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Sport as a Vehicle for Social Mobility and Regulation of Disadvantaged Urban Youth: Lessons from Rotterdam

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Abstract

This article addresses sport's contribution to social mobility of disadvantaged urban youth through an analysis of the Sport Steward program in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Sport-based social intervention programs are conceptualized as potential vehicles for the creation of different forms of capital from which certain benefits can be derived that enable social agents to improve their social position. While the Sport Steward program has contributed to objective and subjective social mobility of some participants, in most cases it is more suitable to highlight the relatively modest increases in participants' cultural, social and/or economic capital. However, rather than simply enhancing individual freedom and opportunity, sport-based intervention programs also serve as a form of social control and regulation. Sport is increasingly becoming a substantial aspect of the neoliberal policy repertoire of cities like Rotterdam aimed at generating social order in disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhoods.

Keywords: social mobility; regulation; disadvantaged youth; urban regeneration; the Netherlands

Introduction

Sport is often praised for its potential to promote certain societal outcomes. These outcomes cover a multitude of policy areas, including health, community cohesion, integration of minorities, urban regeneration and crime prevention (Long et al., 2002; Walseth and Fasting, 2004; Coalter, 2007; Kidd, 2008). Arguments for sport's contribution to social capital have

gained widespread recognition, despite the lack of consensus regarding the concept of social capital and its measurement (Blackshaw and Long, 2005). Sport participation is commonly viewed as providing opportunities for people to develop social trust and norms of generalized reciprocity (Putnam, 2000: 109-115). Jarvie (2006: 335) argues that the ‘promise in the notion of social capital is that sport and other associational activity can make a contribution to building up levels of trust in sport, culture and society and consequently contributing to democracy, community spirit and a weakening public domain.’ This promise underpins arguments for sport as a driver of social development and urban regeneration. More practically, the potential impact of sport as a catalyst for community regeneration and cohesion is now being widely advocated to help tackle issues of social and cultural exclusion and anti-social behaviour (Coaffee, 2008: 388). Social inclusion policy, particularly in the UK (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000; Coalter, 2007) but also increasingly in the Netherlands (Krouwel et al., 2006) and France (Arnaud, 2008), has driven to an extent the emphasis on sport as a tool for urban regeneration, the ‘integration’ of ethnic minorities, and the reduction of youth disengagement and crime.

There are some serious problems with the massive expectations people have of sport as a means to ‘solve’ social problems. While sport’s presumably beneficial contributions to several desired social outcomes are often recognized, empirical evidence for such outcomes is limited (Coalter, 2008: 40). Several authors suggest that there is a need to test the claims empirically and to monitor and evaluate sport for development programs in a more rigorous and sustained manner (e.g. Tacon, 2005; Levermore, 2008). More generally, Coalter warns against the danger of de-contextualized, romanticized, communitarian generalizations about the value of sport for development. Coalter (2008: 48) argues that ‘sport in any simple sense rarely achieves the variety of desired outcomes attributed to it’ and that ‘issues of process and context ... are key to understanding its developmental potential.’

This article aims to further this debate by exploring recreational sport’s contributions to social mobility of disadvantaged urban youth. First and foremost, it will unpack and critically examine a number of crucial questions drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1992) and on recent analyses of urban regeneration policies. These questions are discussed in relation to one particular case study: the Sport Steward program (SSP), a sport-based social intervention program in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. This program, which focuses on structured team sports, aims to improve the social outlook and employability prospects of long-term unemployed and underemployed youth, most of whom are second-

generation non-Western migrants. The questions that will be discussed in terms of the specificities of the locale under study are:

- Why and how are sport programs of this kind emerging within the political and cultural context of Rotterdam (and the Netherlands)?
- How and to what extent does SSP enable disadvantaged youth to create and convert different types of capital in the sport context and beyond?
- For which participants and under which circumstances does the program generate significant outcomes?
- And, finally, for whom are these outcomes actually desirable? What exactly have participants been ‘trained’ for: an education in becoming a normalized, regulated neoliberal subject?

Addressing these complex questions will move the scholarly debate on sport as an agent of personal and social change beyond a narrow focus on ‘evidence-based policy’, towards a profound and reflexive analysis of the political-cultural context in which sport programs of this kind are embedded and the social transformative and/or reproductive practices they embody. Underlying this approach is the recognition that the nature and consequences of capital formation will vary considerably depending on the social context. The approach taken in this article is one that treats social relationships and behaviour as constituted by social agents in specific circumstances, with access to unequally distributed assets, within networks and structures of (local) neoliberalism.

Sport, capital and social mobility

Sport can be viewed as a vehicle for generating different forms of capital, most notably economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), from which certain benefits can be derived that enable social agents to improve or maintain their social position. The impact of sport on an individual’s social position can be analyzed in terms of the effects of sport engagement on different forms of capital and the ways in which these capitals are transferred to other social spheres. These capitals are regarded as resources which may enable individuals to improve their social position and, as such, can form a basis for upward social mobility. In short, investigating the ways in which social agents create, use and convert

capitals through sport participation enables us to determine more precisely the contributions of sport-based intervention programs to social mobility. Below I define the key concepts in this model.

