

# 1. INTRODUCTION

---

## 1.1 The Social Significance of Sport

Public policy on sports participation in Ireland is concerned mainly with sport as physical activity. The central aims are to increase participation and raise standards of performance in sport. However, sport is also a social activity and its social significance spreads well beyond those who play. The role of sport as a social outlet can take many forms, ranging from the extensive voluntary service that is provided to amateur sports club by committee members, coaches, team organisers and fundraisers, through to attendance at sports fixtures by members of the general public. Such activities are important in narrow sporting terms: many sports could not exist in their present form if there were no clubs to organise them or spectators to support them. But they also have a wider social significance. They bring people together, help build communities, and provide a focus for collective identity and belonging. The collectivities affected by sport in this way can range from the small community that supports a local club team to an entire society following the fortunes of an individual or national team in major international competition.

These social dimensions of sport have attracted growing attention over the past decade in the context of a new interest in 'social capital'. The concept of social capital refers to the social networks, norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups (OECD, 2001, p. 41). Some see it simply as a new term for 'community'. It is usually measured by reference to the density of people's social networks; the extent of their participation in clubs, societies and other organisations; their level of trust in others; and their acceptance of shared norms, values and identities. Research and policy development on social capital have mushroomed around the world in the last decade or so, prompted by the belief that its social and economic benefits can be enormous. Both the World Bank and the OECD have adopted programmes on social capital (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002, OECD, 2001), as have many national governments. Robert Putnam, a major promoter of the concept, has claimed that "...social capital can influence everything from infant mortality rates to solid waste management to communal violence" (Putnam, 2002, p. xxii). In Ireland, the *Programme for Government 2002* included a commitment to promote social capital. The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) has recently published an analysis of the significance of social capital for public policy and has concluded that "...social capital is one resource, among others, which can be used in support of community development" (NESF, 2003, p. 3).

Sport is often pointed to in international research as a key generator of social capital. As the title of Putnam's best known book – *Bowling Alone* – suggests, the decline of collective participation in sport is interpreted in this approach as indicative of a weakening of social capital. Where Americans in the past typically went bowling with friends or in family groups, they are now more likely to do so alone: bowling continues to be a popular past-time in the US, but participation in local amateur leagues has dropped sharply (Putnam, 2002). In this context, it is not loss of the physical exercise associated with bowling that matters (since many people play the game as much as before) but the decline of organised collective involvement, since, in the view of social capital theorists, this entails the loss of an important component of social life. Research in other countries has supported the view that associational involvement in sport contributes to social capital (e.g. Delaney, 2005; Daly, 2004; Warde and Tambubolon, 2002). Sport is particularly important as a cause of volunteering. A study of volunteering in eight European countries in the mid-1990s found that sport and recreation accounted for 28 per cent of all volunteering compared to 17 per cent for the next largest category (cited in Anheier and Salamon, 2001, p. 9) (see below on the similar situation in Ireland).

The positive contribution of sport to social capital has been queried by some (e.g. Dyreson, 2001). As reviewed by Daly (2004), the international literature has demonstrated a number of potential problems in the linkage between sport and wider social capital, some of which have implications for the Irish context. Citing among others, Alexandris and Carroll (1997), Daly's review highlights the following issues.

- Sport tends to be utilised by men to a greater extent than women and thus offers men an access to networks and social capital to a greater extent than women.
- Participation in sport tends to be greater among more educated individuals and professionals, particularly formal club membership. Once again, this may point to an uneven distribution of the social benefits of sport.
- Participation in sport declines significantly with age meaning that younger people have more access to the benefits deriving from sport than older people.
- Sport can be a source of social tensions, as in the case of racial tension and homophobia.
- Some sports may be commoditised to a degree that its local community-based expressions are lost and replaced by televised versions or by non-social sporting activities such as private visits to gyms.

Even where sport is good for those directly involved, it may lead to 'clique' behaviour and the exclusion of non-members. This effect might extend beyond the sporting environment and spill over into the workplace and other areas of life. These issues are particularly important given that sports memberships are less common among

certain groups such as women, unskilled workers, the unemployed and older people. The question then becomes whether sport promotes cohesion and social capital for society as a whole rather than sections of it.

Concerns such as these suggest that the social effects of sport cannot be assumed to always and everywhere be good. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that on balance the contribution of sport to social cohesion is positive. Countries with higher levels of associational membership in sport also tended to score highly on almost all other measures of social capital such as interpersonal trust, trust in institutions etc. (Delaney, 2005). While this evidence is not conclusive, it argues that negative social aspects of sport such as 'clique' behaviour and exclusion should not be overstated and are likely to be outweighed by positive effects.

In addition to its social importance, sport can also be thought of as a significant sector of the economy. This sector includes such areas as the manufacture and sale of sports equipment and merchandise, the commercial aspects of sports events and activity in sports clubs, tourism related to sport, and the sports media. There is also the 'shadow economy' made up of the large volumes of voluntary effort devoted to sport. The various economic aspects of sport should be taken into account when formulating sports policy, though some aspects are more relevant than others. For example, gambling might not be thought of as warranting support from public policy in the same way as volunteering.

In viewing sports policy from an economic point of view, it is important to recognise that, while some forms of sports service can be fully provided by the market system, sport has a large public good element, where the social benefits outweigh potential profits that could be made by private investors. This is the rationale for government funding of sport. If the market system is sufficient to co-ordinate demand and supply for any given activity, the dominant view among economists is that it should be left to do so. However, aspects of both the demand and supply side may cause the market to fail to provide the amount of sports activity that is optimal for society as a whole. The aspects can be summarised under a number of headings.

- Equity/Fairness: A market system is not concerned with promoting access to sport on the basis of fairness. One justification for government intervention is to ensure that access to sport is not overly constrained by lack of resources or other forms of socio-economic disadvantage.
- External Social Benefits: A fully marketed system will not take account of the external benefits arising from sport such as health and educational benefits. Positive externalities result when benefits arising from private transactions accrue to those who are not parties to the transaction. They will generally be under-provided in market economies due to lack of sufficient incentives. To this end, there is a role for

government intervention to provide sport to achieve external social gains.

- **Long-Term Investments:** The benefits accruing from investment in sporting activities may accrue over a long time, perhaps even over generations, and may be unattractive for private investors on that account. A purely market mechanism would fail to ensure optimal provision in that context.

Our concern here is to provide an economic valuation of sport that can help illuminate the background to discussion of such issues. We focus on those aspects of sport that are most closely connected with the playing of sport and key social activities highlighted in this report, such as volunteering, club membership, attendance and expenditure of sports equipment. We provide estimates of the economic value of these aspects based on individual level data on activity and expenditure.

---

## 1.2 Social Aspects of Sport in Ireland: Previous Research

There has been some research in Ireland that has echoed Putnam's linkage of sport and social capital. The NESF report mentioned earlier pointed out that volunteering for sport is the dominant form of volunteering in Ireland. According to the data it quotes, 13.5 per cent of adults in Ireland in 1999-2000 volunteered for sport and recreation, compared to 7.7 per cent who volunteered for the next largest category of activity (that associated with religion and church bodies) (NESF, 2003, p. 63). Using different measures, Ruddle and Mulvihill (1999) also found that sport was the main form of volunteering in Ireland. In their study, 32 per cent of all formal volunteering time was accounted for by sport and recreation, compared to 24 per cent for social services and 11 per cent for religion, the next two most important causes for which people volunteered (Ruddle and Mulvihill, 1999, pp. 64-65).

Another aspect of the social role of sport in Ireland is that it is a major arena for club and organisational membership. The data reported by the NESF found that it was the most important arena in Irish life in this regard: 28 per cent of Irish adults were members of sports and recreational organisations compared to 16 per cent who were members of religious and church bodies and 10 per cent who were members of arts and cultural organisations (NESF, 2003, p. 63). It is also profoundly important for collective identity. It has been said that "...whether at local, regional or national level, sport is, after war, probably the principal means of collective identification in modern life" (Bale, 1986, quoted in Tuck, 2005, p. 105). There is a growing body of literature exploring the role of sport from this point of view in Ireland (see e.g., Bairner, 2005; Cronin, 1999; Sugden and Bairner, 1993). Furthermore, the act of *playing* sport often has strong social overtones in that it brings people together either on the playing field or through social activity afterwards (though, as we will see below, some sports such as jogging and aerobics are less social in this way).

---

### 1.3 Policy Context

The social aspects of sport are relevant to two areas of policy in Ireland – sports policy and policy on social capital and volunteering. Although the importance of the social dimensions of sport is implicit in the underlying definition of both these fields of policy, neither has taken extensive account of the social role of sport.

Substantial public spending on sport emerged in Ireland in the 1990s as National Lottery funding for this purpose became available. The Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism currently devotes approximately €180 million to sport per year, of which €112 million is devoted to the areas of sport covered in this report (the balance goes to horse and dog racing, areas not dealt with here). The Irish Sports Council was set up in 1999 to promote both competitive and recreational sport. Recreational sport is defined in the legislation establishing the Irish Sports Council as having social as well as physical dimensions, in that ‘forming social relationships’ is identified as one of its defining objectives (the other objective relates to expressing and maintaining physical fitness – *Irish Sports Council Act 1999, section 2*). However, in its explicit formulation of policy, the Council has to date concentrated on sport conceived of as physical activity. Thus, for example, the main objectives adopted in the Council’s strategic plan for 2003-2005 were to increase participation in sport, to improve people’s sporting abilities and performance, and to support high level sports achievement, all of which relate to the playing of sport rather than its social dimensions. One might argue that implicit recognition of the importance of the social aspects of sport has underlain the emergence of state support for sport and has been reflected in the activities of the Irish Sports Council. Yet there has been little by way of formal recognition of that role or exploration of its components.

As public policy on sport began to develop in the late 1990s, policy interest in volunteering and social capital also began to emerge, although in a separate arena. Part of this interest was an outgrowth of the traditional importance in Ireland of what was often called the ‘voluntary sector’. This large sector consists of those public social services (education, health, care services) that are owned and run by non-state agencies, even though they are often heavily funded by the state. Services associated with the Catholic Church account for much of the voluntary sector (as in religious-run schools and hospitals). The voluntary sector in this sense is not primarily operated by volunteers (people who work for no pay), though voluntary activity in this sense may play a role (as in the case, for example, of the social services provided by the Society of St Vincent de Paul). Rather, it is a formally organised and heavily professional sector that is to be understood in distinction from the statutory sector, which consists of similar services owned and run directly by state agencies.

During the 1990s, state policy sought to broaden the range of non-state channels by which public social services might be delivered, particularly in connection with the role of community groups as a means to deliver local services and promote local development. This had the effect of developing segments within the

voluntary sector which were less professionalised and more likely to evoke volunteering in the usual sense than the 'traditional' voluntary sector, though quite often core activity was carried out by paid staff who were funded either by the state or public donations. The term 'community sector' evolved as a collective label for these segments, and the entire field of non-state social services is now often called the 'voluntary and community sector'.

These developments gave rise to questions about how the new community segments should be incorporated into the existing established system and to policy discussions about how the voluntary sector as a whole should evolve in the future. A Green Paper on voluntary activity was published in 1997 and this led to a *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, published in September 2002. The United Nations proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of the Volunteer and this added to the momentum in this field in Ireland. A National Committee on Volunteering was set up in 2001 and it reported in October 2002. A Joint Oireachtas Committee issued a report on volunteers and volunteering in 2005 (Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005).

In many respects, the policy interests represented by these developments had only limited relevance to sport since they were concerned with social services and combating social disadvantage through local development or championing of marginalised groups. Their focus, in other words, was on what Salamon and Sokolowski (2001, p. 15) refer to as 'service' volunteering (that which has a utilitarian value to others) rather than 'expressive' volunteering (that which is concerned with artistic or sporting expression, preservation of cultural heritage or natural environment, and so on). Since volunteering for sport fell outside the service category, it was typically overlooked in analyses of the 'voluntary sector'. It was sometimes referred to as belonging to the 'non-profit sector' rather than the voluntary sector understood in service terms. It is notable, for example that discussions of funding for volunteering in Ireland to date have not referred to existing sports funding in this context, even much of that funding is directed to sports bodies that are largely voluntary in character and therefore could be thought of as an indirect support to volunteering. Thus, for example, the report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (2005) recommended that funding for volunteering be co-ordinated.

A new basis for assessing the social value of sports in general, and of sports volunteering in particular, began to emerge in many countries, including Ireland, during the 1990s with the emergence of interest in 'social capital'. The social capital perspective considered that voluntary activity was important not only because it offered an alternative, community-based means of delivering social services to tackle poverty but also because of its broader role in expressing and reinforcing sociability and thus in supporting the cohesiveness of societies. From this point of view, it was the *process* of volunteering

that was important, and the ends it was directed at – whether of the service or expressive type – was less of a concern. In this view, volunteering for the local choir or sports organisation, joining the local bridge club, or taking part in local community celebrations was as valuable to society as volunteering for social services directed at the disadvantaged. In Putnam’s (2001) seminal analysis of this topic, the central concern was that the American middle classes were becoming anti-social in their leisure activities – they stayed at home watching television rather than going with neighbours to the local bowling club – thus giving rise to a general weakening of community in middle America. Concern for social services delivery or the condition of the poor scarcely featured in this analysis.

In Ireland, interest in the social capital in this sense filtered into government, perhaps reflecting a general concern about the possible weakening of community throughout Irish society. As already mentioned, the *Programme for Government 2002* included a commitment to “... promote social capital in all parts of Irish life through a combination of research and ensuring that public activity supports the development of social capital, particularly on a local community level”. The National Economic and Social Forum took up this issue and produced an analysis and set of recommendations on social capital (NESF, 2003). This analysis showed the importance of sport to social capital, particularly in regard to the dominant role of sport in volunteering and organisational membership. Yet, in its policy recommendations, the NESF leaned towards a social service interpretation of social capital, similar to that expressed in regard to volunteering in the White Paper and the report of the National Committee on Volunteering mentioned earlier. In consequence, its recommendations did not address the role of sport in generating social capital and did not consider how sport might be drawn upon to fulfil the commitment on social capital contained in the *Programme for Government*.

The upshot of these developments is that while the NESF report, along with earlier studies on volunteering in Ireland (e.g., Ruddle and Mulvihill, 1999), make clear that sport is central to social capital in Ireland, that recognition has not been followed through in emergent policy on social capital and volunteering. It is in this context that the present report seeks to highlight the significance of the social dimensions of sport not just for sports policy but also for the commitments on social capital contained in the *Programme for Government 2002* and for policy needed to fulfil that commitment.

---

## 1.4 Objectives and Scope

The purpose of this report is to examine the social and economic value of sport in Ireland, to assess levels and patterns of state support for sport in the light of its social and economic value, and to draw implications for policy. The *social* value of sport is defined in terms of social capital, which refers to the role of sport in promoting social contact and community involvement among people. Four aspects of sport are dealt with under this heading: volunteering for sports activities; membership of sports clubs; attendance at sports

fixtures and socialising connected with playing sport. The *economic* value of these aspects of sport is also examined. In the case of volunteering, an economic valuation is arrived at by estimating the quantity of voluntary labour provided to sport and valuing it at the current minimum wage rate. In the case of membership of sports clubs, attendance at sports fixtures and consumption of various other sports goods, the economic valuation is based on survey data on expenditure by individuals. Public expenditure on sport is defined by reference to the grants programmes funded by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, either directly or through the funding it provides to the Irish Sports Council.

