Social Sport Club and Youth Sport Expectations: Personal and Social Determinants in Contrasting Ecologies of Practice

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This study aimed at determining how environmental practices and significant others alongside operate in shaping sport experiences. Recent research brought evidences that different ecologies of practice produce different personal outcomes for the athletes who engage in competitive settings for long periods of time. The purpose of the study was to explore how significant others perceive football sport environment in an economically and socially underserved milieu, to clarify the effects of sport engagement and to highlight the factors that can optimize the positive influences associated with sport participation. Field diary, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted to 12 significant others with an active role in the club, participant observation along with field diary were also completed during this longitudinal study in the 2010/2011 sport season. Significant others displayed an unexpected sense of community in the social club and they perceive as being strong influences on athlete's perceptions of the environment and motivation exerted. Despite the conditions, adults in social clubs see sport as having an important social positive role justifying overall convictions about the importance of sport practice for underserved youth and the more profound study of reality in these environments.

Keywords: voluntary sport club, context, social development, underserved youth

Introduction

Human development should be understood as a cultural process and this understanding requires a historical perspective of individual contributions in community dynamics (Rogoff, 2003), it will always be in function of the meanings events acquire, the comprehension of different levels of social organization and the necessity to comprehend particular situations (Erikson, 1986).

Sport gained a new dimension in modern society due to social concerns about health, economy, pro-social values, and personal and community development. In fact, new urban form interventions in modern societies have the potential to result in lasting influences on the behavior of large populations of youth as they can either serve to constrain or promote physical activity (van Loon, & Frank, 2011).

In fact, human development study model has suffered successive changes since its first design over half a century ago (Bronfenbrenner, 1951; Bronfenbrenner, 1960), with first systematic expositions only occurring 20 years later (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Bronfenbrenner, 1979); followed by two successive reformulations edited in 1983 (Bronfebrenner, 1983) and 1998 (Bronfebrenner & Morris, 1998); his fifth effort occurred in 2000 (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

In fact, recent studies have pointed out multiple level organizational recognitions as well as contextual influences in adolescent development (Holt, Spence, Sehn & Cutumisu, 2008; Holt, Cunningham, Sehn, Spence, Newton, Ball, 2009; Urban, Lewin-Bizan & Lerner, 2009). His conceptualist and interactionism theory breaks the classic division between subject and object of investigation, as depicted by Comte's positivism. Grounded on the phenomenological conceptions of the environment and group dynamics of Kurt Lewin (1948), the theory emphasizes naturalistic observation as a philosophical orientation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The rising of qualitative methods in the 60's (Hammersley, 2002), namely, Lewin (1948), Mead (1934), Blumer (1937) and Dilthey (1959) have influenced ecological theory namely, in the role that the individual has as an active agent of his own development, revealing a rationalist, humanistic and phenomenological tradition.

In consequence, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory is a suitable theoretical framework to study contextual influences in sport clubs. This paradigm focus its attention on molar activities and behaviors that have the potential to instigate proximal processes (Krebs, 2009a) and are considered a significant phenomenon of development (Krebs 2009b).

This study discloses an important gap existing in the sport literature as previous studies reveal a great amount of knowledge about settings without development, contrasting with studies

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involving development out of context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1992, 1998). This partial imbalance puts in evidence the need of integration of the two domains, personality and environment, to enhance human developmental research.

In social deprived communities underserved youth face enormous barriers in their emotional, social, and intellectual development. Recent research have stimulated a reconceptualization of the field of youth development as well as the identification of specific guidelines for extended day programs in underserved communities (Hellison, 2002; Wilson et al., 2006; Yancey, Ory & Davis, 2006); but also in school- based interventions (Britto, Klostermann, Bonny, Altum & Hornung, 2001; Spengler, Connaughton & Maddock, 2011).