Social mobility

Social mobility generally refers to the movement of individuals or groups between different positions within the system(s) of social stratification. More specifically, social mobility can be described as changes in an individual's social position which involve significant alterations in his or her social environment and life conditions. There are two principal types of social mobility, horizontal and vertical (Sorokin, 1959: 133). Horizontal social mobility refers to the transition of an individual from one social group to another situated on the same level. When changes involve a significant improvement or deterioration of the social position, this is called vertical social mobility – upward or downward mobility, respectively. Upward social mobility exists in two principal forms: as an ‘infiltration’ of the individuals of a lower stratum into an existing higher one; and as a creation of a new group by such individuals, and the insertion of such a group into a higher stratum instead of, or side by side with, the existing groups of this stratum’ (ibid.: 133-4). In this article I will focus principally on cases of individual social uplifting.

Another relevant distinction is between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. Intergenerational mobility refers to the difference between the social position of individuals at a particular point in their adult life with that of their parents. Intragenerational mobility, on the other hand, involves the more short-term mobility within a single generation. In this article the focus is predominantly on the latter: the ways in which intragenerational mobility is achieved, or inhibited, by sport participation. However, as we will see in the discussion of the Sport Steward program, there are strong relationships between the social positions of parents (origins) and those that their children subsequently occupy (destination) (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1999).

Individual social mobility can be measured in terms of ‘hard’ indicators such as changes in the level of occupation, income or educational attainment. These indicators can be viewed as the ‘objective’ dimension of social mobility. But such indicators alone provide insufficient insight into how changes in life conditions are actually experienced by individuals. Bertaux and Thompson (1997: 15-6) argue that ‘objective resources ... and

constraints ... are so much mediated by the *perceptions* young people have of them that they remain ineffective and almost unreal as such.' It is possible to identify a number of subjective indicators of individual social mobility, such as perceived changes in emancipation, personal development and skills. Social mobility thus comprises objective as well as subjective dimensions. Incorporating both dimensions allows us to study sport's contribution to social mobility in a more precise manner.

Social mobility is not merely an individual affair. The social environment, geographical conditions, educational arrangements and the regional economy determine to a large extent if personal development and ambition are able to flourish. A socially disorganized neighbourhood obstructs individuals' prospects for the creation and use of social capital (Wacquant, 1998). Liveability, safety and service provision appear to be important (if not necessary) conditions for upward social mobility. This underlines the interrelationships between sport and other social fields. Sport, as a relatively autonomous field, cannot be viewed in isolation from other social spheres, such as the family, education, labour market and government. The avenues of social mobility facilitated through sport are to a large extent dependent on social conditions whose origins lie outside the realm of sport. Social mobility is affected by a range of factors that act in combination with one another in mutually reinforcing ways. Education and family (home environment, socio-economic and educational situation of parents) are two of the most important variables influencing relative social mobility (Nunn et al., 2007). I will return to this issue in the discussion of the Sport Steward program.

Economic, cultural and social capital

Three general forms of capital can be distinguished: economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The possession of any form of capital can reinforce the power of another or the capacity to acquire another. Economic capital corresponds to material wealth, as capital that can be readily transformed into money and that can be institutionalized in terms of property rights. Cultural capital (broadly defined) refers to cultural goods, knowledge, experience, education, competencies and skills which a social actor possesses and which confer power or status in the social hierarchy. Cultural capital is developed in the contexts of learning within family and early childcare settings, formal education, workplace training and informal learning. Social capital is produced by social investments of time and effort, but in a

less direct fashion than is economic or cultural capital. Bourdieu defined social capital as ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Social capital refers to a kind of ‘resource to action’ that is produced by, and invested in, social relationships by social actors for their individual and mutual benefit (Portes, 1998).

Different types of social capital can be distinguished. *Bonding social capital* refers to close ties between kin, neighbours and close friends, which tend to produce resources that help individuals to ‘get by’ or cope. *Bridging social capital*, on the other hand, refers to more distant ties with like persons, such as loose friendships and work colleagues. Bridging social capital is usually associated with leverage-producing connections, i.e. resources that help individuals to ‘get ahead’ or change their opportunity structure. Bridging networks are viewed to be ‘better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion’ (Putnam, 2000: 22). To these types of social capital a third species can be added: *linking social capital*. Linking social capital is concerned with relations between individuals and groups in different social strata. Linking social capital reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available within the community. The notion of linking social capital is extended by Woolcock (2001) to include the capacity of individuals and communities to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the immediate community.