The report focuses on those areas of sport in which popular amateur physical participation is a major component. In practice, the sports in question are identified as those that come within the remit of the Irish Sports Council. This focus means that the report does not deal with certain major areas of sport such as horse or dog racing, professional sport, or gambling connected to sport. The report also limits its attention to the adult population. It does not deal with the social or economic value of sport among those aged under 18 years, though some of the adult activity examined in the study (such as voluntary activity in sports clubs) is oriented to sports among children. Children are omitted as a direct concern of this study because a separate series of studies on sport among children are being prepared in the research programme of which this study forms a part. The focus on the resident population in Ireland also means that the social and economic value of sports tourism in Ireland is not a major concern, though it is briefly considered in connection with the economic valuation of sport.

---

## 1.5 Data Sources

The main source of data for this report is the Survey of Sports and Physical Activity that was carried out in 2003 by the Sports Research Centre in the ESRI, a joint venture of The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Irish Sports Council. The survey is based on a nationally representative sample of 3,080 adults in Ireland, using face-to-face interviews. We derive other estimates of activity from Central Statistics Office (CSO) publications. We also utilise expenditure data from the Department of Finance and the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism to examine the extent of government spending on sport. Furthermore, we supplement this data with information from the annual reports and accounts of major sports bodies such as the GAA.

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted between July and September, 2003. A response rate of 67 per cent was achieved. Pre-testing of the survey instrument indicated a low rate of “don’t know” and “refuse answer” responses to individual items. This increases the confidence with which we can make statements about the data. As outlined in the previous reports, the adult sample profile on age and sex conforms closely to Census 2002 population figures:

Age	Sports Survey Adult Sample	Census 2002
	%	%
18-24 years	15.3	18.0
25-29 years	7.9	9.7
30-39 years	17.6	19.3
40-49 years	17.9	17.6
50-65 years	24.7	20.5
65+ years	16.5	14.8
Total	100	100
Gender		
Male	48.9	49.1
Female	51.1	50.9

The sample was re-weighted by age and gender to conform to population parameters from Census 2002.

---

## 1.6 Data Limitations and Measurement Issues

The main data source used for this study – the Survey of Sports and Physical Activity – provides self-report data from respondents. Since many of the topics dealt with relate to activities that are difficult for respondents to recall and quantify accurately (such as extent of volunteering or level of expenditure on sports), the data are prone to considerable error. One of the tasks of sports policy in the next number of years will be to standardise and compile complete information on the activities of sports clubs in Ireland, a process that has significantly accelerated since the advent of widespread sports funding. Nevertheless, the figures available are adequate as a basis for estimating the broad orders of magnitude involved.

More precise methods for measuring the activities dealt with here can in principle be used, such as time-use surveys for measuring volunteering or household budget surveys for measuring expenditure (these are based on time diaries or expenditure diaries rather than global recall by respondents and so provide more accurate information). However, no time use survey is available for Ireland and the available household budget surveys (the most extensive of which are carried out by the Central Statistics Office) provide insufficient breakdowns on expenditure on sport to be adequate for our purposes. The same problem of inadequate disaggregation of sports activities applies to other data sources which might otherwise be relevant to our concerns. For example, employment coding from national data on the labour force from either the Census of Population or the Quarterly National Household Surveys are not sufficiently disaggregated to identify sports employment as opposed to general recreational or retail employment. This is also the case with national income statistics and input-output tables, meaning that much of our expenditure estimates are based on survey data. Given that the survey was conducted face-to-face on a large and representative sample, the data that we use provide a useful basis for analysis.

# 2. SOCIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTS

---

## 2.1 Introduction

The social and economic role of sport in Ireland is based on a range of individual sports that differ in how they are organised and in the role they play in the community. Some sports are collective in character, others are more individualised, some are amateur and voluntaristic, others are provided on a commercial basis, some take place primarily within formally organised structures, others are *ad hoc* and informal. In recent years also, government funding for sport has come on stream and has formed an additional part of the context that shapes the social and economic character of sport. In the chapters that follow, data collected from individual adults are used to examine the various social and economic aspects of sport. This chapter sets the scene by indicating the range of organisational and social contexts in which the different sports take place, with reference especially to certain major sports. The aim is to provide some indicative illustrations rather than a comprehensive account, since a full description of the social and organisational features of even the main sports and the contribution public funding makes to them would be a major task in its own right. Section 2.2 briefly describes key organisational and social features of certain major sports in Ireland. Section 2.3 describes the role and remit of the major government and state-sponsored bodies involved in sport and describes government funding of sport in Ireland. Section 2.4 concludes.

---

## 2.2 Major Sports

Sports differ in the degree to which they are formally structured and thus in the degree to which they have an organised social presence. For example, walking is the most common recreational physical activity of all but for the most part it requires no social or organisational infrastructure. While walking can take place only where the physical environment allows it, that is, where there are safe and accessible places to walk in, it can and usually does take place without clubs, committees, teams or volunteers. Most other forms of recreational physical activity require a more structured organisational and social base and that is what we are concerned with here.

One major axis of differentiation in that base has to do with the opposition between the community-based voluntaristic approach to sport and the private sector commercial approach. The distinction between these is not absolute, since some sports combine both at different levels of the sport. For example, soccer is organised in privately owned commercially oriented clubs at one level but is amateur and voluntaristic at another. A second distinction is between sports that are social in nature (they require teams, are organised by clubs, and involve much social interaction) and those that are more individual such as jogging or aerobics where many people take part entirely on their own.

### 2.2.1 GAELIC GAMES AND THE GAELIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Gaelic games, the sports organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), consist of Gaelic football and hurling for men, their counterparts – ladies football and camogie – for women, handball (for men and women), and rounders (the latter is a game somewhat similar to baseball that is not now widely played). Ladies football and camogie have their own organisations that are distinct from each other and the GAA at national level, but they are thought of as belonging to the same “GAA family” (GAA, 2005, p. 15). At local level all three organisations share club facilities and playing fields. Apart from handball, Gaelic games are solely Irish and do not entail international competition or the publicity that international competition brings. The recently evolved “International Rules” game (an amalgam of Gaelic football and Australian rules football) has added an international dimension in the form of test series between Ireland and Australia, but this is a small aspect of overall GAA activity.

Gaelic football, the most popular of the GAA games, is played by 8 per cent of male adults and at that is the fourth most commonly played sport among males in Ireland (after golf, soccer and swimming) (Fahey *et al.* 2004, p. 22). Hurling is played by 5 per cent (*ibid.*) Gaelic football and hurling together have a share of the adult male playing population somewhat less than that of soccer (which amounts to 17 per cent when 5-a-side soccer is included – *ibid.*). Ladies football and camogie together have a playing population of around 3 per cent of adult women and belong to a cluster of sports such as golf, tennis and basketball which have a female playing population of a similar size. All these sports come well below walking, swimming and aerobics as far as number of women who participate is concerned (Fahey *et al.*, 2004).

The GAA’s organisational strength is greater than the relative numbers of those who play its games would suggest. It is by far the largest sports body in the country and is the strongest representative of the voluntarist, community-based model of sports organisation. In 2003, it had 2,595 affiliated clubs on the island of Ireland, of which 2,124 were in the Republic and 411 in Northern Ireland (GAA, 2004). It had an additional 242 clubs overseas, which are

supported by the Irish diaspora, mainly in Britain and North America (for an account of the GAA in one Irish community abroad, see Darby (2005)). Precise membership data for the GAA are not available, but the GAA itself estimates that its ‘members and active supporters’ number around 700,000, or some 15 per cent of the population (the estimate of *adult members* based on survey data used in this report is 300,000 – see Chapter 4 below). For 2004, the GAA reported that it had over 20,000 active teams – 12,686 in football and 6,850 in hurling (GAA, 2005, p. 24). The Association has long had a policy of acquiring and developing its own playing fields and facilities and now has an extensive physical infrastructure at club, county and national level. The combined value of its physical assets is loosely estimated at €3 billion, which would average out at something over €1 million per club (GAA, 2004, p. 22). The GAA rebuilt its national stadium – Croke Park – between 1992 and 2005 at a cost of €260 million. Gate receipts and other income from the use of Croke Park, along with €110 million in state grants, had reduced the debt on that development in 2004 down to €30 million (GAA, 2005, p. 57). The popularity of football and hurling as spectator sports is indicated by the level of attendance at inter-county championship games held during the summer months. Total attendances at these games in 2003 amounted to 1.9 million (GAA, 2004).

The size and strength of the GAA as a sports organisation is not the only aspect of its unusual character and gives an incomplete indication of its significance in Irish life. The most notable of its other features is the wide range of social and cultural objectives it sets itself, over and above its activities in sport. The Association was founded in 1884 as part of the wider Gaelic revival movement (for a standard history of the GAA, see de Búrca (1999)). Its objectives were overtly nationalistic and embraced the promotion of native Irish language and culture as well as the promotion of “native” games. It allied itself closely with the Catholic Church, and the Catholic parish became the spatial unit on which clubs were based. It considered that its role was to help construct the Irish nation as well as to organise sports, and it included the promotion of the Irish language and culture among its objectives. The nationalist ethos of the GAA has evolved in recent decades, particularly in regard to what some see as a move from an exclusive, ethnic nationalist mentality to a more open form of “civic nationalism” (Bairner, 1999, Hassan, 2005). Alongside its nationalism, the GAA has also espoused a strong community ethos. It is particularly strong in rural Ireland though it also has a strong presence in urban areas. A club development scheme initiated in 1970 aimed to make clubs into community and social centres, and club premises have since then been developed to meet this goal (de Búrca, 1999, pp. 207-8). Today, the GAA defines its mission in sporting; cultural; community development and national identity terms. An internal strategic review carried out in 2001 stated that its vision was “...to use the national games to build a sense of local community identity and national *tír ghrá* [love of country] within Irish communities everywhere”, and

added that further essential tenets were its community basis, volunteer ethos and amateur status (GAA, 2002, p. 14, pp. 78-81).

### 2.2.2 SOCCER

Soccer, which is played by 17 per cent of adult males and some 2 per cent of females, is the most widely played team game among adults in Ireland (Fahey *et al.*, 2004, p. 22). It also has a very large spectator following, generated in part by the improved fortunes of the Irish international soccer team since the advent of the 'Charlton era' in the late 1980s and in part by interest in competitions televised from abroad such as the English Premiership and the European Champions league. Support for the international soccer team has become an important outlet for expressions of national pride and identity and as a means to project the country abroad (Cronin, 1999). Violence or tension has been largely absent from Irish football fixtures and this has meant that the concerns about the linkage between football, racial tension and hooliganism expressed in other countries have not surfaced in Ireland. In addition to its popularity as a spectator sport, the attraction of soccer to players may be explained partly explained by the informal, *ad hoc* way in which it can be played. It is suited to the schoolyard or street as well as the soccer pitch, and can be played with three or four players per side as well as with full teams.

The social and organisational presence of soccer in Ireland, though significant, is not as strong as the size of its playing population and its popularity among spectators would lead one to expect. The Irish international team is drawn almost wholly from players who play with professional clubs abroad (mainly in England). Relative to the level of interest in the international team and the foreign league competitions, support for the domestic professional league run by the Football Association of Ireland is modest. Amateur soccer clubs can be found in many parts of the country, especially in urban areas. While there is no systematic information on either the number or strength of these clubs, many are thought to be weakly organised (Football Association of Ireland, n.d. Section 5.1). Taken together they do not amount to a substantial network of community based clubs and are not strongly integrated into a national organisation. Many clubs rely on local authority playing fields and lack their own club premises. A number of amateur football leagues are organised on a local (often county) basis around the country, such as the Amateur Football League in Dublin, which caters for 119 teams ([http://www.amateurfootballleague.com/afl\\_history.html](http://www.amateurfootballleague.com/afl_history.html)). Many teams playing in these leagues are embedded in clubs but many are *ad hoc* arrangements between players that last only for one or two playing seasons.

Soccer in Ireland is thus marked by a peculiar combination of strength and weakness. Its strength lies in its many players at the local amateur level, many of whom participate informally, and the strong following enjoyed by the international game among the Irish public. Its weakness lies in the underdevelopment of its club

structure at community level and the limited public interest in the domestic leagues, whether amateur or professional. The precise manifestations of these strengths and weaknesses as far as the social dimensions of soccer in Ireland are concerned will be examined further in later chapters.

### **2.2.3 RUGBY**

Although rugby is less widely played than either Gaelic games or soccer, it is worth taking note of here because as far as social presence at community level is concerned, it is in some respects in an intermediate position between the GAA and soccer. As in the case of soccer, international rugby competitions in which the Irish national team takes part attract strong public interest. Since the upper levels of the game turned professional in 1995, there are now also international club competitions which attract some following. Irish representation in these club competitions is provided by four provincial teams. In contrast to the situation in soccer, however, and more like the GAA, the community based club plays an important role in rugby and is an important component of the domestic game. Rugby clubs are much fewer in number than GAA clubs: there are now 205 rugby clubs affiliated to the Irish Rugby Football Union, of which one in five are located in Northern Ireland. However, these clubs typically are quite strongly organised and in many cases have extensive playing pitches and club facilities. Rugby traditionally was seen as an upper middle class sport in Ireland and was the game of choice for boys in most elite schools. However, as we shall see further below, it also has pockets of support drawn from lower down the social class scale and from outside the base provided by rugby-playing schools. The higher than average wealth levels of much its supporters and players may have accounted in part for its ability to develop and sustain its club structures. Nevertheless, these clubs are the product of a high level of voluntary commitment and indicate that even the less prominent sports in Ireland can be socially strong in certain localities or among certain segments of the population.

A recent development that may help increase popular participation in rugby is the emergence of 'tag rugby' as a summertime recreational sport for players at all skill levels and ages. This is a non-contact, 'fun' version of the game that is often played by mixed-gender teams. A new organisation, the Irish Tag Rugby Association, has emerged to support the game in Ireland and organise competitions (see [www.tagrugby.ie](http://www.tagrugby.ie)). While existing rugby grounds usually provide the venue for the games, it is organised independently of rugby. It remains to be seen whether tag rugby will develop further as a popular sport in Ireland and what form of social presence it will create.

### **2.2.4 OTHER SPORTS**

We encounter further diversity in the organisational context and social presence of sport when we move away from the field-based

team games exemplified by the GAA, soccer and rugby. Aside from recreational walking, swimming is the most popular form of recreational physical activity in Ireland, and is especially common among women (Fahey *et al.*, 2004). As we shall see further in later chapters, swimming itself is not a major generator of social or community engagement, though it does evoke some volunteering. Swimming pools in Ireland are a mix of the privately and the publicly owned, but in most cases operate along commercial or near-commercial lines and are run by paid staff. These facilities serve users who may participate with other family members but otherwise have less social interaction with each other than would be common in team based or club organised sports. The same is true for aerobics and fitness activities, which are also important as an outlet for physical exercise (again serving women in particular) but operate largely on commercial, non-community lines. The Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management act as a representative body for the leisure industry, of which these sports are a subset (though Swim Ireland is the specific governing body for competitive swimming). The physical and health benefits of the types of exercises promoted by these activities are substantial, as has been discussed in a previous report (Fahey, Layte and Gannon, 2004). They are therefore important from a public health point of view, as well being a source of jobs and economic activity. The extent to which the commercial leisure industry generates social capital is discussed later in this report.

