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Title: Comparison of Canadian and Belgian Youth Sport Participation Profiles

Abstract

In Canada, leisure time sport activities for youth are mainly offered through extracurricular programs within the school system, while a club system dominates in Belgium. These differences in sport delivery systems may affect opportunities for youth to participate in sport. Data on sport participation and socio-cultural background variables were collected from a national representative sample of Canadian adolescents (grades 9 to 12) and a representative sample of Flemish high school students (grades 7 to 12). Canadian youth showed higher levels of sport involvement and a stronger preference for team sports. The Canadian results reinforce the importance of parental influence on your sport participation, especially the father, whereas the Flemish results indicate a persistent social stratification in club participation based on age, sex, and parental education level. The school system as main supplier for leisure time sport activities can explain the lower level of segregation in sport participation among Canadian youth.

Keywords: Club sport; Cross-cultural analysis, Parental involvement; School sport; Social stratification

Introduction

The physical, psychological, and social benefits for youth who are actively involved in sport and physical activity are well documented in the literature (Bouchard, Shephard, Stephens, Sutton, & McPherson, 1990; Bouchard, Shephard, & Stephens, 1994; Colchico, Zybert, & Basch, 2000; Curtis & Russell, 1997; Quinney, Gauvin, & Wall, 1994; Steinbeck, 2001). Sport providers also emphasize that sport participation helps prepare youth to become responsible, independent, and contributing members of society (Martens, 2003). Physical education teachers, sport providers, and policy makers must therefore be cognizant of research in the field of youth sport that investigates the individual and social factors that influence sport participation. Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton's (2000) sport consumer behavior model indicated that both individual and environmental factors affect sport involvement. Similarly, Shank (2002) identified internal, external, and situational factors. Individual factors are identified as those linked to internal or psychological processes such as motivation, perception, learning and memory, attitudes, physical characteristics, and self-concept. Environmental factors refer to external socio-cultural and situational factors such as cultural norms and values, class, ethnicity, and gender relations, significant others, geographic conditions and sport opportunity. Shilbury, Quick, and Westerbeek (1998) also argued that consumer behavior is as much situation specific as it is person specific. Although the influence of individual and psychological factors may be important determinants of youth sport participation, the focus of this paper will be to examine data that relates to the social and cultural factors that may influence youth sport participation.

Given the impact of globalization in the 21st century, international comparisons of youth sport participation patterns provide an interesting opportunity to investigate social factors and operational systems from a cross-cultural perspective. In Europe for example, different studies

have compared sport participation profiles across a number of countries (Coordinated Monitoring of Participation in Sports [COMPASS], 1999; European Opinion Research Group [EORG], 2003; Rodgers, 1977). In these surveys, however, the samples were drawn from participants who were 16 years and older – thus excluding a major segment of the youth population. In addition, few surveys focused on comparing youth sport participation profiles on an international scale (De Knop, Engstrom, Skirstad, & Weiss, 1996). Research by De Knop and De Martelaer (2001), and Scheerder and Breedveld (2004) examined youth sport participation between Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands. De Knop and De Martelaer concluded that for youth sport in both countries, participation was more strongly tied to the aspect of the quality in which the sports activities were offered, rather than the quantity of involvement or programs offered. According to Scheerder and Breedveld (2004) the involvement in sports slightly decreased in Flanders among the younger population, while in the Netherlands little to no growth was detected. In Flanders, club membership increased in the 1990s, whereas it decreased in the Netherlands.

Comparative research in sociology sport presents a number of methodological and interpretative challenges. Henry (2002) identified two of these challenges. He suggested that one challenge

“is the recognition of the limitations of attempts to operationalize, and thus compare, parallel phenomena in different social/national systems. The other is the growing recognition that globalization, which implies interpenetration of phenomena makes certain forms of comparison (of ‘separate’ systems) not simply redundant but misconceived.” (p. 81)

Given these concerns, this investigation is an example of a ‘post-hoc’ comparative investigation where the data have been collected prior to the comparison study. The essential challenge to

overcome in this type of post hoc approach is defining and operationalizing concepts and variables across different contexts, such as streamlining the data. Given this limitation, this study may be considered as a ‘first step’ toward a developing area of research that examines transatlantic comparisons of youth sport participation. Canada and Belgium were selected as the comparative case for this examination due to the availability of similar data. It should be noted here, however, that the Belgian data in this paper, only relates to Flanders, the Northern and Dutch speaking part of Belgium. Belgium is a federalized country. The structure of the Belgian state has strongly influenced the organization of sport, as well as the development of sport policies (Taks, Renson, & Vanreusel, 1999). Since the end of the 1960s, sport became a separate responsibility of each of the three Communities (i.e. the Flemish, the French, and the German-speaking Community). In what follows, we will therefore, refer to Flanders, as an autonomous region within the Belgian state.