In this article I will use the above concepts of social mobility and capital to interrogate the Sport Steward program. The aim of this exercise is to illustrate the ways in which the proposed framework can be put into practice. I appropriate Bourdieu’s sociological orientation as a set of ‘thinking tools’ for substantive investigation (Brubaker, 2004: 26). While drawing heavily on Bourdieu, my application of cultural capital is potentially at odds with his theory of social reproduction. For Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), the educational system perpetuates class-based differences in power and prestige. Rather than promoting social change, educational institutions such as schools tend to reproduce existing social relations and inequalities. Cultural capital plays a vital role in the reproduction of dominant social relations and structures. In this view, the Sport Steward program, which adopts an education-based personal development model, is unlikely to yield any significant results for disadvantaged urban youth in the long term. However, I would rather posit the *potential* for some degree of social transformation and social mobility for certain participants under certain

circumstances. But even in cases where the program does seem to be successful, the question remains for whom this success is actually desirable. It is to this issue that I will now turn.

Urban regeneration and sport policies: social control and social cohesion in Rotterdam

During the last decade the Dutch authorities have increasingly come to recognize sport as a major instrument in social policies. Sport is seen as potentially contributing to a wide array of social issues, including social integration and participation, community safety and crime reduction. The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (2005) views sport as ‘a highly desirable and effective way of achieving key government objectives’. In its policy statement *Tijd voor Sport* (Time for Sport), the national government particularly highlights its concern over increasing vandalism in inner-city areas, unhealthy lifestyles, segregation between different groups and diminishing community cohesion. The Dutch government has recently taken several initiatives as part of its Large Cities Policy (*Grote Stedenbeleid*) in which sport and leisure activities play an important role (ibid.: 49). As such, sport has become more connected with mainstream policy agendas and political projects in the Netherlands during the past few years (cf. Coaffee, 2008 for the UK).

The emergence of sport-based intervention programs such as SSP should be viewed within the context of attempts by a coalition of state actors at generating social order in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. In the Netherlands, there are many interdependencies between institutional actors in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and powerful national actors, with both having the ambition to create social order in areas that are deemed prone to segregation, crime, vandalism and nuisance (Uitermark et al., 2007). Local authorities in Rotterdam have initiated various strategies for urban regeneration and inter-ethnic ‘integration’, most evidently through large-scale gentrification processes but also through welfare-to-work programs and sport-based programs like SSP. Despite these efforts, relations between different social and ethnic groups in Rotterdam are mostly ‘parallel rather than integrative’ (ibid.: 137). In the field of sport, Krouwel et al. (2006: 175) have noted the strong preferences for mono-ethnic environments among the majority of participants with a non-autochthonous Dutch ethnic background living in Rotterdam. For minority groups, sport is particularly useful to temporarily get away from social arenas with tense relations, such as the neighbourhood, school and workplace. During leisure time there is a desire to be among those with whom social interaction is uncomplicated, symmetrical and meaningful.

It could well be argued that within this context of major political concern about social cohesion, immigration and crime, serving disadvantaged (ethnic) youth is not the ultimate goal of sport-based programs such as SSP. Rather, they are a means through which governmental organizations and their partners seek to ‘civilize’ and regulate these youth and their neighbourhoods. This strategy reflects the (locally adapted) neoliberal agenda that has emerged, in the Netherlands and elsewhere (e.g. Peck and Tickell, 2002; Wacquant, 1999), around ‘social’ issues like crime, immigration, urban order and community regeneration. Peck and Tickell (2002: 391-2) assert that in social policy, the (re)criminalization of poverty, the normalization of contingent work, and its enforcement through welfare entrenchment, workfare programming, and active employment policies represent a comprehensive reconstitution of the boundary institutions of the labour market. The neoliberal policy repertoire has been stretched to embrace a range of extra-market forms of governance and regulation. These include, *inter alia*, the establishment of social-capital discourses and techniques, and the incorporation of local-governance and partnership-based modes of policy development and program delivery in areas like urban regeneration and social welfare (ibid. 390).

In Rotterdam, this neoliberal policy repertoire involves renewed attempts to discipline disadvantaged (minority ethnic) groups (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008: 1486). The fear of urban unrest, crime, segregation and a culture of unemployment is central to this repertoire, which targets those places where disadvantaged (minority ethnic) groups reside: cities in general and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in particular. A sense of moral outrage and fear informs the actions of local authorities (spurred on by powerful national actors) who try to educate and discipline those who are deemed ‘dangerous’, ‘troublesome’ or ‘at risk’. Sport development policy in Rotterdam principally targets two discursively overlapping groups: potentially ‘troublesome’ (mostly unemployed) youth, and ethnic minorities (Rijpma and Meiburg, 1989: 146). This policy is based in part on the common suspicion that ‘isolation and disintegration may prove a fertile breeding ground for vandalism, aggression in public, drug addiction, and other forms of deviant behaviour’ (ibid.: 147). Further, sport could be used ‘as a means to “motivate” marginal youth’, to normalize their behaviour (e.g. contingent work, refrain from criminal behaviour) and ‘to “integrate” them into wider society’ (ibid.: 151). Although the exact form of this ‘civilizing offensive’ differs strongly between left-wing and populist local political parties, both sides of Rotterdam’s political spectrum emphasize the necessity of managing and redressing incivilities and generating social order (Uitermark and

Duyvendak, 2008: 1499). It is within this particular political-cultural context that the Sport Steward program operates.