While golf is somewhat less common than swimming in the adult population as a whole, it is the most widely played sport among men and is particularly important for men in the middle and later stages of the life cycle. The Golfing Union of Ireland co-ordinates the activities of over 408 affiliated golf clubs throughout the country. Little industry data is available on the impact and size of golf in Ireland. One recent study by the Club Managers Association and the Michael Smurfit Business School estimated that there are approximately 350,000 members, including juniors, in Irish golf clubs (see also Chapter 4 below). Golf courses and clubhouses are costly to provide and maintain and on a day-to-day basis are run by paid staff. They typically are sustained by substantial fee income from players, though there are also publicly owned golf courses that provide access to the game on a below-cost basis. Nevertheless, golf has a considerable social dimension – people rarely play golf alone and golf clubs usually are venues for social interaction, not least because they often have bars and restaurants. In addition, the overall management of golf clubs is often the responsibility of voluntary committees drawn from the membership of the club. The amount of volunteering required for such management is less than the much wider range of volunteering required by clubs oriented to team games such as the GAA, soccer and rugby, where activities such as team organisation and coaching absorb large amounts of volunteer time. Nevertheless, the social and organisational aspects of golf are significant contributors to the overall social impact of sport in Ireland.

There are many further bodies which go to make up the organisational context of sport in Ireland, as is indicated by the fact that the national governing bodies of sport that receive funding from the Irish Sports Council number over 50. There is also a number of bodies that transcend particular sports and that play an important role in Irish sporting life. Special Olympics Ireland is a case in point. This is an all-Ireland body that organises year round sports training and competitions for children and adults with a learning disability. It hosted the Special Olympics World Summer Games in June 2003, which was said to be the largest sporting event in the world in that year. A massive community and voluntary effort was required to host the 7,000 athletes, 3,000 coaches and 14,000 family members who attended the Games. This effort evoked an enormously favourable public reaction in Ireland, particularly because of the country-wide community involvement it entailed. The opening and closing ceremonies of the Games, held in Croke Park, were among the most spectacular sports related events ever held in Ireland. The Paralympics Council of Ireland is also recognised as an arm of the Olympic movement but is a distinct body that focuses on elite sports for people with disabilities, especially physical disabilities.

The National Coaching and Training Centre, which is located in the University of Limerick, provides a range of services to coaches, athletes and national governing bodies of a range of sports in Ireland. Its connection to recreational sport lies mainly in the training for coaches it provides, especially through the National Coaching and Development Programme. It is an important resource for any effort to provide training for sports volunteers in Ireland. The Federation of Irish Sports is another notable cross-sport body. It was founded in 2002 as an umbrella organisation that acts on behalf of over 70 national governing bodies for sport in Ireland.

---

### 2.3 Government Bodies and Funding

Total state spending on sport is difficult to quantify as it is spread over a wide range of government departments and agencies and is sometimes embedded in programmes where the sports element is difficult to isolate. A portion of the budget for the education system, for example, goes on sports facilities and physical education but not always under a specific sports heading. Local authorities provide playing pitches and other sports facilities and now also increasingly employ sports development officers, but again these elements of spending are not readily separable from overall local authority budgets. In all these cases, support for sport is a small aspect of the activities of public bodies whose major remit lies outside the world of sport. Here, we will focus on the two main government bodies where sport is a more central concern. These are the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism and the Irish Sports Council. The sports functions that these bodies discharge are of relatively recent origin, having become significant alongside the development of the National Lottery as a source of public funding for sport in the 1990s.

### 2.3.1 DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, SPORTS AND TOURISM

The Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism was formed in June, 2002 through an amalgamation of the functions of the Sports and Tourism division of the former Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation and Arts and Culture Division of the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. Its overall mission with regard to sport is:

*The achievement of Government objectives for increased participation in sport and improvement of standards of performance in sport and the development of sport facilities, at national, regional and local level, particularly in disadvantaged communities through the provision of an appropriate and effective policy and public funding context. (Annual Report, page 32).*

From the perspective of this report, as has been suggested in the previous chapter, a particular question arises as to what is meant by the concept of 'participation' in sport – in particular, whether participation refers narrowly to playing or whether it has a broader meaning that includes social activities such as volunteering, joining a club, attending sports events, or socialising in the aftermath of sports events. Policies intended to increase participation in sport could differ a great deal depending on whether the broader or narrower concept of participation was adopted. We will return to these issues in considering policy implications later in this report.

The sports budget administered by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism in 2004 amounted to €180 million. Of this, €67 million was allocated to the horse and greyhound racing fund, which is financed by excise duties on off-course betting, and €29 million was allocated to the Irish Sports Council (see next section). The Department's direct funding role in sport focuses primarily on capital funding, of which the Sports Capital programme is a major component. According to the Department's Annual Report, 617 projects were allocated a total of €53 million in 2003, with €78.5 million euro allocated to 859 projects in 2002. In total, €267 million was allocated to approximately 3,500 projects since 1998 (DAST, 2004, p 14). In addition to the Sports Capital Budget, the Department has funded the renovation and building of swimming pools, spending €9 million on this in 2003, and an estimated €15 million in 2004. Furthermore, Sports Campus Ireland, a body charged with the development of sports facilities in Ireland, received approximately €6.3 million from the Department in 2003 and approximately €2.7 million in 2004. Finally, the Department also allocated approximately €9 million toward the running costs of the 2003 Special Olympics.<sup>1</sup>

One important aspect of sports financing in Ireland is the reliance on the National Lottery Beneficiaries fund. Money allocated to sport under this fund is included under the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism budget in the National Accounts. For example,

<sup>1</sup> Several Local Authorities also devote funds to sports development officers.

the estimates for 2004 show that over €90 million was allocated to the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism for sports related projects. One concern about the use of a lottery mechanism to finance sport is that it is regressive in distributional terms. Those on lower incomes tend to spend proportionately more of their income on lottery tickets than those on higher incomes. From a social equity point of view, it would be a concern if a large portion of lottery funding were being used for elite activities for which there were little wider public participation or value.

### **2.3.2 IRISH SPORTS COUNCIL**

The Irish Sports Council was established under the Irish Sports Council Act in 1999. Its overall mission is *To plan, lead and co-ordinate the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland.* (Irish Sports Council, 2004). Specifically, its remit involves:

- Encouraging the promotion, development and co-ordination of competitive sport;
- Developing strategies for increasing participation in recreational sport and co-ordinating their implementation by all Irish bodies involved in promoting recreational sport and providing recreational sport facilities;
- Facilitating good standards of conduct and fair play in both competitive and recreational sport;
- Combating doping in sport;
- Initiating and encouraging research concerning competitive or recreational sport;
- Facilitating research and disseminating information concerning competitive or recreational sport.

The Council is answerable to the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism and receives its funding from that Minister's overall sports budget. It has a particular remit to distribute recurrent funding to Irish sports bodies. The distribution of its recurrent support in 2003 and 2004 is shown in Table 2.1. The development of elite performance is an important policy goal as evidenced by the €2.2 million spent on the High Performance Strategy, which for example includes strategies to develop Olympic success. A considerable amount (€2.4 million) is also dedicated to the International Carding System, which facilitates top athletes in pursuing competitive sport. However, it is clear that much of what the Sports Council funds relates to non-elite performance. Its single biggest element of spending (almost €8 million in 2004) consists of grants to the national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, of which 68 were deemed eligible for funding in 2003. While the NGBs are oriented in part towards competitive sport, they are also major promoters of many forms of recreational sport in Ireland. The Council also funds initiatives such as the Older People and Sports Initiative (€0.6 million) that are designed to increase participation in sports among groups with lower than average levels of participation.

An important part of the Council's strategy to increased participation in sport is the setting up and funding of Local Sports Partnerships. These aim to bring together the statutory, voluntary and commercial organisations with an interest in sport at the local level in order to enhance public access to and experience of sport. There are now 16 such partnerships, each with a territorial base roughly coinciding with a local authority area. They received €2.3 million in funding from the Irish Sports Council in 2004.

### 2.3.3 COMPARISON OF FUNDING

The amount of public funding allocated to sport can be compared to other areas of public expenditure by examining the amount of money that could be given back to each household if funding for sports activity were discontinued. This amount is not quite the same as the amount paid by households in taxation to support sport, since some of the tax monies used to fund sports funding is paid by entities other than Irish households, such as foreign companies operating in Ireland and tourists who travel to Ireland.

**Table 2.1: Sports Council Allocations 2003 – 2005**

Grants	Total Committed 2004	Total Committed 2003
	€	€
Team Ireland	252,000	245,185
NGB Grants	7,927,446	7,135,792
International Carding	2,357,092	2,307,460
VEC Grants	470,000	700,000
Local Sports Partnerships	2,301,542	1,759,131
CUSAI	30,000	50,000
Youth Sport West/Youth Sport Foyle	13,000	13,000
Olympic Council of Ireland	601,495	567,773
NCTC	1,224,000	1,120,000
Paralympic Council	375,632	216,238
Irish Special School Sports Council	26,372	26,517
Recreational Sports	60,000	40,000
Youth Field Sports	6,690,000	6,340,000
Irish Adventure Training Trust	211,550	207,277
Older People and Sport	635,000	635,000
High Performance Strategy	2,226,875	1,912,850
Special Olympics	1,000,000	
50 Metre Pool	273,000	262,500
Morton Stadium	200,000	188,700
	26,875,004	23,727,423

We focus on the sports budget of the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism as the relevant measure, though as mentioned earlier it does not encompass all areas of state spending on sport. Table 2.2 shows that, excluding the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, this budget is the equivalent of €1.79 per household per week, compared with, for example, a total government spend of €621 per week. The health and education areas of government spending have an overlapping interest with spending on sport, since sport has a role both in health promotion for the population as a whole and in physical education for young people. However, state expenditure on sport of €1.79 per household per week is small compared to the expenditure of €126.92 per household per week on health and €93.26 on education. An item of government expenditure that is of a similar order of magnitude to the sports budget is the subvention to public broadcasting, which is the equivalent of €2.65 per household per week.

**Table 2.2: Funding for Various Expenditure Programmes, 2004**

Activity	Annual Funding €Million	Annual Amount per Household (€)	Weekly Amount per Household Approx (€)
Total Health Spending	8,600	6,600	126.92
Total Education Spending	6,300	4,850	93.26
RTE/Public Broadcasting	150	115	2.21
Sports Component of the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism	179* 112**	138* 93**	2.65* 1.79**
Total Government Spending (Current and Capital)	42,000	32,300	621.15

\*Including the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund.

\*\* Excluding the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund.

### 2.3.4 DATA ON SPORT

The rise of public funding and public policy on sport gives rise to a corresponding need for adequate data on sport. Data collection in this field is relatively new to Ireland and so far has relied heavily on sample surveys of the general population (of which the survey reported on in this study is an example). While such surveys are useful for providing general overviews of various aspects of sport, they are less useful in providing more focused information on particular sports or on the impact of particular public policies or spending programmes. Data produced by sports bodies themselves on their own membership or playing population is limited, though some sports organisations have begun to recognise the value of such information (the GAA, for example, is planning an ambitious scheme to develop a national computerised register of members – GAA, 2005, p. 12).

A standardised, routine and convenient method for collecting and compiling statistical data on volunteering, membership and attendances would substantially aid in the advancement of evidence-based policy in Irish sport. While such a method is not easy to

devise, it is an ideal worth aiming for. There is some potential for sports organisations to generate such data internally, though given the voluntary character of much community-based sport and its varying organisational capacity at local level, that potential should not be overstated. Local Sports Partnerships referred to earlier may have a useful role in this regard, particularly since they themselves are likely to need good quality local information on sport in order to operate effectively. Consultation between sports researchers, sports policy makers, National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships is necessary to develop thinking and methods on data collection and thus provide a stronger basis for guiding and evaluating sports policy over the medium and long term.

---

## 2.4 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to set the scene for the detailed analysis presented in later chapters by setting out some general features of the social and organisational contexts in which different sports in Ireland operate, including that represented by public funding of sport. The key feature highlighted in the chapter is the *diversity* of contexts: sports differ in how they are organised and the way they are embedded in society and so can be expected to differ in the social and economic characteristics to be examined later. These differences arise not only between sports of a different kind (say, Gaelic football or soccer on the one hand versus aerobics or swimming on the other) but also between sports that belong in the same general category. Gaelic football and soccer, for example, are alike in narrow sporting terms, in that they are both football games played mainly by males in teams and fields of a similar type. Yet the two sports differ greatly in how they are organised and embedded in society. Gaelic games have a club structure and a place in local community that is not paralleled in soccer, while soccer has an international profile and level of informal playing that is absent in Gaelic games. Similarities and differences of this kind need to be taken into account in considering policy on the social aspects of sport, since such policy would not have a uniform significance across sports but differ according to their existing social and organisational character.

The Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism and the Irish Sports Council are now also important parts of the framework of sport in Ireland. Funding levels from these sources have increased significantly over the past 10 years. Expenditure in this area amounted to €112 million in 2004. One of the requirements for guiding such spending in the future and for evaluating the impact of sports policy is a stronger information base on sport in Ireland. This is an area that will require attention from sports policymakers in the future.

# 3. VOLUNTEERING

---

## 3.1 Introduction

Volunteering is one of the main social aspects of sport and, as has been outlined in Chapter 1, sports volunteering is the dominant form of volunteering both in Ireland and in other countries. This chapter examines the extent of volunteering in sport among adults in Ireland, its distribution across sports and across socio-demographic groups. It also examines the type of services provided by volunteers, the perceived usefulness of qualifications in assisting certain kinds of volunteers in providing their services, and some aspects of entry into and exit out of volunteering.

---

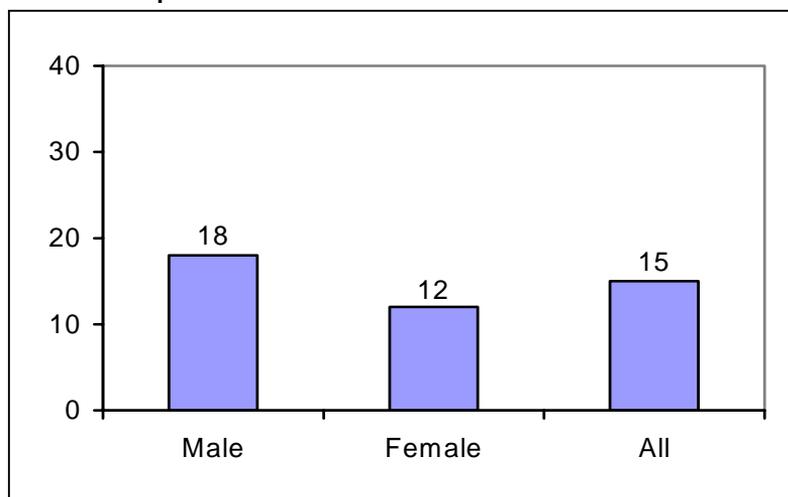
## 3.2 Who Volunteers?

Volunteering occurs in many different forms and is sometimes an unstructured and sporadic element in people's lives. It is therefore difficult to quantify, and measures of its extent are sensitive to differences in the measurement instruments used. Survey-based estimates over the past decade of the proportion of adults in Ireland engaged in volunteering have ranged from below 20 per cent (NESF, 2003) to 33 per cent (Ruddle and Mulvihill, 1999).