Contextual Framework

Delivery Systems for Sport Participation

The organizational context for youth sport participation in Canada and Flanders (Belgium) presents two different delivery systems. In Flanders (and Belgium as a whole), extracurricular sport activity is largely provided through sport clubs (the voluntary sector), and through public sports authorities (Taks et al., 1999). The club system in Flanders is supported by governmental subsidies within the framework of the ‘Sport for All’ policy (Vanreusel, Taks, & Renson, 2002). In Canada, the majority of the extracurricular sporting activities are provided through the publically funded school system. Under the ‘Quality Daily Physical Education’ school initiative originally established in 1986, schools offer daily physical education and intramural sport activities (Chad, Humbert, & Jackson, 1999; Luke, 2000). The community club system is available in

Canada, but is not publicly funded. Since the school system is the only place that reaches *all* youth, one might expect a higher level of sport involvement of Canadian youngster compared to Flemish youngsters (**Hypothesis 1**). The context of sport participation, through school and/or community clubs, is a major difference between both countries, and thus constitutes a major focus of this study.

Cultural and Geographical Contexts

In addition to differing delivery systems, Canadian and Belgian youth are characterized by different cultural and geographical characteristics. These contexts will presumably lead to differences in youth sport preferences. With the exception of soccer – a sport that is popular in both countries (Scheerder et al., 2002; Statistics Canada, 2003) – ice hockey is, for example, strongly embedded in Canadian culture, both as a participant and a spectator sport. Cycling, on the other hand, is very popular in Belgium, mainly as a semi-professional and professional sport (Geldhof, 2003). From a participant perspective, gymnastics and swimming have always been strongly embedded in the Flemish culture, because these sports have made up the core of the physical education curriculum for a very long time (Scheerder et al., 2002). We anticipated, therefore, that the selection of preferred youth sports will differ between Canada and Flanders (**Hypothesis 2**).

Socio-Cultural Factors and Sport Participation

Research suggests that sport participation is socially stratified (Booth & Loy, 1999; Wilson, 2002). Gender, age, and socio-economic status are factors that have been investigated in the adult sport participation literature. Ethnicity and media preferences have also been identified as important determinants of sport participation (e.g., Wright, Macdonald, & Groom, 2003; Moens & Scheerder, 2004). Age and gender differences in youth sport participation research has also been well documented (Scully & Clarke, 1997) with the general conclusion that females participate less

than males, and that sport participation among youth decreases with increased age. In contrast to research regarding the adult population, however, empirical data on the social stratification of youth sport has received less attention (Scheerder, Vanreusel, Taks, & Renson, 2005). This line of research suggests that socio-cultural variables also affect the sport participation and consumption patterns of youth. These factors may include: (a) generation-related variables (cohort analysis); (b) subject-related demographic variables (including age, sex, and birth order); (c) family-related variables (i.e., family size, parental level of education, parental professional status, family income, parental and siblings' participation behavior); and, (d) school and leisure-related variables (peers, school, media; Taks et al., 1993).

Given this context, the Canadian and Flemish data sets available for this study include a selection of socio-cultural background indicators in addition to sport participation statistics. Thus, the possible influence of socio-cultural background variables on youth sport participation patterns may be analyzed and compared for the Canadian and the Flemish sample. In light of the fact that both countries share a comparable industrialized status and the liberal democracy philosophy, we do not expect a major socioeconomic status divergence between these two populations. However, due to the differences in the sport delivery system, we expect that club sport participation in Canada will require more capital resource, and as such, will be more socially stratified compared to Flemish club sport participation (**Hypothesis 3**).

Family-Related Variables and Sport Participation

The impact of parental influences is a family-related variable that encourages youth sport participation (Mota & Silva, 1999; Mullin, Sutton, & Hardy, 2000; Yang, Telama, & Laasko, 1996). Direct parental influence is exerted by sharing information related to sports participation and by imposing cultural norms and values. Indirect parental influence may be experienced

through active sport participation that is observed and imitated by children, and by screening the interaction of youth with other leisure-time activities such as watching television or spending time with peers. However, the influence of peers, school, and media may also impact youth sport participation and sport consumer behavior (e.g., “significant others”, De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2004; Mullin et al., 2000). Given the fact that no data were available to analyze these school and leisure-related variables, this study will examine data related to the sport participation preferences of the parents and the sport participation profiles of their children. A positive relationship is expected to appear for both the Canadian and Flemish data (**Hypothesis 4**).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to compare: (a) youth sport participation profiles (i.e., level of involvement, organizational context, and sport preferences); (b) the impact of socio-cultural background characteristics on youth sport participation; and, (c) the impact of the parents’ sport participation on the sport participation of youth in Canada and Flanders. The analyses will test the following four hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: A higher level of sport involvement is expected among Canadian children compared with Flemish youngsters because leisure time sports have a dominant place in the extracurricular programs of schools in Canada, and the school is the only context that reaches all youth in society.

Hypothesis 2: Due to geographical and cultural differences between Canada and Flanders, we expect differences in sport preferences among Canadian and Flemish youngsters.

Hypothesis 3: Because of the lack of governmental subsidies, club participation in Canada is expected to be more socially stratified compared

to the Flemish club system.

Hypothesis 4: We expect a positive association between the sport involvement of the youngsters and the parents, in both, the Canadian and the Flemish sample.

Method

Participants

The Canadian and Flemish samples are represented in Table 2.1. In Canada, 2,400 surveys were distributed, and 1,127 samples were returned for analysis (47% response rate). The Flemish sample consisted of 2,176 youngsters, with a response rate of 71%, and non-respondents were not systematically distributed in any particular social category (Scheerder & Vanreusel, 2002). The Canadian sample is representative for the high school population in Canada, while the Flemish sample is representative for the high school population in Flanders.