Engaging the ‘hard to reach’: the Sport Steward program

SSP seeks to improve the socio-economic outlook of disadvantaged youth by means of providing personal development and employment opportunities. The program uses sport as a hook to access ‘hard to reach’ groups and to engage and encourage young people to look at the broader issues that affect them. SSP acknowledges that ‘it is the adoption of a personal and social development model which is sacred to sport-based social inclusion programs rather than sport’ (Crabbe et al., 2006: 19). SSP tackles problems such as unemployment, lack of education and poverty by using sport to educate and develop life skills that are transferable into other aspects of life (cf. Skinner et al., 2008). The four-month program is aimed specifically at creating an educational platform where youth obtain knowledge of and experience with the profession of sport steward, as well as opportunities to play sport. The training includes job placement and offers prospects for further education and employment.

Reflecting the neoliberal policy repertoire of the local authorities, SSP particularly targets neighbourhoods that are characterized by comparatively high levels of youth unemployment and related issues such as educational deficits, welfare dependency, public violence, crime and drug abuse (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2007). Delivery of the program commenced in 2007 in the districts of Delfshaven and Feijenoord, both of which have relatively large numbers of unemployed youth who face particular barriers to employment and education (Gemeente Rotterdam, 2006; Centrum voor Onderzoek en Statistiek, 2008). The program currently operates throughout Rotterdam, although its main office and training facilities are located at the stadium of Dutch Premier League football club Sparta Rotterdam in Delfshaven.

SSP is a collaborative effort of two educational colleges, the non-profit organization Sport Steward Promotion and several stakeholder agencies, notably local professional football clubs and government agencies. It was initially co-financed through the European Fund for Regional Development and the educational colleges. Since 2008 SSP has been financed by the Department of Social Affairs of the Municipality of Rotterdam. SSP participation enables formal qualifications in areas such as stewarding and security operations, first aid, traffic control, crowd management and social hygiene. The program

seeks to endow participants with (modest stocks of) institutionalized cultural capital. SSP also offers intensive counseling and individual guidance to school and/or work. A personal, engaged approach based on sustained contacts between participants, tutors, counselors, sport development workers and prospective employers is seen as crucial both during and after completion of the program to assist participants with any issues that may arise and to enable them to access the vast social networks maintained by the organizations and staff members involved in the program.

Methods

The SSP impact study combined quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was compiled from the records kept by program coordinators regarding the pre- and post-program situations of participants, including their previous and current employment, education, financial and housing situations as well as their behaviour (i.e. drug use, criminal record, mental health issues). This data was supplemented and updated using interview and observation material collected by the author. The purpose of this method was to establish a detailed picture of the impact of SSP on the lives of participating youth.

This picture should be regarded as a snap shot that does not fully capture the temporality and fluidity of the youth's activities and experiences. The quantitative data regarding the youth's social mobility leads to artificial results because it freezes their social position at two particular moments in time (one moment before and one moment after participation). SSP staff were very much aware of this and stressed that the employment situation of many participants was very fragile and in constant flux. This observation corresponds to Gallie and Paugam's (2002) finding that those with an experience of unemployment, even where they enter work, are likely to enter poor quality, temporary work with fewer opportunities for self control, where they have higher levels of perceived insecurity and where there are fewer chances for self-development and progress. The picture also fails to produce any profound insight into the youth's everyday experiences and the meanings they give to their participation in SSP. The quantitative data therefore needs to be supplemented with qualitative data that measures capital formation and social mobility.

For these reasons, the study also gathered qualitative data by means of participant observation and in-depth interviews. To determine the delivery and outcomes of the program, the author participated during the fifth round of the program, from August to December 2008,

which commenced with 16 participants between the ages of 17 and 31. Observations were made at the different program locations not only to monitor the experiences and progress of individual participants, but also to investigate teaching methods and group dynamics. A total of 51 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative sample of stakeholders. The following stakeholders were interviewed:

- Participants, group five ($n = 12$)
- Former participants, groups one to four ($n = 15$)
- Program director and tutors ($n = 3$)
- Sport coaches ($n = 3$)
- Teachers ($n = 5$)
- Representatives of football clubs ($n = 4$)
- Representatives of businesses ($n = 3$)
- Job coaches ($n = 1$)
- Local government ($n = 3$)
- Police ($n = 2$)

In addition, two group discussions were organized in which twelve participants of the fifth group participated, as well as teachers and tutors. These sessions focused on the life histories of participants and their expectations and aspirations for the future, including their views on the impact of the program on their personal development, employment and education opportunities.