The measure reported on here differs from these earlier measures in that it deals only with volunteering for sport. Because it focuses respondents' attention specifically on sport, it can be expected to yield a higher measure of sports volunteering as it is likely to prompt respondents into recalling and reporting forms of volunteering that might be forgotten in less sports-oriented surveys. According to present data, 15 per cent of adults had voluntary involvement in sports in the previous twelve months (at least one occasion) – 18 per cent among men, 12 per cent among women. This equates to over 400,000 volunteers – 250,000 men, 170,000 women. This estimate is somewhat larger than that implied by the share of total volunteering accounted for by sport in Ruddle and Mulvihill's (1999) data. They found that 33 per cent of adults volunteered for some activity and of the time given to formal volunteering, almost one-third was devoted to sport (Ruddle and Mulvihill, 1999, p. 51, p. 64). Applying the same share to all volunteering (formal and informal) would imply that something of the order of 10-11 per cent of the adult population volunteered for sport. NESF (2003, p. 63) quote data from the European Values Study which suggests that 13.5 per cent of adults volunteer for sports and recreation in Ireland, which is broadly similar to the proportion suggested here. However, their own Survey of Social Capital suggested that 20 per cent of Irish adults volunteered for some activity, and this would suggest that

volunteers for sport, if around one-third of all volunteers, could be as low as 7-8 per cent (NESF, 2003, p. 51).

**Figure 3.1: Per Cent of Adults who had Voluntary Involvement in Sport in Previous Twelve Months**

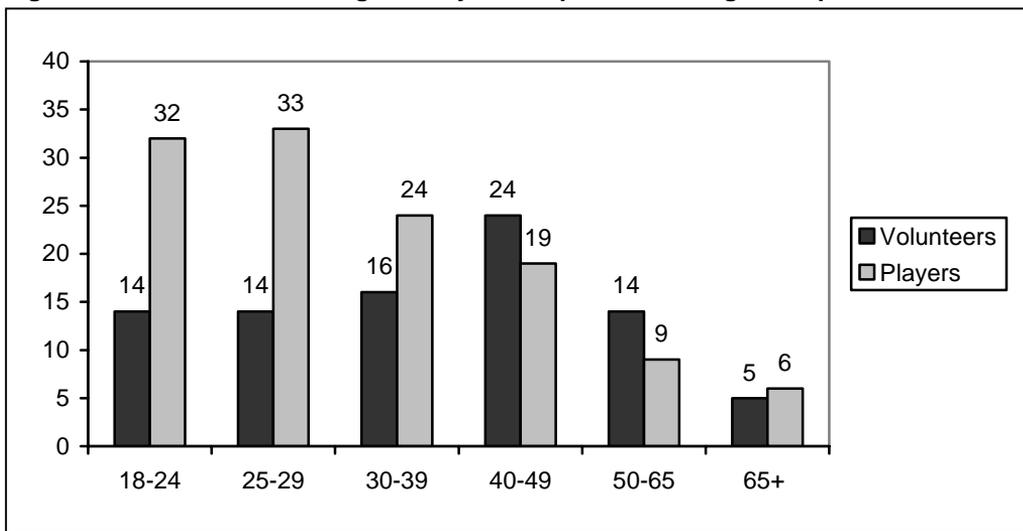


A previous report based on the same survey data as are used here estimated that 20 per cent of the population *played* sport at least once per week and with enough intensity of effort to gain some health benefit from it (Fahey *et al.*, 2004, p. 19). We now see that the proportion of the adult population who volunteer for sport, at 15 per cent, is not that far short of the proportion who play with this level of regularity and intensity: for every four people who play regularly, three people volunteer. *This is an important finding as it indicates that the role of sport in generating the kind of social capital represented by volunteering is not that far short of its role in generating worthwhile physical exercise.* While it is difficult to quantify the relative value of the social compared to physical exercise benefits of sport, the role of sports volunteering from a social capital perspective is clearly significant enough for it to be taken account of in sports policy.

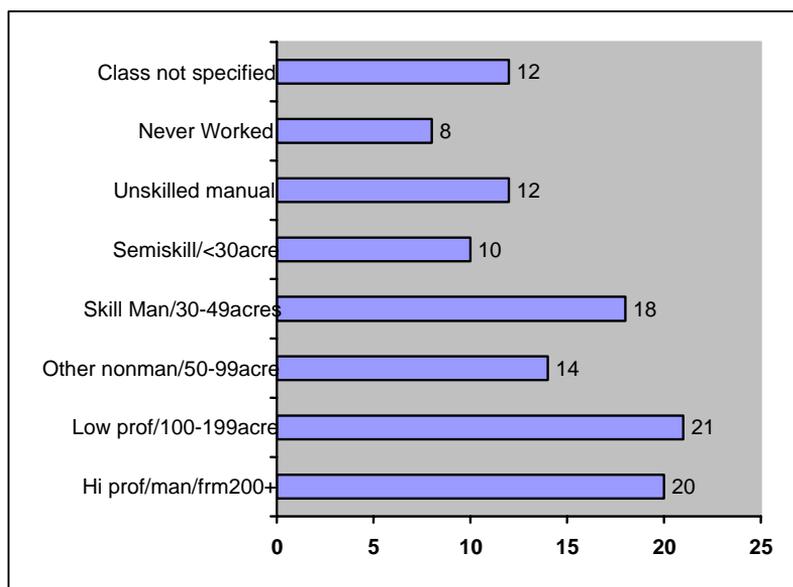
As we shall see further below, there is considerable overlap between volunteering and playing, since many players volunteer and many volunteers play, but yet they are distinct activities and draw to some extent on different categories of the population. One of the important differences between the social characteristics of volunteers and players is their age profile. Figure 3.2 presents the percentages of each age group that play sport regularly, in the sense just outlined, and compares them with the percentages who volunteer for sport. The comparison shows that volunteering, though occurring at a somewhat lower rate than playing overall, has a more durable pattern over the life course. Among people aged in their twenties, playing was more than twice as common as volunteering – in the age group 25-29 years, for example, 33 per cent were players while 14 per cent were volunteers. When people enter their thirties, playing drops off somewhat (down to 24 per cent), while volunteering edges upwards (to 16 per cent). In the 40-49 year age group, volunteering reaches its

peak (24 per cent of the population) and becomes more common than playing (19 per cent). In the age group 50-65 years, volunteering drops to 14 per cent, but this is about the same rate of volunteering as amongst people in their twenties. By that age group, playing has dropped to 9 per cent. Among people aged over 65 years both volunteering and playing drop to low levels. Thus, while playing is relatively high before age 30 years and drops off thereafter, volunteering is more evenly distributed across age groups, with a peak in early middle age. The peak in volunteering in early middle age can be explained by factors such as the desire to help out with sports activities for one's own children and the desire to give back to the club after one's playing days finish. These factors are explored further below in the section 'Routes into volunteering'.

**Figure 3.2: Volunteers and Regular Players of Sport in Each Age-Group**



Volunteering is most common among professionals. As can be seen from Figure 3.3, 20 per cent of those in higher professional and managerial positions volunteer compared to 12 per cent of those in unskilled manual professions. Table 3.1 also reveals that volunteering is most common amongst the self-employed and least common among those who are retired or unemployed. Sports volunteering is also more common in rural areas than in cities.

**Figure 3.3: Volunteering by Social Class****Table 3.1: Percentages of Adults that Volunteer for Sport Classified by Socio-Economic Characteristics**

	One or More Activity (%)	Two or More Activities (%)	Three or More Activities (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	17	5	1
Female	12	5	2
<b>Household Location</b>			
Large City	14	4	2
Small City	8	2	2
Town	13	3	1
Village	18	4	1
Rural	15	6	2
<b>Children</b>			
Yes	16	5	2
No	12	3	1
<b>Employment Status</b>			
Employee	17	6	2
Self Employed	21	6	1
Unemployed	5	1	0
Home Duties	10	4	1
Retired	7	3	1
In Education	21	3	1
Other	8	4	0
<b>Age-Group</b>			
18-24 years	14	2	1
25-29 years	13	4	2
30-39 years	15	5	1
40-49 years	25	9	4
50-65 years	14	5	1
65 years +	5	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

### 3.3 How Much Volunteering Do People Do?

Most people who volunteer do so for one activity and for one or more periods per week (Table 3.2). Approximately 4.5 per cent of respondents volunteer for two or more activities, and 1.5 per cent volunteers for three or more activities. Those who volunteer for two or more activities are most likely to have children. They are also most likely to be in the 40-49 year old age bracket. Indeed volunteering for more than two or three sports is a phenomenon strongly associated with the presence of children. Being a parent makes one twice as likely to volunteer for two sports and over two and a half times as likely to volunteer for three sports.

**Table 3.2: Percentage who Spend Time Volunteering for Sport**

	% Male	% Female	% All
<b>First Sport</b>			
Once Per Week	4.5	3.6	4.1
Twice Per Week	4.3	2.7	3.5
Three Times Per Week	2.2	1.6	1.8
Four Times Per Week	0.8	0.6	0.7
Five Times Per Week	0.5	0.3	0.4
Six Times Per Week	0.1	0.0	0.1
Seven Times Per Week	0.2	0.1	0.2
Three Times Per Month	1.1	0.6	0.8
Twice Per Month	0.8	0.6	0.7
Once Per Month	1.4	0.7	1.0
Less Than Once Per Month	0.9	0.7	0.8
<b>Second Sport</b>			
Once Per Week	1.3	1.6	1.5
Twice Per Week	1.2	1.1	1.1
Three Times Per Week	0.5	0.4	0.4
Four Times Per Week	0.1	0.5	0.3
Five Times Per Week	0.0	0	0.0
Six Times Per Week	0.0	0	0.0
Seven Times Per Week	0.0	0	0.0
Three Times Per Month	0.3	0.2	0.2
Twice Per Month	0.2	0.3	0.3
Once Per Month	0.2	0.2	0.3
Less Than Once Per Month	0.2	0.2	0.2
<b>Third Sport</b>			
Once Per Week	0.7	0.9	0.1
Twice Per Week	0.1	0.4	0.1
Three Times Per Week	0.1	0.0	0.0
Four Times Per Week	0.0	0.0	0.0
Five Times Per Week	0.0	0.0	0.0
Six Times Per Week	0.0	0.0	0.0
Seven Times Per Week	0.0	0.0	0.0
Three Times Per Month	0.1	0.0	0.0
Twice Per Month	0.1	0.1	0.0
Once Per Month	0.0	0.1	0.0
Less Than Once Per Month	0.0	0.1	0.0

As can be seen the majority of those who volunteer for sport do so at least once a week. Volunteering once a week for more than one sport is comparatively uncommon with approximately 3.4 per cent of the population volunteering for two sports once a week or more. There are modest gender differences in the time patterns of sports volunteerism. Women are more likely to spread their volunteering over more than one sport than are men. This probably reflects women's greater tendency to be drawn into sports volunteering to back up their children or other family members rather than because of an interest in a specific sport.

If we assume that each volunteering session lasts one hour we can aggregate the amount of time spent to produce an estimate of the number of hours spent volunteering by Irish adults each week. This yields a weekly figure of approximately 0.9 million hours spent volunteering for sports activity in Ireland per week. Assuming a 40 hours full-time equivalent work week, this is the equivalent of 22,500 full-time workers (for estimates of the economic value of this activity, see Chapter 7 below).

### 3.4 What Do People Volunteer For?

The GAA (football, hurling, camogie and ladies football) accounts for 42 per cent of all volunteering – 21 per cent for Gaelic football, 15 per cent for hurling, 4 per cent for camogie and 2 per cent for ladies football (Table 3.3). After the combined Gaelic games, soccer is the next most volunteered-for activity at 17 per cent of volunteers. There is then a considerable gap to the next sports, with swimming at 6 per cent of volunteers, and golf, basketball, rugby and athletics at 3-4 per cent each. There are evident gender characteristics in the pattern of sports volunteering. More women volunteer for sports played exclusively by men (such as Gaelic football and hurling) than men do for sports played exclusively by women (such as camogie or ladies football). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to volunteer for male sports only, though some male volunteering is directed at female sports. Swimming, and to a lesser extent, basketball are the only sports that have a higher profile among female volunteers than among male volunteers.

**Table 3.3: Volunteer Rates for Different Sports by Gender**

	Male	Female	All
	Percentage of Volunteering Activities		
1. GAA football	24	18	21
2. Soccer	22	13	17
3. GAA hurling	19	11	15
4. Swimming	2	9	6
5. Camogie	3	6	4
6. Golf	4	3	4
7. Basketball	2	5	3
8. Rugby	3	2	3
9. Athletics	2	4	3
10. Ladies football	1	4	2
11. All other sports	18	25	22

The most common task carried out by volunteers is provision of transport (26 per cent of all volunteers), but the distribution of tasks differs by gender (Table 3.4). Male volunteers are more likely to act as coaches or mentors with 28 per cent of male volunteers acting as coaches or mentors versus 15 per cent of female volunteers. Men were also more likely to act as selectors (10 per cent of male volunteers as opposed to 4 per cent of female volunteers) and club officials (15 per cent of male volunteers as opposed to 9 per cent of female volunteers). Female volunteers were more likely than male volunteers to provide transport (34 per cent as opposed to 22 per cent of male volunteers) and to provide kit maintenance (16 per cent as opposed to 6 per cent of male volunteers).

**Table 3.4: Ways in Which Volunteers are Involved by Gender**

	Male	Female	All
Mentor	10	3	7
Coach	18	12	15
Referee	4	3	4
Providing transport	22	34	26
Activity organiser	13	13	13
Kit maintenance	6	16	10
Selector	10	4	8
Club official	15	9	13
Other	3	6	4

N = 465.

### 3.5 Routes Into and Out of Volunteering

While volunteering is most common in the 40-49 year old age-bracket, the route in to volunteering occurs at a younger age (Table 3.5). Approximately 45 per cent of volunteers had begun to volunteer before the age of 30 years. Having said that, unlike physical participation it is not uncommon for people to begin volunteering at later stages in the life cycle. Over half of volunteers started to volunteer after age 30 years.

**Table 3.5: Age When Started Volunteering**

	%
Under 18 years	10
18-24 years	24
25-29 years	11
30-39 years	30
40-49 years	11
50-64 years	6
65+ years	10
Total	100

N= 481.

Volunteering is related to prior physical participation (Table 3.6). Over 55 per cent of volunteers were still playing their sport when they began to volunteer and 13 per cent had just stopped playing. It can therefore be seen as an added social effect of playing of sports that in many cases it leads to subsequent volunteering. However, here again there are pronounced gender differences in that 55 per cent of female volunteers had no involvement in the sport before they began volunteering compared to 16 per cent of males.

**Table 3.6: When You Began Your Voluntary Involvement Were You?**

	Male	Female	All
Still physically participating in the sport	67	38	55
Just stopped active physical activity	17	6	13
No recent prior involvement with the sport as a participant	16	55	32
Total	100	100	100

N = 455.