In the Canadian sample, the teen segment, 12-17 years of age, was targeted. The sample represented a cross-section of youth from six Canadian provinces (British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec). Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to youth, between grades 9 and 12, at ten Canadian high schools. A convenience sampling approach was utilized (Jackson, 1999). An elite sport ranking of a national sport governing body was used to identify schools with an adequate scholastic-athletic environment. From the national list, separate lists were made for each province. Every school on the provincial list was contacted and sent an information package. Any school that was permitted to participate in the study by its administration and was interested in the project was included in the sample. The use of an elite sport ranking to select the sample limited the inferences that could be made from the data. Nevertheless, 44.2% of the respondents self-identified as varsity athletes, subsequently yielding a balance between varsity and non-varsity preferences within the sample.

The sample also included diverse representations from English and French schools, and private and public sectors.

The Flemish sample was proportionally stratified according to: (a) the school population in each province (N=5); (b) the population in each school board (community, private, provincial or municipal); (c) the population in each school program (humanities or ‘academic’, technical, and vocational); and, (d) the level of urbanization of the school’s place of residence. Since the Canadian sample included grade 9 to grade 12 students, and the Flemish sample included grades 7 to 12, the Flemish sample has a slightly higher proportion of youth at younger ages (Table 2.1).

Survey Instruments

The Canadian survey consisted of seventy-five multiple choice, rank-order multiple choice, and open-ended questions that were designed to investigate the socio-cultural, psychological and consumer profile of youth and sport (Bradish, Lathrop, Stevens, & Sedgwick, 2000). For the purpose of this study, multiple choice and rank order questions related to sport participation level, context, and type, and parental educational level and sport involvement were analyzed. A pilot study determined the categories for each question. For example, the item related to sport participation asked respondents to indicate their interest in sport participation according to five choices; very high, somewhat high, average, somewhat low, and very low, which were collapsed into three categories, high, moderate, and low, for analysis. Athletic Directors within each school partnered with the researchers and offered each student involved in athletics or physical education classes an opportunity to complete the survey.

The Flemish survey collected data through a standardized questionnaire, which was previously submitted, to tests of reliability and validity (Renson, 1973; Scheerder, 2003). The variables under investigation include questions on the socio-cultural and demographic situation of

the teenagers and their families, and on the participation in leisure-time sports by the teenagers and their parents. For the teenagers the actual average hours of sports participation as well as the type of sports practice were questioned. The questionnaire included 19 sports activities and seven open ended options. For the parents no list of sports practices was available. Instead, they were asked to mention which kind of sports activity/activities they practiced in the past and at present. The questionnaire was distributed at the schools. The teenagers were asked to complete the questionnaire at home together with their parent(s) and to take the completed questionnaire back to school two weeks later. When completed, the questionnaire was checked by a personal interview.

Measurements for the Sport Participation Variables. The sport participation variables included in the study and their measurements are show in Table 2.2. In order to streamline the data in both sets, some adaptations in the measurement of the variables had to be performed. However, some differences still remain and should be pointed out. For instance, the level of sport involvement by the youngsters was self-reported in the Canadian sample, whereas this was based on the actual average hours of participation in the Flemish sample. It should be noted that the non-participants are included in the ‘low’ participation level, and the ‘unorganized sport’ categories. The sport preferences were also questioned in a different way. The Canadian survey had a limited list of the four most preferred sports among youth, based on a pilot survey. The respondents had to indicate in which sport they participated most often, for instance basketball, volleyball, soccer, baseball, other. The Flemish questionnaire included 19 sports, as well as open-ended options, thus multiple answers could be provided. For the purpose of this survey, the four sports with the highest frequencies of participation among the Flemish males and females will be compared with the Canadian data (Table 2.2).

Measurement of the Socio-Cultural Variables. The comparable socio-cultural variables include: country, age, sex, parental level of education (PEL), sport involvement of father (FA-SP), and sport involvement of mother (MO-SP). The educational level of the parents was selected as the social status variable over the professional status, because there were more difficulties to overcome in streamlining the professional status compared to the educational level. Moreover, the educational level is commonly accepted as an indicator for measuring social status and social position (Elchardus, 2002), and Wilson (2002) argued that cultural capital, measured by the educational level, better explains social class and sport involvement than economic capital, which is measured through the income status. However, a new variable was constructed, which regroups the educational level of the father and the mother, using the HOMALS data reduction procedure within SPSS. This technique estimates category quantifications and the object scores that separate categories of nominal variables as much as possible and divides cases into homogeneous groups. Only one dimension was withdrawn and the time interval-related eigenvalues measured 0.801 indicating a good fit. The results of this re-scaling procedure were divided into three categories (low, medium, and high). Each category holds the same share of respondents (approximately 33%). The new variable refers to the ‘parental educational level’ (PEL) and was calculated for the Canadian and Flemish samples separately.

Sport involvement of the parents (FA-SP and MO-SP) also needed streamlining between both samples. Parental sport involvement was self-reported in the Canadian sample, while this was based on actual participation characteristics in the Flemish data; ‘low’ being equal to ‘no participation in sport or less than one hour/week’, ‘moderate’ being equal to ‘participating 1 to 3 hours per week’, and ‘high’ being equal to ‘more than 3 hours of sports per week’.

