary in the socio-economic composition of their populations, we might have expected that these variations in the composition of local populations would explain their differences in levels of sports participation.
- 3 Accordingly, **sportscotland** commissioned Professor Fred Coalter (Stirling University) and Steve Dowers (Edinburgh University) to analyse the results in detail and seek to identify any underlying socio-demographic factors that might account for the differences. Their report, *An analysis of regional variations in sports participation in Scotland*, was published by **sportscotland** in August 2006. This summary is based on their report which can be accessed on www.sportscotland.org.uk.

Findings**Overview**

- 4 The thorough analysis by the authors has shown that area differences in socio-demographics provide no such neat explanation. They find the following:
 - 4.1 There are surprisingly wide variations in levels of participation. For example, sports participation rates in Moray are nearly twice those of Glasgow.

- 4.2 The lowest levels of participation were found in a tight¹ grouping of six local authorities in west central Scotland that contain a third of the country's population.
- 4.3 The socio-economic factors that could be measured are insufficient to explain these differences. Even when a wide combination of factors was allowed for (age, gender, social class, terminal age of education, limiting long-term illness or disability, resident in area of multiple deprivation, car ownership, and access to facilities), there were still significant differences in levels of participation among the populations of local authority areas.
- 4.4 Reflecting well-established (albeit improving) trends, women's participation is lower than men's virtually everywhere. However, the analysis found that in the areas of lowest overall participation rates, the disparity was even greater.
- 4.5 The factors included access to facilities. The evidence is that there is such a level of sports facility provision across Scotland that differences in provision among local authority areas do not explain the different levels of participation.

Groupings of Local Authority Populations

- 5 The survey data allow four broad groups of local authority areas to be distinguished, although it is acknowledged that these divisions are somewhat arbitrary (especially taking into account the issue of margins of error).
- 5.1 A group of ten local authority populations that (within the margins of error) already meet or exceed Sport 21's key challenge of 60 per cent of adult Scots taking part in sport at least once a week by 2020. Although there are some intra-group differences, all these populations have a general 'culture of participation' – ie, they all achieve high levels of participation in a number of different groupings of sports (Swimming, Hall sports, Pitch sports, Golf, Bowls, Other indoor, Other outdoor).
- | | | |
|---------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Moray | Clackmannanshire | Eilean Siar |
| Aberdeenshire | East Dunbartonshire | Midlothian |
| Stirling | West Lothian | |
| Orkney Isles | Dundee City | |
- 5.2 A group of 11 'middling' authorities that are up to 8 per cent short of the current target, but could be regarded as capable of reaching it. It is interesting to note that the majority of these authorities can be regarded as marginally 'over-performing' compared with the Scottish average once the various socio-demographic factors explored in the analyses have been taken into account.

¹ The map in Figure 1 of the report shows this grouping. It is possible that the grouping is geographically tighter than shown, as the islands plus the more rural parts to the south of the highlighted area may have higher levels of participation that are more comparable with their adjacent rural local authority areas. However, sample sizes are insufficient to explore this hypothesis.

Angus	Highland	Dumfries & Galloway
Falkirk	Fife	Scottish Borders
Perth and Kinross	Edinburgh City	Inverclyde
Aberdeen City	East Lothian	

- 5.3 The third group of five areas have participation levels around the 50 per cent mark. These are a rather mixed group, with some marginally 'over-performing' and some 'under-performing' when their socio-demographic profiles have been taken into account.

South Ayrshire	Shetland Isles
Argyll and Bute	East Renfrewshire
West Dunbartonshire	

- 6 The last group of six are distinctive, both for their much lower levels of participation (40% and below) and the fact that they are geographically contiguous in the west of Scotland². Although some can be regarded as achieving levels of participation which reflect a range of local circumstances, the majority can be regarded as 'under-performing' when the range of socio-demographic factors have been taken into account.