Most volunteers were motivated by a general interest in the sport or a desire to give back to the club, while a quarter volunteered because their children were involved (Table 3.7). Again, gender differences are evident here. The most common reason women gave for beginning to volunteer was that their own children were involved (mentioned by 57 per cent of women compared to 34 per cent of men). The most common reasons men gave was their general interest in the sport or their desire to give back to the sport (these two reasons were mentioned by 67 per cent and 58 per cent of men respectively). The latter reasons were less common among women but were by no means completely absent, as they were mentioned by 47 per cent and 29 per cent of women respectively. Thus, women's volunteering for sport is strongly driven by commitment to their children but also reflects a real interest in sport among substantial minorities of women volunteers. Men's volunteering is primarily driven by interest in sport, but is associated with commitment to children among a substantial minority. Given that there are far more male than female volunteers for sports, one might say in broad terms that the absolute volume of volunteering accounted for by commitment to children is similar among men and women, while the absolute volume accounted for by interest in or commitment to sport is much greater among men than among women.

**Table 3.7: Why Did You Decide to Volunteer Your Time to the Club/Activity?**

	% of Mentions	% of Men Mentioning Item	% of Women Mentioning Item
To give back to the club/sport	28	58	29
General interest in game/sport	34	67	47
Pressured into volunteering	6	10	8
Because own children were involved	27	34	57
Other	4	5	9

N = 726. Multiple mentions possible.

Another important aspect of volunteering is the reason for ceasing to volunteer (Table 3.8). As well as the 15 per cent of respondents who are currently volunteering for sport, a further 10 per cent previously volunteered but subsequently stopped doing so. Of these 10 per cent, the average age at which they began volunteering was 26 years, and the average at which they ceased was 36 years. The two primary reasons for exiting volunteering were time constraints from other areas of life and the family growing older.

This bears out the previous analysis that many who volunteer for sport do so as a support to their children and so are likely to give up once their children stop taking part or become old enough not to need their parents' involvement. This pattern is particularly evident among women volunteers, 43 per cent of whom cited the children getting older as a reason for giving up as opposed to 23 per cent of men. Conversely, 44 per cent of men cited being busy or time constraints as a prime reason for ceasing voluntary activity as opposed to 20 per cent of women.

**Table 3.8: Principle Reasons why Respondents Ceased Voluntary Activity**

Reason	Male (%)	Female (%)	All (%)
Too Busy/Time Constraints	44	20	34
Children Got Older	23	43	31
Moved House/Job or Lost Contact	16	19	17
Too Much Hassle/Too Little Support	17	8	13
Lost Interest	12	10	12
Left School or University	6	11	8
Too Old or Not Able	10	3	7
Transport Difficulties	3	2	3
Other	15	10	13

### 3.6 Volunteering Among Coaches and Referees

Over two-thirds of voluntary coaches/referees are active at youth level, and of these a quarter are dealing with under-10 year olds.

**Table 3.9: Level at Which People Volunteer to Coach/Referee**

	%
National/ International	6
Senior club/player	16
Intermediate club/player	10
Youth	68

N = 177.

**Table 3.10: At Youth Level, Which Age Groups?**

	%
Less than 10 years	23
10-15 years	15
16-17 years	19
18-21 years	16

N = 196.

One-third of referees/coaches have coaching qualifications but almost none have refereeing qualifications. The level of satisfaction with the existing qualifications among those who hold them is high. Approximately 70 per cent of those who held a coaching or refereeing qualification found it to be either excellent or very good in supporting them in undertaking their duties.

**Table 3.11: Do You Have a Nationally Recognised Coaching or Refereeing Qualification?**

	%
Coaching	31
Refereeing	3
None	66
Total	100

N = 144.

**Table 3.12: How Would You Rate the Qualification You Received as a Support to Assist You Undertaking Your Duties?**

	%
Excellent	20
Very good	50
Good	27
Fair	3
Total	100

N = 52.

### 3.7 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has examined the extent and patterns of sports volunteering in Ireland. Approximately 400,000 adults, 15 per cent of the adult population, volunteer for sport in some way during the sporting year. Assuming they provide one hour of input per session of volunteering, their labour is the equivalent of approximately 22,500 full-time workers. Men are more likely to volunteer than women, with 18 per cent of men volunteering for at least one sport and 12 per cent of women. Volunteering varies significantly across age groups. Those in the 40-49 year old age group were most likely to volunteer and volunteer rates fall away sharply after the age of 65 years. Volunteer rates also vary across social class, with professionals more likely to volunteer than non-professionals. The GAA is dominant in terms of the sports for which people volunteer. Over 6 per cent of the adult population, or 42 per cent of all sports volunteers, volunteer for the GAA. Soccer comes next with 17 per cent of sports volunteers. The main gender difference in sports volunteering occurs with soccer (22 per cent of male volunteers, 13 per cent of female volunteers), hurling (19 per cent of male volunteers, 11 per cent of female volunteers) and swimming (9 per cent of female volunteers, 2 per cent of male volunteers).

Volunteers provide a range of services to sport. The most common activity is the provision of transport (26 per cent), followed by coaching (15 per cent), organising activities (13 per cent) and serving as a club official (13 per cent). There are substantial gender differences in the types of services volunteered with 34 per cent of female volunteers providing transport, compared to 22 per cent of male volunteers, and 16 per cent of female volunteers providing kit maintenance services versus 6 per cent of male volunteers. One-third of those who volunteer as coaches or referees hold a refereeing or coaching qualification. Of those with such qualifications, 20 per cent judged them to be “excellent” and 49.7 per cent judged them to be “very good” in assisting them to discharge their duties.

These results give an indication of the degree to which sport in Ireland is volunteer driven. They suggest that when considering participation in sport, not only players but also volunteers should be borne in mind. This is especially so in some sports, such as those of the GAA, which have developed elaborate, voluntarily run club structures. To the extent that social capital is necessary to the smooth working of society and volunteering is a key source of social capital, the sports volunteer is important not only to sports clubs and players but also to the wider community. A further point to emerge from the present chapter is the possible value of training programmes as a support for sports volunteers. Among volunteers who coach and referee at underage level, for example, only a third have a coaching or refereeing qualification but of these the majority considered the qualification to be a help to them in coaching/refereeing.

# 4. MEMBERSHIP IN SPORTS CLUBS

---

## 4.1 Introduction

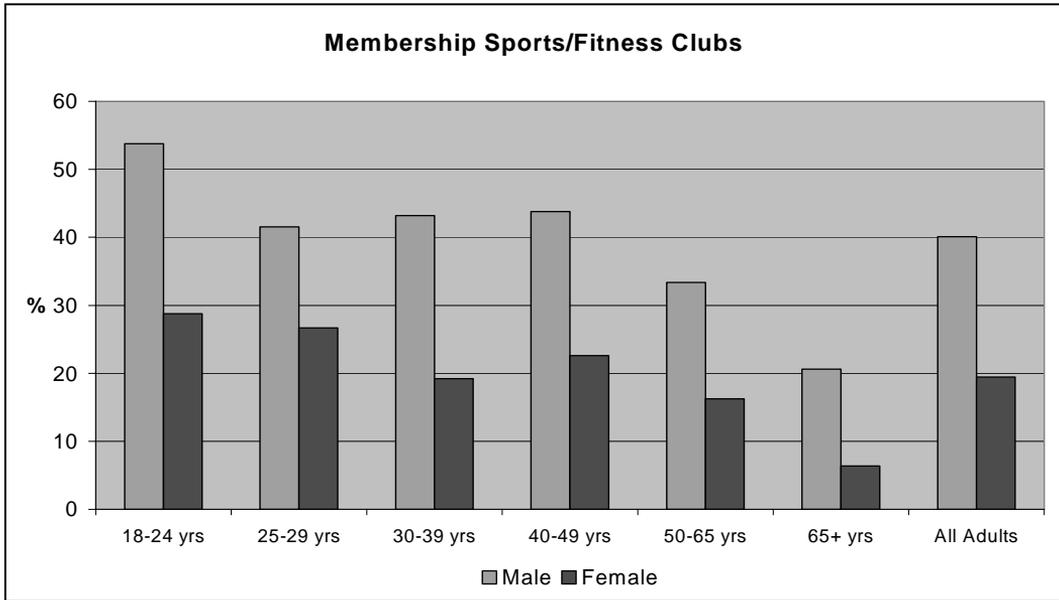
Alongside volunteering, another significant social aspect of sport in Ireland is membership of sports clubs. Such memberships are important in the first instance because of membership fees, an important revenue source for sport that will be examined further in Chapter 7. In addition, the quantity of associational memberships, including memberships of sports clubs and organisations, is frequently thought of as a key dimension of social capital. Sports clubs act as a venue for forming friendships and engaging in shared activities, something we examine further in Chapter 6. Many sports clubs have social facilities such as bars and social clubs and hold regular social events for the purposes of both fundraising and community engagement. For some people, membership of a sports club may have little significance beyond the opportunity it gives to play the sport in question, but for others, it may be a focus for their social lives. In short, sports club membership clearly has important social as well as sporting dimensions and on that account warrants being examined as a social aspect of sport. This chapter examines the overall extent of club membership, its distribution across sports and socio-demographic groups, and its life cycle and gender aspects.

---

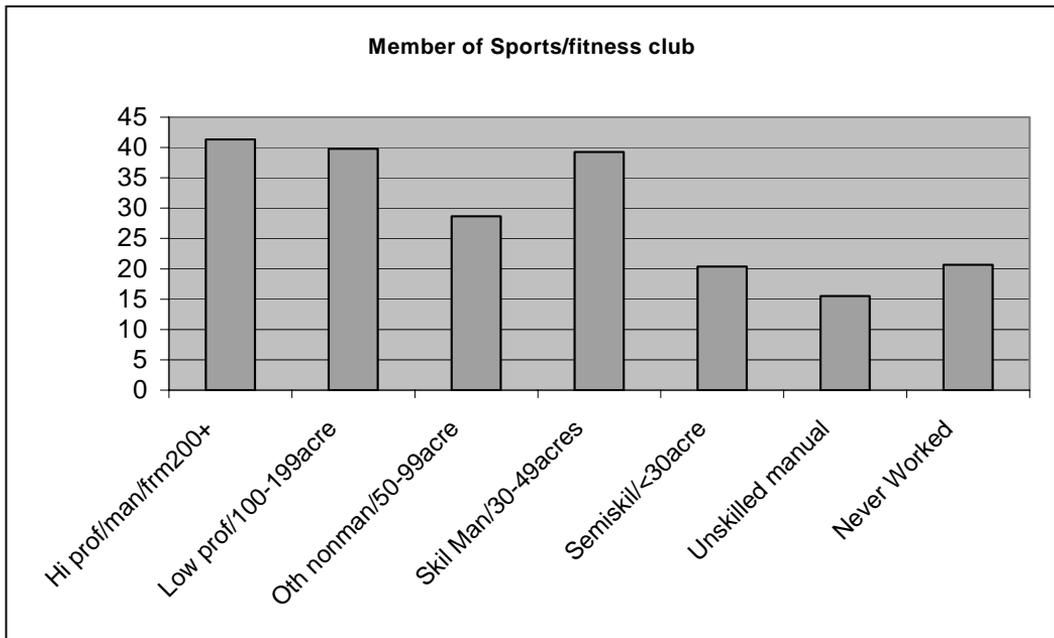
## 4.2 How Many are Members?

Amongst adults 30 per cent are members of sports/fitness clubs: 40 per cent of men, 20 per cent of women, with 6 per cent of the adult population holding memberships in two or more sports. Club membership among males is highest in the 18-24 years age bracket for both males and females. In contrast to life cycle patterns of playing of sport, levels of membership are high over the course of the life cycle, particularly among males. For example, over 20 per cent of males over the age of 65 years are members of a sports club. Sports club membership are skewed toward those from professional as opposed to unskilled or semi-skilled backgrounds. Approximately 40 per cent of those from a managerial or professional background are members as opposed to 20 per cent of those from a semi-skilled background and 15 per cent from an unskilled background.

**Figure 4.1: Membership of Sports/Fitness Clubs by Gender and Age**



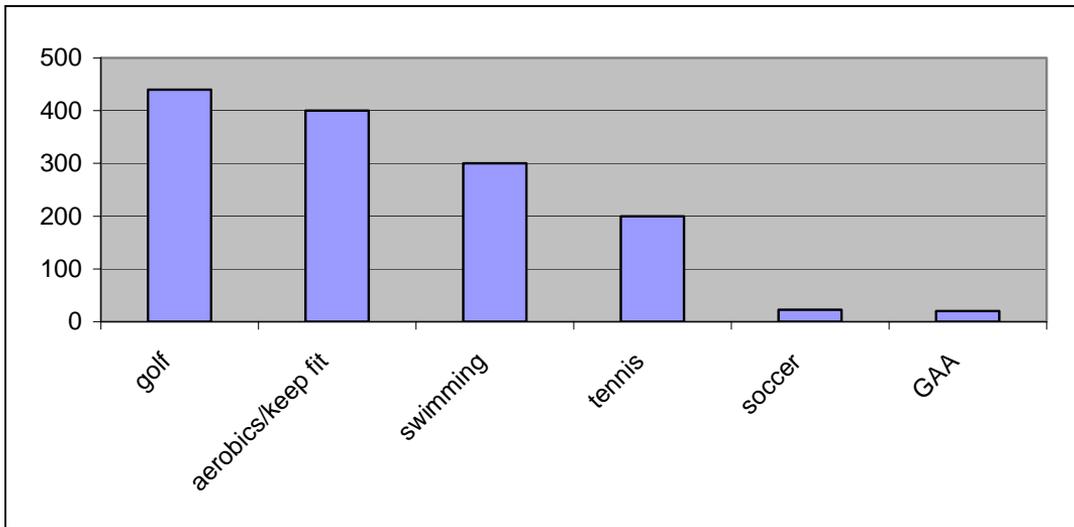
**Figure 4.2: Membership of Sports/Fitness Clubs by Social Class**



### 4.3 Membership Fees

Membership subscription fees vary widely by sport. Broadly speaking, team sports such as GAA and soccer have modest club memberships fees, generally in the range of €20-€30 per year. Aerobic/fitness and golf clubs are more expensive, with median membership fees in the range €400-€500 per annum. Swimming club and tennis club memberships are also relatively expensive at €300 and €200 per year respectively.

**Figure 4.3: Median Subscription Fees (€per year) Paid by Registered Members of Clubs in the Main Membership Sports**



### 4.4 Membership and Playing by Sport

The proportions of adults who are club members in different sports are of interest in themselves as indicators of the social significance of those sports. They have a further interest when set alongside the proportions of adults who *play* those sports, since the co-existence, or lack of it, between the two forms of involvement is revealing about the social character of different sports. Table 4.1 compares the proportions of the adult population who are members of clubs in the major sports with the proportions who play the same sports. Looking first at the data for ‘all’ (males and females), the GAA stands out both as the sports organisation with the largest membership and the only major sports organisation which has more members than players. Taking Gaelic football and hurling together, and including the ladies’ versions of both games, 10 per cent of the adult population (the equivalent of just short of 300,000 adults) are members of GAA clubs, compared to 7 per cent of adults who play GAA games. Apart from the GAA, players typically outnumber club members. The gap is narrow in the case of aerobics/fitness activities, where the proportion of adults who take part is only marginally greater than the proportion who are club members (8 per cent versus 7 per cent). The gap is very wide in the case of swimming: 15 per cent of adults say they swim but only 1 per cent say they are members of swimming clubs. In soccer, players outnumber club members by three to one (9 per cent players versus 3 per cent members). While soccer has more players than the GAA (9 per cent

versus 7 per cent of adults), it has less than one-third the number of club members (3 per cent versus 10 per cent).