Findings

The first five groups, from January 2007 to December 2008, consisted of a total of 77 participants. Participants entered SSP voluntarily through several channels: social services, youth work, community police officers, friends or after reading about the program. For the vast majority of participants, the sport focus of the program and the prospect of working at major sporting events were important incentives to participation, as expressed in the following comments:

I don't like books or classes. I just like sport. That's why I chose this program. I read that it was a sport-based education. I would love to work in a sporting environment.
(male, 17 years old)

I read a poster on sport stewards while I was out looking for a job. I really wanted to do something with sport because I love it. I didn't even know what the rest of the program was really about, but I was willing to check it out. (male, 29 years old)

These remarks also reveal the dispositions of participants towards the educational system. Several participants claimed to feel 'out of place' at school, and this seems to be in large part because of the family environment that did not prepare them for school through the cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the original milieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and to a lesser extent because of the influence of like-minded peers.

Although the personal circumstances of participants are diverse, it is possible to identify some patterns of commonality:

- *Age and gender*: participants are young males and females aged 16 to 31. Most participants are in their twenties. Approximately 50% are female;
- *Domestic situation*: most participants grew up in broken families. They live either at home, usually with their mother, or in so-called 'guidance homes' under supervision of a counselor or case manager;
- *Ethnic background*: the vast majority of participants are first- or second-generation migrants of Netherlands Antillean, Moroccan or Cape Verdian descent. There are also some participants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- *Education*: mostly drop-outs who have not completed secondary education, similar to their parents. As a result of their limited educational attainment, many participants have a limited understanding of Dutch language. Their parents also tend to have a Dutch language deficit;
- *Social class*: the majority come from lower working class backgrounds and live in urban neighbourhoods with a high concentration of non-western immigrants;
- *Income*: either none, welfare dependency or informal economy;
- *Debt*: Fines and outstanding debts in relation to public transportation, cellular phones and health insurance are common.

- *Work experience*: predominantly unsatisfying temporary work through job agencies; high levels of job insecurity;
- *Antisocial behaviour*: approximately one quarter of participants have a criminal record, mainly for violent conduct, vandalism or theft. Some females have been victims of violence or abuse;
- *Drug use*: not particularly high, largely confined to soft drugs (marihuana);

Cultural capital and educational attainment

Many participants thought that opportunities to improve their social position were constrained, if not blocked, by their limited educational attainment. They were aware that the cultural capital bound up in a degree or certificate is increasingly mandatory for entry into the field of employment. As desirable positions in the job market increasingly require formal educational qualifications, it becomes essential for parents to invest in a good education for their children (Brubaker, 2004: 42), which SSP participants lack. Some participants appeared to submit to their inferior educational position, *pace* Bourdieu's argument that the dominated, having internalized their own position in the field of power, participate in their own domination. Others, however, refused to collude in their own educational suppression in two ways: they either rejected the value of educational qualifications, claiming their potential for success in other fields, such as in music ('becoming a celebrity') or in crime ('becoming a gangster'); or they actively sought to improve their educational position through self-disciplined, vigorous learning activities.

An illustration of the latter strategy, former participant Mustapha said:

I wanted to build a future, a better life. I had enough of being welfare dependent. I wanted to start something new because no one would hire me because I don't have a diploma. I have had many temporary jobs, but I wanted a long-term perspective. It was always six months or a year, and then they would tell me they weren't going to renew my contract, that the economy was bad, blah, blah. That's why I decided to join the program. I really had the feeling that without a diploma I would never have job security, because I was always the first one to be laid off. I knew that was my problem. (male, 29 years old)

Mustapha was one of many participants who had previously participated in other government-led job finding programs. Like several others, he was rather critical of these programs due to their sole focus on finding a job, regardless of the nature and security of employment: ‘It gave you a temporary job, but after a couple of months you were out on the streets again. It didn’t give you any lasting improvements, no diploma or certificate.’

Mustapha expressed that SSP had helped him to take ‘a really positive step’ in life. He acquired a formal certificate and a so-called ‘blue pass’, which enables him to work as a steward at sporting events. Obtaining the ‘blue pass’ stimulated him to commence a new studies to become a security guard. He now has a 32-hour contract with a security company, earning considerably more than he used to, and studies one day a week to obtain a ‘grey pass’, which would allow him to work as a fully qualified security guard. He also works on a part-time basis as a steward at Sparta Rotterdam and Feyenoord, a job he thoroughly enjoys owing to his passion for football. Mustapha stressed that he had tried to get a job at several security companies in the past, but that they never hired him due to the fact that he did not complete secondary education. He not only felt that SSP contributed to his skill development, knowledge and experience, but also that program staff provided intensive support when needed and really pushed employers to give him a chance to prove himself. Several participants expressed similar views.