The existing studies reveal a great amount of knowledge about settings without development contrasting with prior studies involving development out of context (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1992, 1998). Studies in sport context are rare and today we are witnessing a growing dialogue between nature and individual (Mota, 1997). Therefore, the purpose of the study is threefold: to explore how significant others perceive football sport environment in an economically and socially underserved milieu; to clarify the effects of sport engagement and to highlight the factors that can optimize the positive influences associated with sport participation.

Methods

Participants

Twelve significant others with an active role in the club (3 coaches, 7 parents and 2 directors) were interviewed. Note that some significant others accumulated more than one role in the club, for example, parent and director or coach and parent). The respondents were asked about economic and social conditions of the club, changes over time in the club, community and politic power relation and interpersonal relations.

Data collection

Various methods were used for data collection purposes such as participant observation, camp diary and semi-structured interviews. This combination of methods permitted a cross validation and emerging descriptions (Lessard-Hérbert, Goyette, Boutin, 2008). Despite the same questions and due to the dynamics of the interview structure, questions weren't always in the same order. In order to deepen some ideas, the respondents were asked to share their experiences in a flexible manner, which originated sometimes parallel questions that enriched the interview.

Procedures

Previous to the semi-structured interview, it was certified that they understood entirely the purpose and nature of the study and how the results could be applied.

Participants were recruited through the clubs gatekeeper and through on-site recruitment opportunities at training and, in some cases, competitions. Data collection took place only after two months of contact and familiarization of the clubs organization. The interviews were held in a room duly equipped and with the vice-president and youth coordinator full knowledge. The project was approved by the Faculty of Sport Sciences Ethics Committee of University of Coimbra.

Data analysis

Content analysis was used along with field diary and observational grill during the 2010/2011 sport season. Document analysis were used and demographic and biographic information were also collected, which allowed to obtain some social data such as age, years of experience in football, scholar year, ethnic origin of the players and parents. All the interviews were recorded in audio with specialized equipment. At the end of the day, the interviews were transcribed *verbatim* and confirmed again with the recorder. Further the transcribed texts were confirmed with the respondents and they were identified by the role they play in the club (director, coach and parent). Content analysis was elaborated according to procedures suggested by specialist in qualitative methodology in various contexts, including sport (Gould, Eklund & Jackson, 1992; Dugdale, Eklund & Gordon, 2002).

Groups of statements were formed when the researchers considered there were sufficient statements to saturate a category (Glaser, 1978). It is important to refer that dimensions emerged through thorough reflexions and posterior consensus between researchers and participants. Some groups of statements and some major categories contained more statements than others, providing a measure of the strength of significant other's views on particular issues.

Eight groups of statements were generated by the sessions in response to the questionnaire. The groupings and major categories are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Major categories and groups of responses

Dimensions	Major category	Statement group label
Personal development and self-improvement	Climate and values	Group cohesion Youth sport role Adult's significance
	Skills construction oportunity	Group cohesion Time managemen and responsibility Sport goal's Social integration Youth identity Personal development
Sport context and achievement	School integration	Social importance Sport adequacy
	Family integration	Parental support Parental conflicts Family structure
	Communtiy belonging	Sport culture Social context
	Organization and structure	Structure and resources Practice conditions Internal organization Adaptation to changes Youth mobility
	Club's identity	Club's social goal's Social reality Sport history
Proximal processes and social interactions	Support relations and efficacy	Coach efficacy Youth's community role Interpersonal relations

Reliability and validity

To acquire valid and reliable multiple and diverse realities, multiple methods of searching or gathering data were in researchers permanent agenda, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The researchers proceeded with a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research in order to understand the voluntary social sport club and youth participation alongside, providing the research with credibility and transferability.

Researchers took very seriously the task to describe the changes that occurred in the setting (p.e. changing days of practice and several issues related to the lack of logistic accommodations such as hot water and light) and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study. In order for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, an independent researcher specialized in qualitative study with many hours of field practice assumed the "devil's advocate" role with respect to the results. Ecological validity (Brooks & Baumeister, 1977) was assessed using observational grids' as well as a thoroughly descriptive diary that allowed a very good resemblance in experienced contexts to the participant.