Statistical Analyses

Frequencies are used to describe general characteristics of samples. Bivariate comparisons of categorical data were calculated using the chi square test of independence, with $\alpha = .05$, followed by analysis of the adjusted standardized residual. In order to control alpha inflation, a modified Bonferoni procedure was used (Keppel, 1991) in the analysis of the adjusted standardized residual. A probability of 0.05 was multiplied by the number of the degrees of freedom for the chi square test of independence, and the resulting value was divided by the number of cells in the matrix to determine the alpha level for each cell.

Multinomial regression analyses were used in order to predict which variables best explain sports involvement among Canadian and Flemish youngsters. The exponentiated $-\beta$ -coefficients from the multinomial regression analyses show the odds ratios regarding a specific variable category. The odds ratios represent the change in the odds of membership in the 'target' category, given a 1-unit increase in the predictor variable. Odds ratios greater than 1.0 show the increase in odds of an outcome of '1', whereas odds ratios less than 1.0 show the decreases in odds of that outcome (Menard, 2002). The Wald statistics indicate the predictive power of each variable, given all variables in the model.

Results

Sport Participation Profiles by Gender and Age

Level of involvement. The Canadian data, in which the youngsters self-reported their level of involvement, show a very high proportion of highly involved participants. In the Flemish data, a much lower proportion of the youngsters is situated in the high intense group (especially the females), confirming **Hypothesis 1** (see Table 2.3 and 2.4). As 44.2% of the Canadian respondents self-identified as varsity athletes, this result is expected. A gender comparison of participation

levels demonstrates similar trends within the Canadian and Flemish data. More males indicate a high level of participation whereas females more often indicate average and low levels of participation. These results support existing research that demonstrates females are less physically active than males. Moreover, the Flemish data set shows a reduction in the high participation group with increasing age, but this trend is not significant. In the Canadian sample, more 13 and 16 year olds show higher levels of participation while more 14, 15, and 17 year olds show lower levels of participation than expected ($p < 0.01$) (Tables 2.3 & 2.4).

Sport Delivery. The results confirm the differences in the sport delivery system, including a more developed extracurricular school sports system in Canada, and more club sport participation in Flanders. However, the Canadian questionnaire asked for the way in which the youngsters participated ‘most often’, while the Flemish data reflect a hierarchy, with club participation having the highest rank, followed by organized school sports, and unorganized sports. Thus, once a person indicated participation in a club, his/her participation in school sport is no longer reflected. However, within the Flemish context, the sport(s) practiced in club are usually ‘the most important’ as well.

In terms of gender, in Flanders, more males are active in school and club sports whereas more females are active in unorganized sport contexts. However, the opposite occurs in Canada where more females participate in school sport and males are more involved in unorganized sports. Note, however, that in both samples, males show a higher involvement in club sports than females. The Canadian results are in line with previous findings from a Canadian survey indicating that boys were more likely than girls to participate in organized and unorganized sports (Statistics Canada, 2004).

In terms of age, the Flemish sample indicated a shift from club sport participation among

the youngest youth (13 years) to unorganized sport participation among the oldest youth (17 years). In other words, as the youngsters grow older, they start to participate more often in an unstructured sport context ($p < .001$). No significant differences appear in the context of participation according to age in the Canadian group. This is in contrast with previous findings which indicated that younger children in Canada were more involved in unorganized sports (Statistics Canada, 2004) (Tables 2.5 & 2.6).

Sport Preferences. The sport selections listed in the Canadian survey were the four most popular sports retrieved from the pilot survey. In the Flemish data, the four most popular sports are retrieved from a list of 19 sports. Soccer is the number one sport for males in Flanders, followed by recreational swimming, which is also the number one sport for Flemish females. Basketball is the also popular among Flemish males. Volleyball is ranked the number three sport among Canadian and Flemish females. Baseball is of no importance in the Flemish sample, as expected. The results partially confirm **Hypothesis 2** (see Table 2.7). On the one hand there are similar sport preferences, such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball, on the other hand there are clear differences in sport preferences, such as baseball in Canada, and swimming, tennis and table tennis in Flanders (Table 2.7).

Bivariate Analyses

The results of the bivariate analysis of the level of sport involvement and the context of participation of the adolescents and their socio-cultural background variables are summarized in Tables 2.8 and 2.9. Results from the Flemish sample indicate that low participation youth tend to have low education parents while high participation youth have high education parents and vice versa ($p < .001$; see Table 2.8). No significant differences appear in the level of youth participation according to the parent's education level in the Canadian group. A similar positive pattern is found

in both the Canadian and Flemish data for father's and mother's sport involvement. Canadian youth are more sport active when their parents have a high sport activity level. On the other hand, Flemish youth are more active when their parents have either a high or a moderate sport activity level, particularly for the father. Consequently, a greater range of parent sport participation, moderate to high, can have a positive influence upon youth activity.

The relationship between the socio-cultural background variables and the context of participation are presented in Table 2.9. No significant differences appear in the context of youth sport participation according to parent's education level in the Canadian group. However, significant differences appear for this variable in the Flemish group. For instance, Flemish youth with low and medium education level parents are more frequently involved in unorganized sport, and less frequently involved in club sports than expected, whereas youth with high education level parents are more frequently involved in club sports. The trends in both samples are very similar with regard to the parental sports involvement. Youngsters with low participation parents participate more frequently in unorganized sports, whereas youngsters with high sport participation parents are more involved in club sports.