But not every participant is able to benefit from the cultural capital effects SSP seeks to produce. In general, young people who face particular learning difficulties struggle to increase their cultural capital vis-à-vis their age group. This applies especially to a number of young refugees who participated in SSP. Often due to their temporal legal status as ‘political refugees’, most of them have not completed regular secondary education, and even those who have tend to have a very limited knowledge of (written) Dutch language, which is a major barrier to finding secure and challenging employment. Program staff question whether SSP is suitable for these individuals. One sport development worker said:

I honestly believe that we were not capable of really working with her [a female African refugee]. What she needed first and foremost was intensive language training. We don’t have the means to really teach them that. We teach them a little bit, but you cannot make up for years of non-education within the space of four months. That’s impossible.

Another African refugee faced similar difficulties. Even after successful completion of the program he failed to meet the entry requirements for the jobs he pursued, mainly due to his language deficit. The only alternative SSP staff were able to offer him in the short term was low-skilled manual labour. This turned out to be a huge disappointment for the 29-year-old participant, who had already grown very resentful of Dutch society in general and employers in particular.

The above examples highlight the existence of gate-keeping mechanisms that regulate access to desirable positions (Brubaker, 2004: 42). Employers and teachers put a great deal of emphasis on language and style, which are heavily dependent on cultural capital and hence on a cultivated family background (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Repeated failure to find secure employment due to these gate-keeping mechanisms can lead to growing dissatisfaction and an openly negative attitude towards Dutch society, further isolating the individual from 'mainstream' society and the labour market.

Social capital effects

SSP fosters social connections between participants and between participants and program staff. Some (former) participants indicated that they have become close friends with other participants who they did not know before entering the program. These contacts may provide social and moral support in times of hardship. A 23-year-old female, having being evicted from her home, was given shelter by another female participant, and they morally and financially supported each other throughout the program. Fellow participants at times also sought to help one another find a suitable job. One female participant collected job advertisements and shared them with the group and program staff. Tutors were very supportive of these efforts and routinely followed up on these ads, especially when participants were enthusiastic about them.

The role and influence of program staff is vital to the ways in which SSP generates social leverage. It can be argued that the organization as a whole, including partner agencies, provides an extensive social network which contains valuable resources. The organization can be viewed as linking young people to a range of educational, business and leisure opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. The program generates four types of social capital effects (cf. Lin, 2001: 19-20). Firstly, program staff facilitate the flow of information, providing participants with useful information about opportunities and choices

otherwise not available. They teach young people how to write a CV, how to do a job interview more effectively and where to find employment opportunities. Secondly, they regularly exert influence on recruiters or supervisors of an organization who play a critical role in hiring participants. Thirdly, the program facilitates certifications of participants' social credentials. Finally, program staff reinforce identity and recognition, providing not only moral support but also public acknowledgement of participants' claim to certain resources. SSP is increasingly recognized by sporting and non-sporting events bodies as a reliable partner with a vast base of motivated and well-trained stewards. The CEO of a major event security company described this as follows:

Our perception of SSP has changed profoundly over time. At first we were like 'do we really believe in this?' ... We nevertheless decided to give it a go, mainly because of our previous experiences with the program director [who used to be a senior police officer]. But what we have seen is that through their involvement in the program some of these youths have obtained certain competencies. Some of them are really great workers. ... We currently employ around twelve former participants.

Former participants who are now employed at businesses of this kind may serve not only as peer leaders for disadvantaged young people in their neighbourhoods, but also as social credentials for those to come. These social connections facilitate potential bridging and linking social capital resources for future participants.

Improvements in economic situation

One of the most interesting questions is the extent to and the conditions in which SSP enables disadvantaged youth to generate economic capital. Table 1 provides an overview of the current employment and education situation of former participants (based on the first four groups, for whom longer-term data was available).

Table 1: Employment and education situation of former SSP participants

Employment and education situation (October 2008)	No. of participants	Percentage of total
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Stable employment (minimum one-year contract)	23	38%
Full-time education (inc. paid apprenticeships)	11	18%
Temporary employment	7	11%
Unemployed / welfare dependent	10	16%
Unknown	10	16%
Total	61	100%

Table 1 shows that, in October 2008, 38% of former participants were in some form of stable employment. The most common areas of employment were the service sector and manual labour. Most of these youth have been able to considerably improve their financial position since their participation in SSP. Program staff have helped a number of youth to set up a payment plan to pay off their debts and create more structure in their financial situation. A further 18% decided to pursue further education, for instance in the areas of sport and human movement, youth work or specialized manual labour. A consequence of this decision is that although (in time) they may increase their cultural capital, they have not yet been able to make significant progress financially. Five former participants have an apprentice-level income that is roughly comparable to the total of social benefits they previously received. Seven former participants found temporary employment with relatively low levels of job and income security. Ten persons remained unemployed.