**Table 4.1: Members and Players in the Major Sports**

Sport	Males		Females		All	
	Members as % of	Players as % of	Members as % of	Players as % of	Members as % of	Players as % of
	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
GAA:						
Gaelic football/ ladies football	13	8	2	2	8	4
Hurling/camogie	4	5	1	3	2	3
Aerobics/keep fit	6	5	8	10	7	8
Golf	9	17	2	5	5	10
Soccer (incl. 5-a-side)	6	17	1	2	3	9
Swimming	1	12	2	17	1	15

These patterns differ by gender. The exceptional position of the GAA, both in the size of its membership and in excess of members over players, is more evident among men than women. Of men 17 per cent are members of the GAA, compared to 13 per cent of men who play GAA games. Golf is the next largest membership sport for men, 9 per cent of whom are members of golf clubs and 17 per cent of whom play. Aerobics/fitness is by far the largest membership activity among women, 8 per cent of whom are members of aerobics/fitness clubs, compared to 10 per cent of women who take part in fitness/aerobics activities. Even among women, however, the GAA is the sports organisation with the second largest membership: 3 per cent of women are members of the GAA.

Table 4.2 looks at membership levels across sports in a slightly different way. Instead of looking at the proportions of the adult population who are members of clubs in particular sports, it counts all club memberships (including multiple memberships on the part of individuals) and shows their distribution across sports. The pattern revealed, however, is broadly similar to that already suggested by Table 4.1. The GAA dominates membership patterns among men, accounting for one-third of all male sports club memberships, while aerobics/fitness is even more dominant among women, at 38 per cent of all female club memberships.

**Table 4.2: Distribution of Club Memberships by Gender (% of Memberships)**

Men	% of Memberships		All		
	Men	Women			
GAA	34	Aerobics/fitness	38	GAA	29
Golf	18	GAA	13	Aerobics/fitness	20
Aerobics/fitness	12	Golf	8	Golf	15
Soccer	12	Swimming	8	Soccer	9
Tennis	3	Tennis	5	Tennis	4
Rugby	3	Badminton	4	Rugby	2
Swimming	2	Soccer	3	Badminton	2
Fishing	1	Camogie	2	Martial Arts	1
Other	15	Other	19	Other	17
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

*Base:* 40 per cent of male sample and 30 per cent of female sample who hold club membership.

## 4.5 Membership by Age and Social Class

The age dimension of club membership is brought out more fully in Table 4.3, which shows the sports membership for the different age groups. Among those aged 65 years and over, golf is the most common membership sport, accounting for 43 per cent of memberships in that age category. Among people aged in their 40s and 50s, the GAA is the dominant membership sport, and it is in second place in all other age groups. Aerobics/fitness is the largest membership activity among people aged in their 30s and among those aged 25-29 years. It is notable that soccer accounts for a substantial proportion of memberships (18 per cent) only in the youngest age group, those aged 18-25 years.

Table 4.4 examines the same issue in a slightly different way, focusing on the age structure of the membership of each of the major sports. The GAA has a relatively even spread of members from the different age brackets: 43 per cent of GAA members are over the age of 40 years and 28 per cent are aged under 25. Swimming has a similarly even age spread, while tennis club members are concentrated more in the 30s and 40s (65 per cent of tennis club members are in these age bands). Members of rugby and soccer clubs, by contrast, are more heavily concentrated on the youngest age group, with over half of club members in both cases being aged under 25 years. Golf again emerges as the oldest membership sport, with by far the largest percentage of members over the age of 40 years, seven out of ten adult golf club members being in this age bracket.

**Table 4.3: Distribution of Membership to Sports Clubs by Age Groups and Sport  
(Base: Sample of Sports Club Members)**

	18-24 yrs	25-29 yrs	30-39 yrs	40-49 yrs	50-65 yrs	65+ yrs
Aerobics/keep fit	20	31	29	16	14	14
GAA	29	29	24	31	36	16
Golf	6	6	12	17	24	43
Rugby*	4	1	1	1	1	2
Soccer	18	6	7	6	2	3
Swimming	4	5	2	3	5	2
Tennis	2	1	5	7	3	3

\* Estimate based on small number of cases (< 30).

**Table 4.4: Percentage of Members of Different Types of Clubs from Different Age Brackets**

	18-24 yrs	25-29 yrs	30-39 yrs	40-49 yrs	50-65 yrs	65+ yrs	Total
Aerobics/keep fit	25	17	28	14	11	4	100
GAA	28	11	17	20	20	3	100
Golf	10	5	16	23	29	18	100
Rugby*	58	3	15	13	6	5	100
Soccer	53	9	17	14	4	2	100
Swimming	29	14	10	19	25	4	100
Tennis	11	4	26	39	16	4	100
Total (including other sports)	25	11	20	20	17	7	100

\* Estimate based on small number of cases (< 30).

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 provide a similar analysis relating to the social class patterns of sports club membership. Table 4.5 shows the sports that each social class prefers to join, while Table 4.6 shows the social classes that each sport tends to draw its members from. We can see from both tables that soccer club membership is associated with the manual social classes, especially skilled and semi-skilled. It is only in these social classes that soccer accounts for a substantial share of club memberships (16 per cent in the skilled manual class and 13 per cent in the semi-skilled class – Table 4.5). Over half of soccer club members (57 per cent – Table 4.6) are from these two classes. The GAA, by contrast, has a wide social class spread in its membership: while 40 per cent of its members are from either the skilled or semi-skilled manual classes, 33 per cent are from the higher or lower professional classes (Table 4.6). It attracts more members in the skilled and semi-skilled manual classes (39 and 29 per cent respectively) than any other sport. Tennis is quite concentrated in the professional classes, with over half its membership coming from higher or lower professional classes, as are golf and swimming to a somewhat lesser degree. One-third of rugby club members are drawn from the manual social classes (Table 4.5), which might seem surprising in view of the traditional view of rugby as an upper middle class sport. However, given the sample size of rugby club members ( $n=20$ ) this result should be treated with some caution.

**Table 4.5: Distribution of Sports Memberships by Sport in Different Social Classes**

	Higher Prof	Lower Prof	Non-Manual	Skilled Manual	Semi-Skilled	Unskilled	Never Worked
Aerobics/keep fit	16	30	32	9	23	15	18
GAA	36	19	20	39	29	45	17
Golf	20	18	13	15	9	11	6
Rugby*	1	1	3	0	4	1	5
Soccer	4	4	5	16	13	8	12
Swimming	1	5	5	3	2	0	9
Tennis	5	8	3	1	2	4	2

\* Estimate based on small number of cases (< 30).

**Table 4.6: Percentage of Members of Different Clubs from Different Socio-Economic Backgrounds**

	Higher Prof	Lower Prof	Non-Manual	Skilled Manual	Semi-Skilled	Unskilled	Never Worked	Total
Aerobics/keep fit	14	25	25	8	15	3	6	100
GAA	21	12	12	26	14	7	4	100
Golf	24	21	15	19	9	3	3	100
Rugby*	12	6	29	5	27	2	19	100
Soccer	9	7	10	36	21	4	10	100
Swimming	5	27	24	16	9	0	19	100
Tennis	25	37	14	3	7	5	4	100
Total (including other sports)	18	18	17	19	13	5	7	100

\* Estimate based on small number of cases (< 30).

---

## 4.6 Conclusions

One of the most striking aspects of sports club membership compared to participation and volunteerism is its prevalence over the course of the life cycle, particularly among males. It is striking that over 20 per cent of males over the age of 65 years are registered members of sports clubs. This points to a significant role for sports clubs membership – especially in golf and to an extent also in the GAA – in maintaining social contact throughout their life course for men. Gender differences in sports club membership are also striking. The global difference between male and female participation (40 per cent male, 20 per cent female) masks an even greater divergence in types of sports clubs men and women are likely to join. Women are particularly likely to be members of aerobic and fitness clubs, whereas men are most likely to be members of GAA, golf and soccer clubs. The life cycle patterns are also very different for males and females with club membership among older females being small.

The GAA has the largest share of sports club membership (29 per cent), followed by the aerobics/fitness (20 per cent) and golf (15 per cent). The GAA also has an exceptionally even spread of membership by age and social class and, while weighted towards men, is the second most common sport (after aerobics/fitness) joined by women. Although soccer has a somewhat larger playing population than the GAA, its membership is around one-third the size of that of the GAA and is heavily skewed towards young working class males. Rugby also has a predominantly younger membership but, on the basis of a small number of sample cases available in the present sample, it would seem to have a social class profile that is more mixed than one would expect from its traditional image as an upper middle class sport.

# 5. ATTENDANCE AT SPORTS EVENTS

---

## 5.1 Introduction

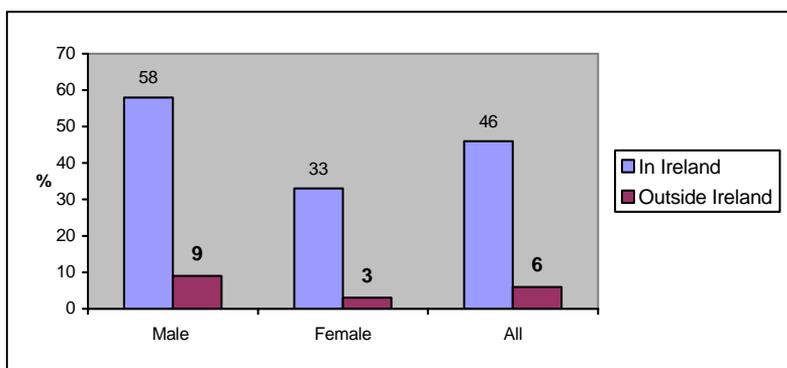
Attendance at sports events is a form of social engagement with sport that may be less intensive than playing, volunteering or joining a club, but nevertheless is socially more engaging than watching the event on television. For many sports fans, attendance at sports events is a way of expressing identity, demonstrating allegiances and developing a sense of commonality not only with other supporters of their own team but with the general body of followers of a particular sport. It allows sports fans to build up a stock of memories and provide subject matter for conversation, reminiscence and debate. It is in these ways that attendance at sports events can be considered a social aspect of sport. This chapter examines Irish people's attendance at sports events both in Ireland and abroad. It describes the distribution of attendance across sports and the socio-demographic correlates of attendance, gender differences in patterns of sports attendance, and sports attendance over the course of the life cycle.

---

## 5.2 How Many People Attend?

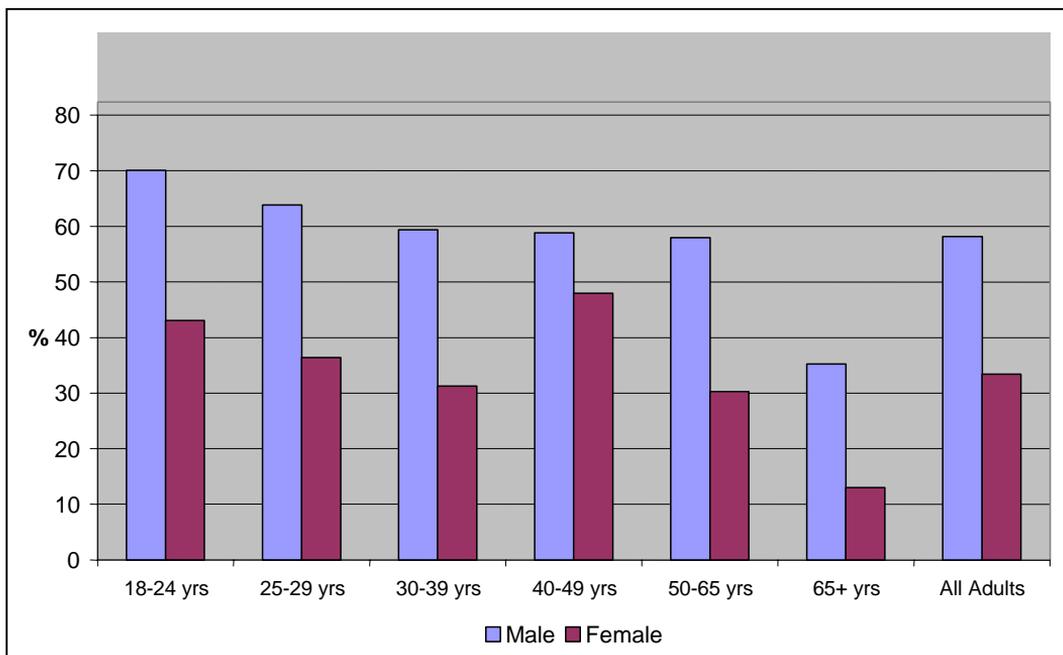
Of the adult population 46 per cent attended a sports fixture in Ireland over the previous twelve months, while 6 per cent attended a sports fixture outside of Ireland. Given the overlap between these two groups, a total of 47 per cent of the population had attended at least one sports fixture either in Ireland or abroad. Almost twice as many men as women attended domestic sports events and three times as many men as women attended events abroad as shown in Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Attendance at Sports Events in Ireland and Outside Ireland in Previous Twelve Months**

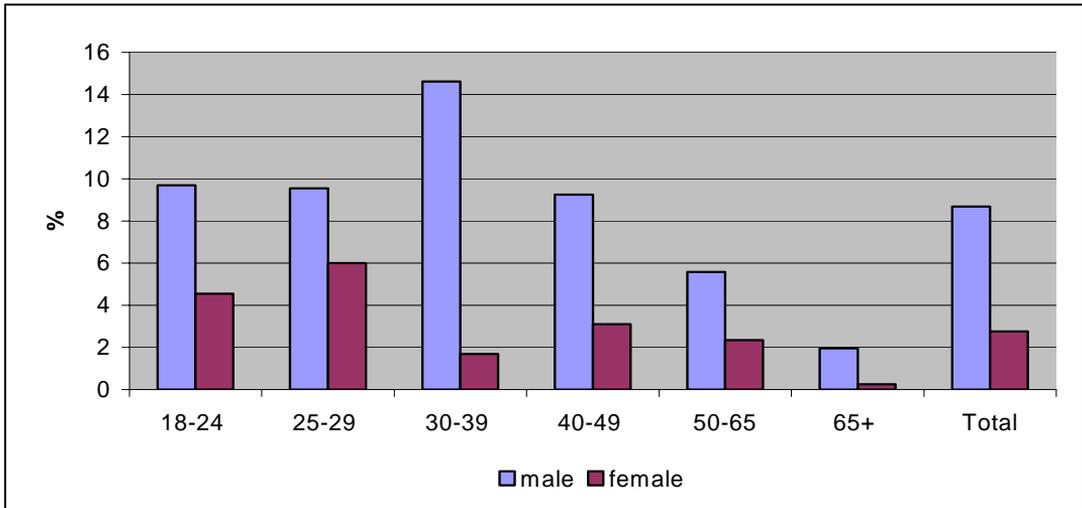


As in the case of club membership, levels of attendance are relatively stable across the life cycle, particularly for men as shown in Figure 5.2. Close to 60 per cent of men in the 50-65 year old age bracket had attended a sports event in the past twelve months. Even though there is a marked decline at the 65+ age bracket, it is still the case that over 30 per cent of men in this bracket had attended a sports event in the past twelve months, something that again points to the social significance of sport in older age brackets. The life cycle pattern of female attendance is different, with attendance peaking in the 40-49 years age bracket, with less than 10 per cent of women in the 65+ age bracket attending a sports event in the past twelve months.