In contrast with the Flemish findings, the Canadian results show no significant relationship between the parental level of education and the sport involvement, nor with the context of participation, indicating an absence of social stratification in the Canadian sample. This is a first indication to reject **Hypothesis 3**. It does not seem to be the case that only more affluent Canadian youngsters find their way to the club system, despite the fact that the club system in Canada is not subsidized. On the contrary, the Flemish results show that youngsters from higher educated parents have a significantly higher level of involvement in sport and participate significantly more in sports club, compared to their counterparts from lower educated parents. Thus, at first sight, the Flemish

governmental subsidies to not induce democratic participation (Table 2.8 & 2.9).

Multivariate Analyses

Tables 2.10 and 2.11 show the results of the multinomial regression analysis for the Canadian and Flemish youth, respectively. The dependent variable is the context of participation, with ‘unorganized sports participation’ as a reference category. All socio-cultural background variables, including the sport participation levels of the parents are included in the model. This type of analysis detects which socio-cultural variable(s) best predict the context of participation, given all variables in the model. The exponentiated values ($Exp(\beta)$) of the raw regression coefficients for each of the variables represent the change in the odds of membership in the ‘target’ category, given a 1-unit increase in the predictor. For example, the $Exp(\beta)$ for ‘Sport for father low’ equals 0.364 ($p < .001$). this odds ratio is smaller than 1, and thus indicates that Canadian youngsters who’s father’s level of sports involvements is low, are significantly less likely to participate in club sports, compared to Canadian youngsters who’s fathers are highly involved in sport, and this compared to those involved in unorganized sports (= reference group). The chi-square of the -2 log likelihood ($\Delta-2LL$) is significant for both models, indicating a good fit of the models. The Nagelkerke’s R-square is 0.08 in the Canadian analysis and 0.093 in the Flemish analysis. The Nagelkerke’s R-square measure may be loosely viewed as a multi-nomial regression counterpart to the well-known R-Square statistic in linear regression analysis. The Nagelkerke’s R-square measure always falls between 0 and 1, and it tends to be much lower than the R-Square statistic in linear regression analysis (Steinberg & Colla, 1991). A low number does not necessarily imply a poor fit, and values between 0.20 and 0.40 are considered very satisfactory. Consequently, the values in the models are only ‘moderately’ satisfactory, indicating that other independent variables may contribute to explaining the context of participation. However, due to the fact that

we were limited to the availability of data in both data sets, and the post-hoc approach of the study, we were not able to include more variables into the model (Tables 2.10 & 2.11).

The Canadian results indicate that youth with a father with a low or moderate participation level, are less likely to be involved in club sports ($p < .001$) than youth with a high participating father. Canadian males are less likely to be actively involved in school sports ($p < .01$) compared to their female counterparts. A youth with a moderately active father is also less likely to be involved in school sports compared to a youth with a highly active father. Finally, youth whose parents have a medium educational level participate less in school sports than youth whose parents have a high educational level. These results need to be contrasted to those who are active in an unorganized sports context (the reference group).

In contrast with the Canadian results, gender and age are important predictors in the Flemish sample. Males, as well as the younger age groups are more likely to be involved in club sports ($p < .001$), and in school sports ($p < .05$), when compared to the unorganized sports participants. Moreover, social stratification in club sport participation is a fact, which supports the findings from the bi-variate analyses. Youth with parents with a low or medium educational level, are less likely to participate in club sports ($p < .001$). Whereas parental educational level is not a predictor for club sport participation among Canadian youth (rejection of **Hypothesis 3**), it appears, unexpectedly, as a predictor in the Flemish data. Another contrast is the finding that in Flanders more males tend to participate in school sport, whereas in Canada fewer males tend to participate in school sports compared to females.

Sport participation of the parents, only plays a role for Canadian youth. More specifically youth with fathers who are low to moderately involved in sport participate significantly less in club sports. In addition, if fathers are moderately involved in sport, youth also participates

significantly less in school sports. Sport involvement of the parents did not predict the context of participation for Flemish youth. Thus, **Hypothesis 4** is only partially confirmed, as it was expected that parental sport involvement would affect both youth groups.

Discussion

With respect to **Hypothesis 1**, the results of the study affirm that a higher level of sport involvement was evident among Canadian youth as compared to Flemish youth. This can be explained, to a certain degree, by considering youth participation level in light of the participation context. Canadian youth participate mainly within school sport whereas Flemish youth participate primarily in club sport. Since the school is the only place to reach all youngsters in society, we assume that Canadian youngsters have more exposure to extracurricular sporting activities and thus tend to participate more. Although a direct causal relationship between ‘exposure’ and ‘participation’ is not proven by the data, the relationship appears plausible. In order to establish whether sport exposure in the school context is a determinant of youth sport participation a more qualitative approach should be considered (Wright et al., 2003). Moreover, the different methodological approaches for the two data sets (self-reported in the Canadian sample and actual number of hours practiced in the Flemish sample) should always be considered when interpreting the data.