For some in the latter category, which includes a number of young single mothers, it seems that a combination of caring duties and welfare dependency have led them to not (yet) actively pursue a job career. A program coordinator noted that ‘occasionally the welfare situation, including child allowance, may be a comfortable safety valve and an easy excuse to think that you don’t really have to go out and look for a job because you will get your money for this month anyway.’ The presence of bonding social capital, in terms of dense social networks of extended family that can relieve a young single mother of some of her caring duties, is not a guarantee for labour market success. In at least two cases, single mothers whose extended family members looked after their children during their participation in SSP failed to obtain stable employment after completion of the program.

Only a minority of participants have been able to increase their economic capital since participating in SSP. Even in those cases, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the program itself can be held responsible for this financial improvement and, importantly, the longevity of this change. Program staff stress that SSP offers ‘a step forward’ for youth who are faced with educational deficits, debts, unemployment and related issues. In this sense, SSP concentrates on engaging disadvantaged youth and breaking down the barriers between the socially ‘excluded’ and the ‘included’, rather than immediate, short-term economic improvement. They seek to encourage young people to engage with projects, opening up potential personal development pathways (cf. Crabbe, 2008: 29-30).

Social mobility

Measured in terms of objective elements such as occupation, education and financial status, SSP has contributed to upward social mobility for some participants, especially those who have found relatively secure employment. For a number of young people, this has translated into changes in their housing situation, allowing them to buy or rent a house, alone or with their partner, in a different, more affluent part of the city. In other cases, changes in financial status have not been accompanied by changes in housing situation, for example for those who still live at home with one of their parents. For those who have chosen the path of further education, increased cultural capital may, in time, translate into social mobility, although it is still too early to tell. In terms of objective social mobility, older participants with relatively few problems (i.e. debt, language deficit, behavioural problems) and with a relatively high level of stability (i.e. housing situation, family) have benefitted particularly from the program. They often had a much clearer idea of what they wanted in life, as expressed by a 30-year-old male:

I see this program as a step forward. I know I have the capacity to hold down a decent job. It's good that there is something like welfare in the Netherlands, but it's not something I want anymore. I cannot always do what my friends are doing because I don't have enough money. I am willing to work very hard to get to their level. That's what matters to me, a job with security and development prospects. I know at my age I probably should have been doing that for some years now.

For these individuals, their pre-existing shortage of cultural capital is partly compensated by their drive to succeed, resisting to some degree their present situation and desperately seeking to get to the level of their friends, who have considerably more cultural and economic capital. This strategy shows the uplifting role peers can have for some disadvantaged youth, especially when these peers are deemed significantly more successful, a point largely disregarded by Bourdieu.

But as mentioned earlier, the program does not engage everyone to the same degree. Thirty-seven of the 61 people who were enrolled in the first four groups have actually completed the program, an average completion rate of 61%. (A further seven people found a job during the program and decided to leave SSP before completion.) Even among those who completed the program there are several people who have remained ‘immobile’, at least in the objective sense. For example, a 19-year-old female was given job opportunities at several stages during the program but declined all of them, stating that she had to look after family members. These caring duties heavily influenced her personal decisions regarding work and education. Her bonding social capital may have prevented her from creating new forms of economic and cultural capital. There have also been participants who disappeared only a few weeks after commencing the program because they were no longer interested or due to external circumstances, such as arrest or homelessness.

In terms of subjective social mobility, SSP has had a considerable impact on several participants. Typical accounts of perceived social mobility include the following:

I now study full-time to become a fully qualified security guard. I also work as a steward at Feyenoord games. That’s quite a change for me. I had been sitting at home for a year and a half. When I came here [SSP] I suddenly had access to so much information and knowledge, which made it a lot easier for me to find my way. I feel that if I hadn’t joined the program I probably wouldn’t have started my studies at all. I was just sitting at home really, not knowing where to go or what to do. The program made me so positive about continuing my education ... And it has allowed me to obtain a diploma, which gives me a bit of a head start compared to other people who haven’t done the program. And of course all the knowledge and experience you gain.
(female, 20 years)

The program has really helped me get ahead in life. I now have a full-time contract and am actually looking to start a new job as a prison officer. And I work part-time as a sport steward. If I compare my situation to how it was three or four years ago, I have to say that I am doing much better now. I always dreamt of doing this kind of work, but I never thought I could really achieve it. ... I did not have a job. I wanted to work, but one of the problems was that I am an immigrant, and initially I wasn't allowed to work. That has been a problem for years. Now, at last, I have a permanent residency status and I am allowed to work. The program staff have helped me in many ways to get to where I am today: self-confidence, social skills, experience. And they have brought me into contact with employers who actually take me seriously. (female, 24 years)

The latter comment underlines the fact that sport, as a relatively autonomous field, is inextricably intertwined with other social fields, in this case the legal system. It may well be impossible to disentangle the various moderating influences that trouble any direct and 'hard' causal relationship between program participation and social mobility, but it is clear from these accounts that in the perceptions of former participants SSP has played at least some positive role in improving their prospects for personal development and employment. The main avenues through which these improvements are realized include the bridging and linking potential of the organization (i.e. access to information and social credentials outside participants' own social group) as well as the cultural capital that program staff seek to generate through training sessions, counselling and workplace experience.