South Lanarkshire	Renfrewshire
East Ayrshire	North Lanarkshire
North Ayrshire	Glasgow City

- 7 At the moment we cannot account for these differences – in particular for the low-participating population in the west. It seems implausible that such a tendency is about sport alone. Are there other factors that hold particular sway in this area? If there were, they might well not provide an explanation, but they could provide a context to suggest the issue is a broader one than sport alone.

Women's Participation

- 8 The survey data illustrate the already recognised issue of women's lower levels of sports participation, especially when the major physical recreation of walking is excluded. Although female participation levels in sport generally are broadly equivalent to males in several high participation areas, in other areas they are only about two-thirds that of males. In terms of the narrower category that excludes walking, the male/female disparities are much greater.
- 9 Further, the greatest differences tend to be in the areas of generally low participation; ie, women are disadvantaged in both absolute and relative terms. The fact that the lowest level of female participation (19% excluding walking for participation at least once a week) is half that of the highest (38%) raises significant issues for policy and investment relating to 52 per cent of the Scottish population.

² East Renfrewshire is located within this geographical area (see Fig 1 of the report), and although not in this group (defined as a rate of 40% or fewer adults taking sport in sport at least once a week) it is the area with the lowest rate (45%) of the previous group. It is not therefore substantially different from its neighbours.

Facility Provision

- 10 The analyses found that the provision of facilities across Scotland is such that differences in supply among local authority areas are not sufficient to explain the differences in participation rates. (It should be noted that the facility factor included in the analyses was accessibility – ie, the quantity of facilities in the right locations, but not their quality.)
- 11 Clearly no one would argue that built facilities are unimportant – without them there would be dramatically decreased opportunities to participate and for certain sports they are crucial. None of the results of these analyses diminishes the need to maintain and improve the range, quality and accessibility of sports facilities.
- 12 However, the analyses indicate that, **relative to the importance of other environmental, demographic and social factors**, the current levels of facility provision in Scotland do not have a major influence on participation. In other words, after a certain level of supply is achieved, increased participation can best be achieved via systematic attempts to address demand-side issues and ‘cultures of non-participation’ – sports development is more important than facility development.

Potential Policy Implications

- 13 Further work is needed to help describe any broader context, but whatever emerged is unlikely to change the overall thrust of the policy implications drawn by the authors of the report. Without denying particular local successes (for example, Renfrewshire ranks fifth for pitch sports) it seems clear that there exist what might be described as general ‘cultures’ of participation and non-participation.
- 14 The implications for Scottish sport of these wide differences in levels of sports participation across the country can be summarised as follows:
- 14.1 If aspirations are to be set for increasing levels of participation in sport, these need to be determined at local authority and (in the case of the group of lowest-participating populations) broader area basis, but arguably not at national level.
 - 14.2 Similarly, both national and local policies for facilitating and promoting sports participation need to be tailored to reflect the differences at local authority and wider area levels.
 - 14.3 The particularly low levels of women’s participation levels within the lowest-participating areas need to be addressed.
 - 14.4 It would be potentially valuable to determine what works in the higher-participation areas to identify any practices that may be transferable.

Further Action

Additional Analyses

- 15 **sportscotland's** Research Unit will try to explore any other measurable factors that may explain – or at least provide a broader context for – these area differences in participation. Suggestions on any such measurable factors would be welcome. Possible hypotheses that have occurred to us, admittedly very tentative at the moment, might include the following:
 - 15.1 Football could be so dominant in the area of low participation that it may replace some opportunities for participation in other sports, yet fails to provide the sporting outlet for most women and older adults, and perhaps as a result reduces overall participation in sport.
 - 15.2 Despite the inclusion in the analyses of areas of multiple deprivation (which incorporate a health component in their definition) and limiting long-term illness, there may still be other health or health-related factors. Lifestyle factors such as levels of smoking, drinking and poor diet might at least provide additional context if they were found to be particularly significant in the low-participation area.
 - 15.3 Low participation in sport might be reflected in low participation in other leisure activities such as the arts, which would (if local data were available) provide a broader context for a 'culture' of low participation.

Further Information

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