Hypothesis 2, which predicted differences in youth sport preferences between Canadian and Flemish youth, is only partially confirmed. Global sports such as basketball, volleyball, and soccer are equally popular among Canadian and Flemish youth. However, some difference sport selections were apparent, which reflect the differences in the sport delivery system. Canadian youth appear to select team sports that are offered in the curricular and intramural school context (e.g., baseball, basketball, soccer, volleyball). Flemish youth prefer those sports promoted via the

club system (e.g., soccer, tennis, volleyball), as well as swimming, which is compulsory in most school curricula and also often practiced in an unorganized setting. The differences in acquiring this information also affects the results. Whereas the Canadian sample was limited to selections from a list of four most popular sports, the youngsters in the Flemish sample were able to provide multiple sport preferences. In a study performed among high school students in Southern Ontario (Taks & Mason, 2004), sports such as ice hockey, American Football and baseball did come up in the top five of most preferred participant sports. These are three sports which are culturally embedded in North America, but not in Europe (Van Bottenburg, 2003).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that club participation in Canada would be more socially stratified compared to the Flemish sport system. Contrary to this expectation, club sport participation in Canada was not socially stratified, whereas club sport participation in Flanders appeared to be socially stratified based on age, sex, and social status (measured by parental education level, and taking into account the non-participants as well). Younger teenagers, boys, and Flemish youth from more affluent families (higher parental educational level) participated significantly more in club activities than the less affluent parental cohort. Given the fact that extracurricular school sport activities are not prevalence in Flanders, and that the club system is publicly funded, the question arises, ‘what keeps youth from less affluent Flemish families from participating in club sports?’ The answer to this question might be sought by a more qualitative approach. In the same line, Wright et al. (2003) stated that:

“... differences in leisure patterns point to social and cultural divisions within countries as well as between countries. The opportunities to participate in physical activity as leisure, as well as the values attributed to participation, are framed within class and gender relations” (p. 19).

Overall, the results indicate much less segregation in Canadian youth sport participation. This is in line with previous Canadian findings, which indicated that lower income levels were not likely to act as a barrier to participation in organized activities for children aged 10 to 15 (Statistics Canada, 2004). Neither sex nor age appeared as important predictors of Canadian youth sport participation. This is in contrast with the Flemish data, where females and the older youth segment appear to be particularly at risk for decreased levels of participation. The club-based “Sport for All” philosophy in Flanders may not be as effective as the “Quality Daily Physical Education” school-based system in Canada. If so, Flanders may wish to focus on the development of extra-curricular sporting activities within the school context (De Knop et al., 2001). The Flemish Sports Administration (BLOSO) engaged in such an initiative, with a plan to establish partnerships between schools, local sport authorities, and sport clubs and their federations (De Knop, Theeboom, De Bosscher, & Van den Bergh, 2002).

Finally, with respect to **Hypothesis 4**, all bi-variate analyses indicated a significant, positive relationship between the level of sport involvement of the parents and their children. However, the parent-youth level of participation association disappeared in the Flemish sample when other variables were included in the model (multi-variate approach). In the Canadian sample, the level of father’s sport involvement remained an important predictor for club sport participation, and to a lesser extent for school sport participation, when all variables were considered. Therefore, the results, only slightly confirm **Hypothesis 4**. In summary, the results of the multi-variate analyses indicate that club participation is socially stratified in Flanders according to age, sex, and parental education level, in Canada, father’s level of sport involvement is the strongest predictor for club participation.

Conclusion

The findings of this comparative analysis indicate a youth sport activity profile that appears to both support general findings in the youth sport literature, and offer a new perspective on cross-cultural sport organizational differences. The Canadian results reinforce the importance of parental influence on your sport participation, especially the father, whereas the Flemish results indicate a persistent social stratification in club participation based on age, sex, and parental education level. Further, differences between the Canadian and Flemish youth profiles indicate a higher participation level of Canadian youth, and the possibility that this difference might be due to the emphasis on extracurricular school sport activity in Canada. Given these indicators, youth sport administrators in Flanders may wish to encourage initiatives that build connections between the school and sport club contexts. Toward this end, sport management and physical education administrators in Flanders need to be aware of the patterns of youth sport participation, so as to encourage *all* their students – both talented and less talented – to find their way to a sport club. The implementation of a ‘School-club-local sport authority’ strategy needs to be evaluated on a regular basis in order to track improvements in the level of youth sport involvement, diminish the risk of youth sport participation attrition, and thereby, truly implement a successful “Sport for All” philosophy. The Canadian educational system needs to be fully aware of the advantages of having extracurricular sports activities within the school system, and the effects they have on the overall participation of Canadian youth. Moreover, school sport experiences among Canadians have proven to be beneficial for adult sport involvement later in life (Curtis, McTeer, & White, 1999). It must be stressed, however, that this contribution was only a first attempt for cross-cultural comparison of sport participation among youngster. The post-hoc approach of the comparison has many limitations, which we tried to overcome the best we could. Future research in this area should take a pre-hoc approach, and use similar instruments to collect the data.

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Table 2.1. Description of the Canadian and Flemish Samples

Country/Gender	Canada		Flanders	
	N	%	N	%
Male	633	57	1,036	48
Female	482	43	1,140	52
Total	115*	100	2,176	100

Note. *12 missing, the total Canadian sample was 1127.