The uses and limits of sport as a vehicle for social mobility

While SSP has contributed to objective and subjective social mobility of some participants, in most cases it is more suitable to highlight participants' relatively modest increases in cultural, social and/or economic capital. The program can be viewed as facilitating the creation of (limited stocks of) cultural capital. SSP – the organization, its staff and partner agencies – also constitutes a vital node in linking disadvantaged youth to social networks outside their local community and enabling them to leverage a far wider range of resources and information from formal institutions within and beyond the immediate community.

SSP staff maintain intensive contacts with former participants after completion of the program to ensure the sustainability of these network resources. In addition, they seek to engage successful former participants as peer leaders and embedded role models in the program as well as in their local neighbourhoods. These efforts stress the potentially vital role of peer educators in sport-based intervention programs, confirming the findings of Nicholls (2009) and Coalter (2007). More generally, SSP concentrates on engaging disadvantaged youth rather than immediate, short-term economic improvement. They seek to encourage young people to engage with projects, opening up potential personal development pathways.

These conclusions verify two major points that are well established in the literature on sport for development. Firstly, SSP provides a useful hook for engaging disadvantaged urban youth and offers a supportive environment to encourage and assist those individuals in their social development, learning, and connection through related programs and services (cf. Skinner et al., 2008). Secondly, the transformative capacity of sport-based intervention programs for disadvantaged youth can only be realized within a social and personal development approach and not by merely offering sport activities (Crabbe, 2006; Coalter, 2007). While Skinner et al. argue that such approaches ‘are at the heart of the neoliberalist agenda to improve individual freedom and opportunity’, this is questionable. Here Bourdieu’s argument that cultural capital plays a vital role in the reproduction of dominant social relations comes into play. The meritocratic ideal of a ‘level playing field’ is illusory and conceals the fact that a person’s origins (family circumstances, social class, etc.) continue to have a major impact on his/her ability to become socially mobile. As Bourdieu writes: ‘Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games ... are not “fair games”. Without being, strictly speaking, rigged, the competition resembles a handicap race that has lasted for generations’ (cited in Webb et al., 2002: 24).

While the analysis of SSP shows that cultural capital is not restricted to the dominant classes and that there is a potential for social mobility for certain participants under certain circumstances, in most cases the program fails to resist or break through the system of social reproduction. It must be reiterated that sport, as a relatively autonomous field, cannot be viewed in isolation from other social spheres, such as the family, education, labour market and government. Certain constraints tend to have a major impact on program participants’ ability to become socially mobile. The main constraints faced by SSP participants are educational dispositions, family circumstances (e.g. broken families, caring duties, single mothers), financial pressures (i.e. debt) that force them to take temporary, low paid jobs, legal

status (temporary refugee status, work permit), and gate-keeping mechanisms that regulate access to secure employment. These constraints, which are produced mainly in other social fields, signal the complexity of determining the (long-term) outcomes of sport-based intervention programs. They also highlight that sport-based programs like SSP need to be individually tailored, meet the needs of local problems and be oriented towards different social groups within disadvantaged neighbourhoods (refugees, young women with children, youth experiencing language difficulties, and so on). Sport-based intervention programs in the Netherlands, including SSP, tend to target ‘at risk’ youth as a general category rather than being oriented towards the range of individual needs that exist with this highly diverse social group.

But there is also a more fundamental point that emerges from the particular political-cultural context of SSP. Even in those cases where the program does seem to be successful, the question remains for whom the outcomes are actually desirable. While several participants are enthusiastic about the program and feel that it enables them to develop their skills and perhaps even to climb higher up the meritocratic staircase, and while program staff are genuinely committed to assisting disadvantaged youth, it could be argued that within the wider context of political concern about social cohesion, immigration and crime, serving disadvantaged youth is not the ultimate goal of sport-based programs such as SSP. Ultimately, they are a means through which governmental organizations and their partners seek to civilize and regulate these ‘at risk’ minority ethnic youth to normalize their behaviour (i.e. not ‘dropping out’, contingent work, refrain from criminal behaviour), to make them meet their ‘societal responsibilities’ and to them ‘integrate’ into Dutch society. Rather than simply being a sign of ‘individual freedom and opportunity’, sport-based intervention programs of this kind also serve as a form of social control and regulation. Sport is increasingly becoming a substantial aspect of the neoliberal policy repertoire of cities like Rotterdam aimed at generating social order in disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhoods.

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