Results

Data analysis promptly delivered three major dimensions that would fit Bronfenbrenner's Bio Ecological Theory and explained three areas of action: Person Development, Proximal Processes and Sport Context.

Personal development and self-improvement

The social and psychological development was considered one of the main goals for youth engagement in organized sport. This social investment is clear in this parent's view:

"...exactly we incentive people to have...good behavior. Athletes who don't demonstrate good behavior, we try everything so that they can accomplish to stay here, although a fact is that sometimes it's difficult to deal with them as we don't pact with a lot of things they do…"

Despite difficult connections with the community, the respondents refer the social acceptance of the role of sport. Furthermore, the differences of generations reflect different outcomes and the impact it has on social resilience, goal pursuit, rule fullfillment and self-commitment,

"For now, they learn how to live in group. They learn the hierarchy inside the group and learn

to fight for a common objective, victory…" (Under14Parent).

Football is seen by parents as a mean to social adaptation to a community, enhancing the sense of belonging:

"I am from a different generation (…)they have things very easily and, well…it's a little bit complicated for me to compare…they don't really have the notion of effort, having to take an effort for something that working a little bit harder we can accomplish." (Under16 Parent2).

In fact, youngsters have contrasting familiar structures in accordance with their parents' social status which, in turn, will determine their notion of life, resilience and the impact it has on them:

"…they really don't have the notion (…) the fight, having to put the effort for something that working a bit harder you'll just might get it." (Under16Parent3).

Proximal processes and social interactions

Significant others displayed an unexpected sense of community in the voluntary social sport club and they perceive themselves as strong influences on athlete's perceptions of the environment exerted. This voluntary social sport club is seen as having an important socially positive role justifying overall convictions about the importance of sport practice for underserved youth and the more profound study of reality, as put in evidence by the coach and coordinator:

"…most of the time the irreverence, simplicity and humility of a social neighborhood youngster helps the one that has it all and, sometimes, shows him the part of life that, perhaps he doesn't know in his day to day!" (Youth Coordinator).

The results suggest that parents are the main socializers influencing children's sport involvement. The adults perceive the club as a nested web of interpersonal relationships similar to a family structure, consequently, youth sport programs should be critically examined with regard to their contribution to culturally cherished skills and social values in youth. The club coordinator alerts for the unstructured families:

"There are families that in general don't have rules but they exist here…we have a lot of divorced parents…some live with their grandfathers, that are their tutors…and they tend to abuse, but here we have rules." (Junior Director)

The clubs directors and managers highlight the importance of outfield work, outside of the sport domain,

"we have a work outside the field much more intense than in the field…" (Youth Coordinator).

The interviewed see the interrelationships and group climate as positive and they claim the youngsters don't make distinctions between socioeconomic status and social provenience of teammates.

"it doesn't matter if they come or don't come from the neighborhood, we have sons of medical doctors, sons of graphic technicians like me, we have sons of blacksmiths(…)sons of everything(…)they don't make those kind of distinctions. Here, they are players and friends…" (Under16 Parent1).

Sport context and achievement

The theory specifies five types of nested environmental systems, with bi-directional influences within and between the systems, and that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems: Micro-, Meso-, Exo-, Macro- and Chrono- (Krebs 2009a, Owen 2009). The club is situated in an impoverished urban area and although it constitutes a historical reference and an emblematic club in the city, it possesses a strong structural and organizational deficit with overall poor conditions for youth practice. The scale of turbulence of the club is high with management based on few resources, accounted risks and unpredictable future.

Parents share the belief that the club has a capacity to socially embrace youngsters and help them avoid anti-social and delinquent behavior from the deprived area where the club sits.

"…it is a reality a bit deteriorated, neighborhood X and Y, where a lot of drugs are handled and the club here, has a social function, that is to call the kids, take them from that reality and insert them in another one. Most of them with familiar deprivation, a lot of them, that's the reality of this club." (Under14 Parent).