Table 2.2. Description of the Sport Variables Adopted in the Study

Category	Canada	Flanders
Level (3 cat.)	Low (self-reported)	Low (≤ 1 hr/w/yr; excl. PE classes)
	Moderate (self-reported)	Moderate ($1 \leq 3$ hr/w/yr; excl. PE classes)
	High (self-reported)	High (> 3 hr/w/yr; excl. PE classes)
Organizational context (3 cat.)	Unorganized sports, Outside of clubs/school, Other	Unorganized sports, outside of clubs/school (summer camp, youth association, with friends, with family, alone)
	Organized school sports	Organized school sports (extracurricular school program)
	Organized clubs/organizations	Organized clubs/organizations (clubs)
Sport preferences (different cat.)	Limited list of sports provided	Extensive list of 19 sports provided, the four most practiced are retained here

Table 2.3. Descriptive Statistics on Level of Involvement by Gender (in %)

Level	Canada		Flanders	
	N = 1,097		N = 1,701	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Low	8 ↓	11 ↑	23 ↓	39 ↑
Moderate	14 ↓	23 ↑	25 ↓	30 ↑
High	78 ↑	66 ↓	52 ↑	31 ↓

Note. Canada: Chi-square = 21.434; df = 2; p < .001

Flanders: Chi-square = 79.280; df = 2; p < .001

↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.4. Descriptive Statistics on Level of Involvement by Age (in %)

Level	Canada					Flanders				
	N = 1,098					N = 1,701				
	≤ 13	14	15	16	≥ 17	≤ 13	14	15	16	≥ 17
Low	5 ↓	7	12 ↑	8	15 ↑	30	28	30	34	38
Moderate	16	24 ↑	19	12	13	29	28	24	28	27
High	79 ↑	69	69	80 ↑	72	41	44	46	38	35

Note. Canada: Chi-square = 27.177; df = 8; p < .01

Flanders: Chi-square = 13.339; df = 8; ns

↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.5. Description of Context of Participation by Gender (in %)

Context	Canada		Flanders	
	N = 1,071		N = 1,911	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Unorganized	39 ↑	35 ↓	33 ↓	45 ↑
Organized school	24 ↓	31 ↑	5 ↑	4 ↓
Organized club	37 ↑	34 ↓	62 ↑	50 ↓

Note. Canada: Chi-square = 6.098; df = 2; p < .05
 Flanders: Chi-square = 28.661; df = 2; p < .001
 ↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)
 ↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.6. Description of Context of Participation by Age (in %)

Context	Canada					Flanders				
	N = 1,098					N = 1,701				
	≤ 13	14	15	16	≥ 17	≤ 13	14	15	16	≥ 17
Unorganized	32	37	42	34	37	34 ↓	35	42	43	52 ↑
Organized School	36	23	24	30	28	5	5	4	6	3
Organized Club	32	40	34	36	35	61 ↑	60	54	51	45 ↓

Note. Canada: Chi-square = 13.911; df = 8; ns
 Flanders: Chi-square = 38.113; df = 8; p < .001
 ↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)
 ↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.7. Description of Sport Preferences by Gender

Rank	Canada		Flanders	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1	Basketball	Basketball	Soccer	Swimming
2	Soccer	Soccer	Swimming	Tennis
3	Baseball	Volleyball	Basketball	Volleyball
4	Volleyball	Baseball	Table Tennis	Soccer

Table 2.8. Socio-Cultural Variables by Level of Involvement (in %)

Variable	Canada (n = 1,089)			Flanders (n = 1,630)		
	Level of involvement			Level of involvement		
	Low	Average	High	Low	Average	High
PEL						
low	11.0	19.4	69.7	36.9 ↑	27.6	35.5 ↓
medium	9.2	20.0	70.8	31.2	28.7	40.2
high	8.4	13.9	77.7	23.6 ↓	28.7	47.7 ↑
	Chi-square = 7.708; df = 4; ns			Chi-square = 24.433; df = 4; p < .001		
FA-SP						
low	14.8 ↑	23.7 ↑	61.5 ↓	37.1 ↑	27.1	35.8 ↓
moderate	9.3	21.8 ↑	68.8	19.2 ↓	33.2 ↑	47.6 ↑
high	5.2 ↓	9.5 ↓	85.3 ↑	18.7 ↓	25.8	55.6 ↑
	Chi-square = 57.431; df = 4; p < .001			Chi-square = 67.031; df = 4; p < .001		
MO-SP						
low	11.2 ↑	20.3 ↑	68.5 ↓	35.7 ↑	27.5	36.9 ↓
moderate	6.4	16.0	77.6	20.6 ↓	31.8	47.6 ↑
high	5.9	11.1 ↓	83.0 ↑	17.1 ↓	23.4	59.5 ↑
	Chi-square = 18.120; df = 4; p < .01			Chi-square = 49.109; df = 4; p < .001		

Notes. PEL = Parental educational level; FA-SP = Father's sport participation; MO-SP = Mother's sport participation; df = degrees of freedom; ns = Not significant
 ↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)
 ↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.9. Socio-Cultural Variables by Context of Participation (in %)