**Figure 5.2: Attendances at Sports Events in Ireland by Age and Gender in Previous Twelve Months**



The age-pattern of attendance at sports events abroad is shown for men and women in Figure 5.3. Travel to sports events abroad is highest among males in the 30-39 year age bracket. It is low among those over the age of 65 with less than 2 per cent of people in this age bracket travelling abroad for sports events.

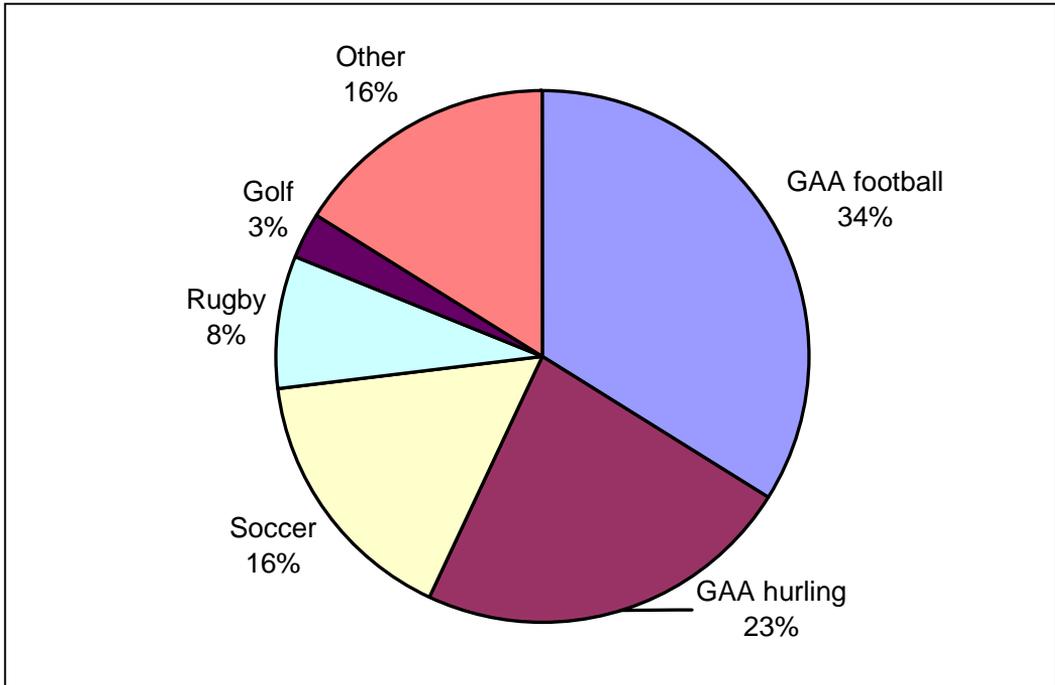
**Figure 5.3: Attendance at Sports Events Abroad by Age Group and Gender**

### 5.3 What Sports Do People Attend?

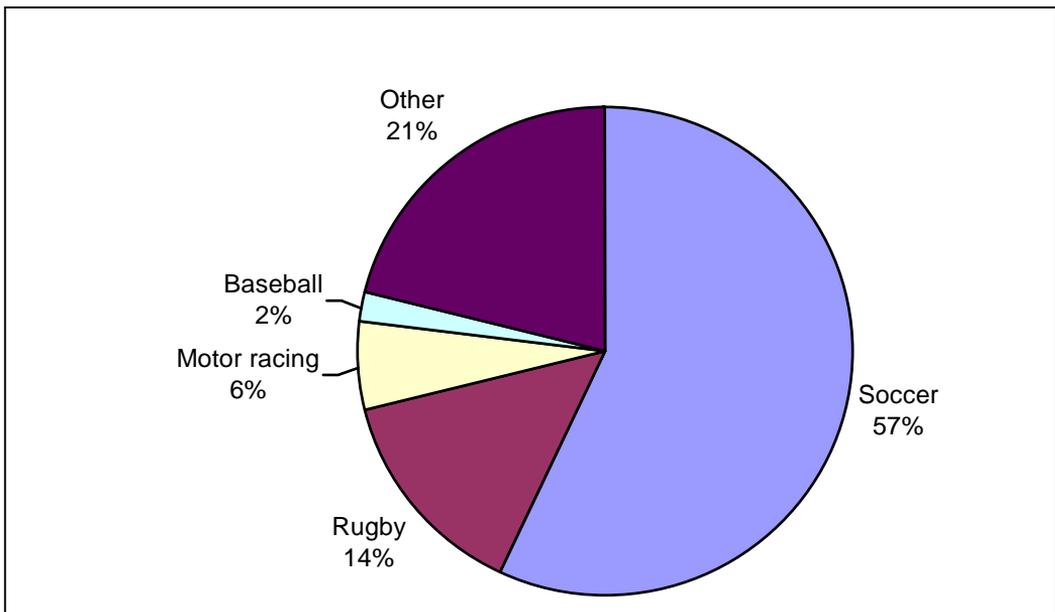
The GAA dominates attendances at sports events (Figure 5.4). GAA sports account for almost 60 per cent of sports attendances in Ireland (34 per cent for football, 23 per cent for hurling). Soccer and rugby come a long way after the GAA with 16 per cent and 8 per cent of sports attendances respectively. Golf and equestrian events are the only other sports with attendances above 1 per cent of the population (though it should be recalled here that the present study did not extend to horse or dog racing, both of which are likely to have substantial levels of attendance). The dominance of the GAA in sports attendances obviously does not extend to international events, of which soccer accounts for over half, rugby 14 per cent and motor racing 6 per cent (Figure 5.5).

Almost 30 per cent third of attendances at sports events are to events involving players aged under 18 years (Figure 5.6) This proportion is higher among women (35 per cent) than among men (25 per cent) and is particularly high (at 61 per cent) among women aged 40-49 years, the age at which women are most likely to have children of a sports-playing age. This is also the age group in which men's attendances are most oriented to under-18 events but at a lower level (37 per cent) than among women. Attendance at under-18 events is also quite prevalent among those aged over 65 years, again especially among women. While much of this attendance may be oriented to sports playing by grandchildren, the number of sample cases on which the breakdowns for those aged over 65 years are based is too small to provide a basis for clear conclusions on this issue.

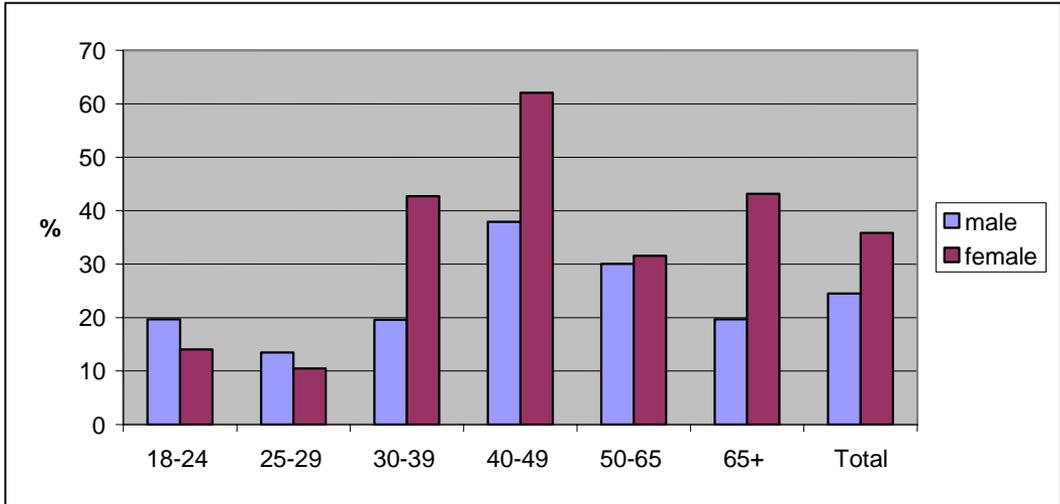
**Figure 5.4: What Sports Do People Attend in Ireland?**  
(Base=46 per cent of sample who attended a sports event in Ireland over prior twelve months)



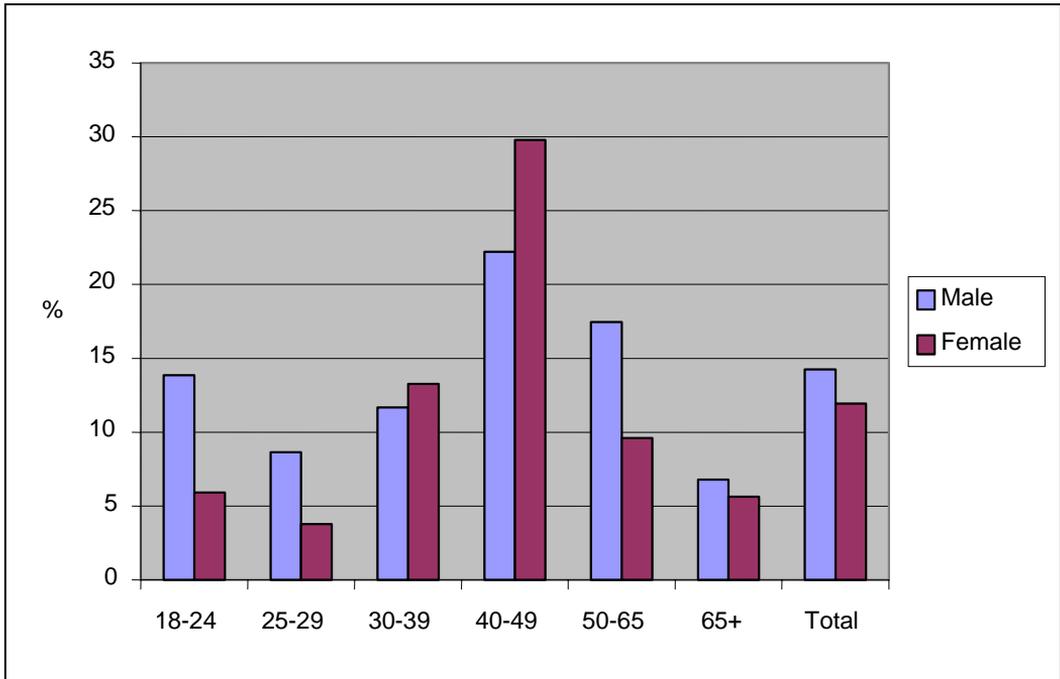
**Figure 5.5: What Sports Do People Attend Outside of Ireland?**  
Base=6% of sample who attended a sports event outside Ireland over prior twelve months



**Figure 5.6: Percentage of Attendances at Sports Events Comprised of Attendances to Under-18 Events Classified by Age and Gender (Base: those who had attended at least one sports event)**



**Figure 5.7: Percentage of the Population Who Attend Sports Events Involving Competitors Under-18 Broken Down by Age and Gender (Base: total population)**



## 5.4 Why Do People Attend Sports Events?

Respondents were asked why they attended both under-18 and over-18 sports events, and it is of interest to classify the responses to these questions by age and gender. With regard to under-18 events (Table 5.1), 61 per cent of women and 31 per cent of men said they attended because their children were playing. It is notable that children drew parents to under-18 events only when they were *playing*: parents hardly ever went because the children themselves wanted to attend. The reasons for attending under-18 events vary with age for both men and women – for example, 62 per cent of men in the 40-49 age group attended because of their children compared to zero per cent in the 25-29 year old age bracket. The most common reason men in all age-groups except those in their 40s gave for attendance is to support the team, but among women, it is only in the younger age groups (18-24 and 25-29) that supporting the team is a dominant motivation. Another interesting aspect of the life cycle motivations for attendance is a move toward supporting the sport itself among older adults. 13 per cent of males in the 50-65 year age bracket and 22 per cent of males in the over 65 year age bracket cite supporting the sport as being their prime motivation for attendance. This is compared to less than 7 per cent in the younger age brackets. A similar pattern is evident for women.

**Table 5.1: Motivations for Attending Under-18s Events**

		My child(ren) were playing	My child(ren) were interested	To support the team	To support the sport	Total
<b>Male</b>	18-24 yrs	5	0	88	7	100
	25-29 yrs	0	0	100	0	100
	30-39 yrs	26	5	64	6	100
	40-49 yrs	62	3	29	7	100
	50-65 yrs	31	2	54	13	100
	65+ yrs	15	3	60	22	100
	<b>Total</b>	31	2	58	9	100
<b>Female</b>	18-24 yrs	18	0	69	13	100
	25-29 yrs	39	0	61	0	100
	30-39 yrs	64	4	32	0	100
	40-49 yrs	80	3	13	5	100
	50-65 yrs	43	6	41	10	100
	65+ yrs	38	8	37	17	100
	<b>Total</b>	61	4	29	6	100

Table 5.2 shows the motivations for attending sports events where the participants are over 18 years of age. As would be expected, children's playing has less of an effect for these sports, with 6 per cent of women and 2 per cent of men citing this as their primary motivation for attending. However, children's participation is an important factor for some sub-groups, in particular women over the age of 65 years, with 27 per cent of attendances among this group motivated by the fact that their children were playing. The two

primary factors influencing attendance at over-18s sports fixtures are support for the team and support for the sport itself. Amongst males 30 per cent and females 22 per cent cited support for the sport as being their primary motivation for attending. 66 per cent of males and 69 per cent of females cited supporting the team as being their primary reason for attending.

**Table 5.2: Motivations for Attending Sports Events Where Participants are Aged Over-18 Years by Age Group and Gender**

		My child(ren) were playing	My child(ren) were interested	To support the team	To support the sport	Total
<b>Male</b>	18-24 yrs	0	2	72	26	100
	25-29 yrs	0	0	61	39	100
	30-39 yrs	0	2	68	29	100
	40-49 yrs	2	8	63	27	100
	50-65 yrs	4	3	65	28	100
	65+ yrs	3	0	59	38	100
	<b>Total</b>		2	3	66	30
<b>Female</b>	18-24 yrs	0	0	82	18	100
	25-29 yrs	0	5	69	27	100
	30-39 yrs	4	3	73	20	100
	40-49 yrs	11	4	64	22	100
	50-65 yrs	8	2	61	29	100
	65+ yrs	27	10	38	25	100
	<b>Total</b>		6	3	69	22

## 5.5 Conclusions

Almost 50 per cent of adults had attended a sports event in the past twelve months. There are significant gender differences in patterns of attendance and in the life cycle course of attendance. Men attend sports events for most of their lives, with a marked decline only at the age of 65 years. Even then, over 30 per cent of men in the over 65 year age bracket had attended a sports event in the past twelve months. The life cycle of female attendance is different with attendance peaking in the 40-49 year age-bracket and falling to below 10 per cent for women over the age of 65 years. The figures on attendance confirm the finding from earlier chapters that sport plays a more significant role over the full life course of men than it does for women and that it is an important aspect of maintaining social and cultural contact for men in older age brackets. The dominant role of the GAA in Irish sport is borne out by attendance figures, which show that over 60 per cent of sports attendances in Ireland are to GAA games. No other sport has attendances of this order. However, in terms of sports events abroad, soccer accounts for over half of attendances. Another important facet of sports attendances in Ireland is the role of children's sports: attendance at children's sport by parents accounts for about one in four of all sports attendances and for almost two-

thirds of attendances by women in their 40s, the age at which women are most likely to have children of sports playing age. Children's sport will be discussed in more detail in a future report, but for now it is interesting to note the large quantitative impact that children's sport has on the sporting engagement of adults.