Hence, despite the impoverished club and potentially delinquency behavior environment the results indicate the presence of some social values such as responsibility, obedience to rules, resilience and group experience as life span benefits. And although adults' perceptions of youth social differences with different social backgrounds they tend to deemphasize the fact, as pointed out by coach and parents.

"…gratifying for us to acknowledge that we will benefit with a kid that gets A's in school helping the most simple and most humble and that often the neighborhood's kid simplicity and irreverence helps the kid that has it all…" (Youth Coordinator).

Alongside, significant others, especially parents don't hesitate in claiming priority of the school educational system over the sport structure, emphasizing a social structured predominance of the first over the latter and trying to conceive sport as an instrument of completion and distraction.

"…he saw soccer more as a getaway from school and school oriented life that he has and soccer is a way to free energy and recharge

batteries for the next day but nevertheless I think he sees things that way too." (Under16 Parent1).

Discussion

BioEcological Theory approach provides a theoretical structure from which emerged the above relational dimensions. Main findings show that significant others not only see sport and specifically football as a social mechanism of change, contributing to avoid anti-social and delinquent behaviors but also highlight the importance of closeness relationships between the clubs several actors with particular emphasis on coach and parents' role.

In fact, recent research (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Martin, McCaughty, Murphy & Kimberlydawn, 2011) suggest that different ecologies of practice produce different personal outcomes for the athletes who engage in competitive settings for long periods of time. In this manner, the individuals' involvement in sport happens through sport organizations, mainly through clubs, each one with their own characteristics, goals, and cultures (Atherley, 2006; Gaskin, 2008) and the interpersonal climate that stands beside it.

Regarding Bronfenbrenner's theory as a systems theory of child development, the concept of developmental transitions is viewed as a product of a developmental system which involves a person's biological predispositions and the environmental influences she/he experiences (Lerner, 2002). In fact, the definition of voluntary social sport club demonstrates the appreciation of sport as an aggregation surrounding community identity, social interaction and space conscience (Tonts, 2005), as it generates relational patterns between social units and institutions (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000) and is consubstantiated in its form, localization, and type of sport of a community club in the production of different type of "social capital" (Okayasu, Kawahara & Nogawa, 2010).

Research on participation in neighborhood based organizations refer to social development of urban adolescents (Quane & Rankin, 2006) and several researches point out positive social community related outcomes (Auld, 2008; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008), relating it to a wide scale of indices of positive development (Rose-Krasnor, 2009). Acknowledging the clubs simple organizational structure, with its intuitive and casuistic approach with a predominant volunteer community activity, helps understand clarify that in poor clubs, parents and volunteers play a main role in promoting children engagement in sport and also an influential role in the clubs' functioning.

Recognizing this important framework, Bronfenbrenners' notion of ecological transition (1979, 1992 & 1998), that young athletes can effectively be heavily influenced by other microsystems, finds echoes when one compares' youngsters fragile family structure and relate it to the clubs own limitations in providing some other form of support. Therefore, development is influenced not only by biological variables, but also life context, such as family, school, neighborhood, community, society, and surrounding culture. The context can be more objective (e.g., income level) or more subjective, which involves people's perceptions and experiences of the context in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 2001).

Findings from Quane and Rankin (2006) suggest that when available, youth participation in locally based organizations is greater in more disadvantaged neighborhoods and that participation has important and positive implications for youth's self-concept as well as their academic commitment and educational expectations. Furthermore, when assessing sports participation developmental outcomes of underserved youth and coaches sports climate perceptions one can measure the relationships between participants reported gains and perceptions of the psychosocial sports climate.

Research shows that coaching actions and climates can effectively have an important influence on personal and social development of young people in these environments (Gould, Flett & Lauer, 2012). In fact, the interaction between maturation and experience and changes that occur over time (Araújo & Davis, 2009) and the necessity to pay attention to individual differences (Abernethy, 2009) play an important role.