Context	Canada (n = 1089)			Flanders (n = 1630)		
	Context of participation			Context of participation		
	UO	OS	OC	UO	OS	OC
PEL						
low	38.6	28.3	33.1	46.4 ↑	4.9	48.7 ↓
medium	39.1	23.0	37.9	41.6 ↑	5.1	53.3 ↓
high	33.1	30.3	36.5	28.6 ↓	4.6	66.8 ↑
	Chi-square = 6.920; df = 4; ns			Chi-square = 44.926; df = 4; p < .001		
FA-SP						
low	44.3 ↑	30.1	25.6 ↓	43.6 ↑	5.3	51.1 ↓
moderate	42.2 ↑	24.1	33.7	28.0 ↓	4.3	67.8 ↑
high	26.7 ↓	28.0	45.3 ↑	32.2 ↓	2.4	65.5 ↑
	Chi-square = 39.973; df = 4; p < .001			Chi-square = 45.318; df = 4; p < .001		
MO-SP						
low	39.6 ↑	27.6	32.8 ↓	42.6 ↑	5.5	52.0 ↓
moderate	35.1	28.1	36.8	29.1 ↓	4.0	66.9 ↑
high	29.3 ↓	24.0	46.7 ↑	27.9 ↓	2.5	69.7 ↑
	Chi-square = 11.261; df = 4; p < .05			Chi-square = 38.066; df = 4; p < .001		

Notes. PEL = Parental educational level; FA-SP = Father's sport participation; MO-SP = Mother's sport participation; UO = Unorganized sport participation; OS = Organized school sports; OC = Organized club sports; df = degrees of freedom; ns = Not significant
 ↑ Significantly more than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)
 ↓ Significantly less than expected by chance (modified Bonferoni procedure)

Table 2.10. Socio-Cultural Predictor Variables of Context of Participating for Canadian Youth (Results of the Multi-Nomial Regression Analysis)

Dependent variable	Covariate	Exp(β) Sign	Wald	
CLUB	Intercept	**	8.045	
	Sex	boys	0.916 (ns)	0.312
		girls	(Ref.)	
	Age	≤ 13	0.953 (ns)	0.027
		14	0.941 (ns)	0.062
		15	0.676 (ns)	2.618
		16	1.025 (ns)	0.008
		≥ 17	(Ref.)	
	PEL	low	0.950 (ns)	0.070
		medium	1.005 (ns)	0.001
		high	(Ref.)	
	FA-SP	low	0.364 ***	24.623
		moderate	0.490 ***	14.329
		high	(Ref.)	
MO-SP	low	0.773 (ns)	1.185	
	moderate	0.838 (ns)	0.461	
	high	(Ref.)		
SCHOOL	Intercept		1.325	
	Sex	boys	0.572 **	11.093
		girls	(Ref.)	
	Age	≤ 13	1.790 (ns)	3.754
		14	0.820	0.552
		15	0.714	1.678
		16	1.050	0.028
		≥ 17	(Ref.)	
	PEL	low	0.856 (ns)	0.592
		medium	0.655 *	4.199
		high	(Ref.)	
	FA-SP	low	0.682 (ns)	3.242
		moderate	0.550 **	8.212
		high	(Ref.)	
MO-SP	low	1.189 (ns)	0.407	
	moderate	1.245 (ns)	0.553	
	high	(Ref.)		

Notes. Ref. = Unorganized sport group; ns = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; PEL = Parental education level; FA-SP = Father's sport participation; MO-SP = Mother's sport participation. 95% confidence interval for Exp(β); Nagelkerke R-Square = 0.08%; Δ -2LL = 72.680 ($p < .001$)

Table 2.11. Socio-Cultural Predictor Variables of the Context of Participation for Flemish Youth (Results of the Multi-Nomial Regression Analysis)

Dependent variable	Covariate		Exp(β) Sign	Wald
CLUB	Intercept		*	5.603
	Sex	boys	1.731 ***	25.082
		girls	(Ref.)	
	Age	≤ 13	1.957 ***	17.510
		14	1.771 **	9.067
		15	1.405 (ns)	3.021
		16	1.284 (ns)	1.702
		≥ 17	(Ref.)	
	PEL	low	0.547 ***	17.268
		medium	0.564 ***	19.476
		high	(Ref.)	
	FA-SP	low	0.738 (ns)	3.131
		moderate	1.216 (ns)	1.057
		high	(Ref.)	
	MO-SP	low	0.616 (ns)	3.721
		moderate	0.844 (ns)	0.419
high		(Ref.)		
SCHOOL	Intercept		***	18.094
	Sex	boys	1.622 *	3.923
		girls	(Ref.)	
	Age	≤ 13	2.858 *	5.886
		14	2.518 (ns)	3.550
		15	2.193 (ns)	2.419
		16	2.254 (ns)	2.751
		≥ 17	(Ref.)	
	PEL	low	0.620 (ns)	2.123
		medium	0.682 (ns)	1.758
		high	(Ref.)	
	FA-SP	low	1.589 (ns)	0.965
		moderate	1.880 (ns)	1.541
		high	(Ref.)	
	MO-SP	low	1.127 (ns)	0.033
		moderate	0.995 (ns)	0.000
high		(Ref.)		

Notes. Ref. = Unorganized sport group; ns = not significant; * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$;
 PEL = Parental education level; FA-SP = Father's sport participation; MO-SP = Mother's sport participation;
 95% confidence interval for Exp(β); Nagelkerke R-Square = 0.093%; Δ -2LL = 128.308 ($p < .001$)