Significant others displayed an unexpected sense of community in the social club and they perceive as being strong influences on athlete's perceptions of the environment and motivation exerted. Interviewed coaches show they acknowledge having influence on young people experiences with whom they interact (Greendorfer, 2002), nevertheless, the study could not confirm that coaches offer support and guidance to athletes ultimately building of strong bonds (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007) nor foster enjoyment, motivation and competence (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007).

Furthermore, literature is consensual regarding the importance of parental involvement and influence in their son sporting life through growth (Sage, 1980; Yang, Telama, & Laakso, 1996; Beets, Cardinal & Alderman, 2010; Trost & Loprinzi, 2011), although few studies relate youngster's physical activity to typology of parental control and familiar cohesion (Trost & Loprinzi, 2011) and it's relation to parent's socio-economic status (Yang et al. 1996). The study is limited in assessing youth's family context, although it clearly demonstrates the importance of family in youth sport environment and how it impacts the club functioning. In fact, analyzing parents' perception of low income youth

participation in a summer sport-based positive youth development (PYD) program, Riley and Anderson-Butcher (2012) highlighted some key outcomes that were identified by parents, namely bio psychosocial development and community interaction and support that are similar to the study presented here. In the study, significant others, specially, parents and coaches underpin the importance of key mechanisms such as qualities and roles of managers, clubs' structure, and the provision of resources contributing to such outcomes.

On the other hand, literature confirms that family socialization also appears to be a central part on youngster's perception of meanings in the sport club (Kay, 2000; Visschler et al 2009; Welk, Babkes & Schaben, 2009). In this sense, Kay (2000) refers that families' abilities to accommodate the activity patterns required by the sport are critical to children's participation. These expectancies and ideological values that parents enclosure are powerful tools in the acceptance and sport commitment of their sons sporting life(Dunn, Kinney & Hofferth, 2003) as the relation parent-athlete constitutes one of the key elements for youth sport development (Welk et al. 2009).

There exists an international consensus regarding the idea that sport can contribute to strategies of social inclusion namely in the area of youth sports (Kelly, 2011) despite the fact that not always personal dispositions of the person *per se* and instigating forces follow the same pathway (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Considering the fact, Holt and colleagues (2008) demonstrate the urgency to understand the way sport context interacts and frames in the social milieu with diverse youth contexts (colleagues, parents) and contradict the emphasis of the educational politics in the assertion of the benefits of sport in school or, in other way, the impact that sport has in personal development and its relation to youth sport (Coakley, 2011).

Following parent's concerns for the implications sport has on health, social rules and responsibility acceptance and diminished deviant behavior, several studies indicate that physically active and fit children tend to have positive outcomes such as better academic achievement (Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody, Lewis, Marshall & Rosengard, 1999; Coe, Pivarnik, Womack, Reeves, Malina, 2006; Nelson & Gordon-Larson, 2006; Ahamed et al., 2007). Sport can be characterized as a social educational space that follows the important context of familiar structure and in doing so its independence and interrelated role to school may contribute incisively to youth social development.

Conclusion

The study's implied meaning is that framing the club's climate in a deprived context with different social backgrounds and meanings may contribute to enhance positive social desired skills in underserved youth; these opportunities will markedly attempt to deviate young athletes from anti-social and delinquent behaviors. The ecological framework used provides an opportunity to develop consistent applied research in sensible social areas as well as to discriminate and foster positive relations that can be consistent through sport developmental programs.

It attempted to describe the physical and organizational structure of voluntary social sport club and also inquire about the individual and collective responsibilities of other significant as they relate intimately to the youngsters perceptions. It was discussed the way interpersonal relations in a determined social sport environment influences the development of youth athletes and some pathways to sport development.

Therefore, public policies need to address the roots within these structural forces in youth sport as pointed in the study. There is a need to understand the structure and processes on the social function equation in a club situated in a social melting pot. This research meets the concerns of institutions and educators about youth participation in deprived areas with implications for physical and psychological well-being, social inclusion and the development of community bonding.

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