As in the case of membership, one important issue for future research is the extent to which the social capital generated by attending sports events is bridging as well as bonding. Bridging facilitates the creation of shared norms and co-operation between groups and bonding facilitates the creation of shared norms and co-operation within a particular group. While within group bonding is not itself a negative thing, it can occur at the expense of bonding with out-groups or even of antagonism towards out-groups as in the case of many forms of football hooliganism. The role of sport in promoting international linkages with Ireland is a particularly important issue in this regard. The almost complete absence of trouble at international sports fixtures involving Irish sports teams would suggest that they are good for international relations. It is in this context that the figure of 6 per cent of the Irish adult population that travel abroad at least once a year to attend a sports event is significant. From a national perspective, once again the almost complete absence of violent or threatening crowd behaviour at Irish sports events, evidenced by the fact that Irish sports tournaments rarely if ever strictly segregate crowds, would suggest that the social capital generated by sports attendances is rarely divisive.

# 6. SOCIALISING AND SPORTS

---

## 6.1 Introduction

In previous chapters we examined membership, volunteering and attendance at sports events as social activities in themselves. In addition, however, we can consider the degree to which people socialise with others as an offshoot of these activities. This question also applies to playing: people may spend an hour or two on the field of play and as much time afterwards socialising with their playing partners. It is generally assumed that social interactions of these kinds benefit people's well being. It is possible, however, that the benefits can be overstated, particularly to the extent that social activity connected with sport is related to alcohol consumption. It is therefore useful to examine the link between social aspects of sport on the one hand and both alcohol consumption and general well being on the other, keeping in mind that these links may be different at different stages of the life cycle. It is notable in this context that the Sport for Older People initiative currently supported by the Department of Sport, Arts and Tourism is motivated by the notion that the social contact facilitated by sport can have particular benefits for the quality of life and well being of older people.

---

## 6.2 Social Dimensions of Playing

The playing of most sports has an obvious social dimension. The subjective importance of this social dimension is suggested by Table 6.1, which shows that 60 per cent of males and 51 per cent of females classified sport as either "very important" or "important" in providing them with a context for meeting new friends and acquaintances. Fewer respondents considered sport to be important as a context for joint family activity. However, the most important benefits of sport that respondents identified had to do with relaxation, health and fitness and sense of achievement rather than social contact, with health and fitness being the most important factor for the majority of respondents.

A further social dimension of sport is the social context in which players participate. As can be seen in Table 6.2, many sports revolve around informal participation with friends rather than formal training sessions or competitive tournaments. This is particularly the case for sports such as snooker, five-a-side soccer, golf, pitch and putt and tennis where informal participation among friends is far more prevalent than competitive activity. Soccer has quite a high level of participation in inter-club competition (57 per cent), but if

five-a-side soccer is included with standard soccer, informal participation emerges as the dominant form. In Gaelic football, hurling and rugby, competitions and formal training sessions provide the context for the majority of participation, though some informal participation occurs in these sports also.

**Table 6.1: To What Degree is Sports Participation Important in Providing You With the Following Benefits?**

		Gender of Respondent	
		Male	Female
Sport benefit-health & fitness	Very important	48	39
	Important	27	29
	Not important	24	32
Sport benefit-joint family activity	Very important	19	20
	Important	32	28
	Not important	48	52
Sport benefit-new friends/acquaintances	Very important	20	17
	Important	40	34
	Not important	40	49
Sport benefit-relaxation	Very important	36	30
	Important	39	37
	Not important	25	33
Sport benefit-sense of achievement	Very important	34	27
	Important	34	33
	Not important	32	41

**Table 6.2: Informal, Formal and Competitive Participation in Different Sports\***

	Informal	Formal Training	Competitive
	%	%	%
Billiards/snooker	97	-	6
Soccer 5-a-side	95	6	7
Swimming	91	10	2
Fishing (all types)	88	7	23
Weight lifting	86	22	11
Golf	83	26	49
Cycling-for leisure	83	3	-
Tennis	83	43	37
Pitch & putt	79	13	25
Badminton	72	28	60
Equestrian (exclude horse racing)	70	39	42
Aerobics/keep fit	61	43	8
Basketball	58	34	55
Soccer	57	23	53
Gaelic hurling	33	24	80
Gaelic football	31	37	72
Rugby	25	18	79

\* Rows can sum to over 100 per cent as respondents were allowed to choose multiple options.

A further indication of the social role of sports is the extent to which different sporting activities involve socialising among players. Table 6.3 displays the frequency of socialising among players in different sports. As can be seen, rugby generates the greatest frequency of socialising among players. Amongst rugby players 86 per cent socialised with other rugby players at least once a week and none of them indicated that they never socialised with other rugby players. Other team sports such as GAA sports, soccer and basketball also generate high levels of socialising among players. Sports such as weightlifting, aerobics, swimming, fishing and cycling generate relatively low levels of socialising. Snooker and tennis, while not as team orientated as rugby, hurling and soccer also generate high levels of socialising among players.

**Table 6.3: Socialising Among Players by Sports**

	<b>Weekly</b>	<b>1-3 Times Per Month</b>	<b>Less Often</b>	<b>Never</b>
Rugby	86	8	5	0
Gaelic hurling	75	13	3	10
Soccer	71	15	11	3
Gaelic football	71	13	5	12
Billiards/snooker	71	12	7	10
Soccer 5-a-side	71	5	6	18
Tennis	68	16	3	12
Golf	61	19	10	10
Equestrian (exclude horse racing)	51	22	12	16
Basketball	48	32	13	7
Ladies football	48	34	18	0
Pitch & putt	46	27	13	14
Badminton	29	33	19	19
Aerobics/keep fit	26	4	19	51
Swimming	19	7	14	60
Fishing (all types)	18	20	37	25
Weight lifting	12	0	4	84
Cycling-for leisure	10	12	3	76

Table 6.4 shows with whom respondents play their primary sport. The table is ordered by the extent to which respondents play alone. The 'bowling alone' phenomenon discussed by Putnam (2000) does not appear to typify Irish sports players, though it does occur in some sports. Solitary playing is common in weightlifting, cycling, jogging, fishing and aerobics, but even in these sports participation with friends and club members also occurs. There is also some solitary participation in sports such as snooker and golf even though most participants play with friends. The incidence of solitary playing in these sports may point to the social isolation effects outlined by Putnam, but it could equally be explained by enthusiastic practice. Swimming and bowling are the most family-based sports, with about

half of participants in these activities taking part with other family members. Informal playing with friends is the most common form of participation among soccer players (72 per cent of soccer players and 91 per cent of five-a-side soccer players participate in this way), though two-thirds of soccer players also play in clubs. Virtually all hurlers (96 per cent) and the vast majority of Gaelic football and rugby players (89 and 88 per cent) play in clubs, making these the most club-based of all the sports in Ireland. These figures are consistent with points made earlier about the centrality of the club in the social and organisational context of the GAA and rugby in Ireland and the somewhat lesser significance of the club in soccer.

**Table 6.4: Whom Adults Play Sports with Classified by Sport\***

	Alone	Family	Friends	Club
Weight lifting	69	27	50	23
Cycling-for leisure	68	22	28	3
Jogging	64	0	51	0
Fishing (all types)	62	44	57	29
Aerobics/keep fit	49	21	56	33
Swimming	38	52	55	11
Equestrian (excluding horse racing)	37	45	47	42
Billiards/snooker	21	25	83	10
Golf	12	39	86	52
Martial arts e.g., judo/karate	11	0	58	82
Pitch & putt	10	38	72	34
Basketball	9	30	80	59
Rugby	7	10	57	88
Ten pin bowling	5	50	86	29
Gaelic football	2	18	46	89
Soccer	1	12	72	65
Tennis	0	32	77	72
Gaelic hurling	0	13	34	96
Soccer 5-a-side	0	18	91	15
Badminton	0	32	79	76
Ladies football	0	33	76	78

\* Rows can sum to over 100 per cent as respondents were allowed to choose multiple options.

### 6.3 Social Dimensions of Volunteering

While volunteering for sport is a social activity in itself, its social significance can be amplified to the degree that volunteers socialise with each other. The picture here is mixed in that many volunteers socialise with each other regularly (one-third do so at least weekly) but more than a quarter never do so (Table 6.5). Furthermore, men are more likely than women to socialise with other sports volunteers. The proportion of female volunteers who never socialise with other volunteers (39 per cent) is more than double that among male volunteers (18 per cent).

**Table 6.5: How Often Do You Socialise with Other Participants in This Activity?**

	Male	Female	All
Weekly	39	25	33
1-3 times per month	21	18	20
Less often	21	18	20
Never	18	39	27
Total	100	100	100

## 6.4 Alcohol Consumption and Sports Club Membership

One concern about the social role of sport is the extent to which social activities surrounding sport have effects on drinking behaviour. Here we focus on the link between alcohol and sports club membership (the relationship between *playing* sport and alcohol consumption was examined in an earlier report – see Fahey, Layte and Gannon (2004)). Table 6.6 compares units of alcohol consumed per week by all adults, all members of sports clubs, and members of clubs in the two main ‘social’ team sports, namely, soccer and GAA (other sports had too few sample cases to provide a basis for similar estimates). These comparisons are broken down by age. Looking

**Table 6.6: Mean Unit Consumption Rates Per Week by Age and Gender\***

Age	Gender	Population	All Sports Club	Soccer	GAA
18-24 yrs	Male	17	16	15	16
	Female	9	9	8	9
	Total	13	14	15	14
25-29 yrs	Male	18	18	14	20
	Female	6	5	10	7
	Total	12	13	13	18
30-39 yrs	Male	14	15	13	16
	Female	5	7	-	3
	Total	10	13	13	15
40-49 yrs	Male	14	14	20	16
	Female	5	6	12	5
	Total	10	12	20	13
50-65 yrs	Male	15	16	13	18
	Female	5	5	-	4
	Total	11	13	13	17
65+ yrs	Male	11	12	16	16
	Female	3	5	9	-
	Total	9	10	15	16
Total	Male	15	16	15	17
	Female	6	7	8	7
	Total	11	13	15	15

Note: Categories where there is an insufficient sample to estimate the unit consumption are marked “-”.

first at the comparison between all adults and those who are members of sports clubs, the differences in amounts of alcohol consumed are small and in some age-gender groups are absent. The picture is somewhat different when it comes to the highly social sports. In general, members of soccer and GAA clubs drink more than the general population, but this is not as prevalent among younger club members, particularly in soccer. It would seem to be the older members of clubs in these sports that tend to drink more than the average for their age group.<sup>2</sup>

---

## 6.5 Mental and Physical Well- Being and Sports Club Membership

A previous report on physical participation in sport analysed the link between physical participation and mental and physical health (Fahey *et al.*, 2004). That report utilised the 'SF-12 scale', which is based on six questions on physical health and six questions on mental health. Despite their imperfections as measures of overall health, these indicators nevertheless display a high degree of reliability and correlation with other more detailed measures and are useful for comparing the well being of different groups. The SF-12 scale is divided into two primary measures, one of physical well being called the Physical Component Scale (PCS) and one of mental well being called the Mental Component Scale (MCS). Both the PCS and the MCS are standardised to given a mean score of 50 with a standard deviation of 10. Thus, the main purpose of the scales is not to distinguish between those with poor health and those with good health on the basis of thresholds but rather to assess relative health levels across groups (for a more extensive account of these measures and their properties, see Fahey *et al.*, (2004), Chapter 5).

Table 6.7 displays the mean Mental Component Score (MCS) and Physical Component Score (PCS) subdivided by gender, age and sports club memberships. The results point to increased levels of mental and physical well being among those in higher age brackets who are members of sports clubs compared to those in higher age brackets who are not members of sports clubs. The increased physical and mental well being effects do not emerge until the 40-49 year age bracket and then the gap in well being between members and non-members increases for the 50-65 year and 65+ year age brackets. This effect holds for both women and men. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 graphically display the results. As can be seen, while PCS scores decrease over the life cycle for both members and non-members, they do at a faster rate for non-members. MCS scores are relatively more constant across the life cycle for both members and non-members. However, there is a decline in mental well being in the older age-brackets among non-members that is not evident among members. A number of multiple regressions were performed, confirming that sports club membership has a statistically significant

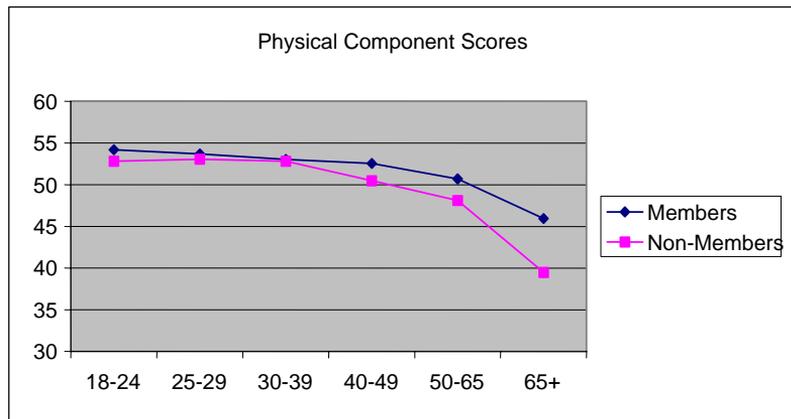
<sup>2</sup> Multiple Regression analysis not shown here confirms that, controlling for age, gender and presence of children, sports club membership has a statistically significant and positive effect on units of alcohol consumed per week.

**Table 6.7: Physical and Mental Component Scores for Members and Non-Members**

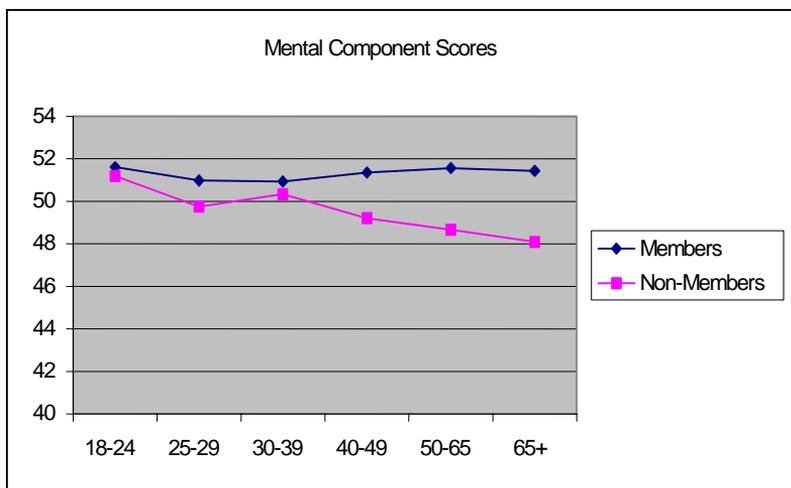
Age	Gender of Respondent		Members		Non-Members	
			Pcs12	Mcs12	Pcs12	Mcs12
18-24 yrs	Male	Mean	54.78	52.86	52.96	52.97
		Std. Deviation	3.45	8.28	5.91	6.10
	Female	Mean	53.06	49.21	52.69	49.98
		Std. Deviation	7.02	9.86	6.88	8.71
	Total	Mean	54.18	51.59	52.80	51.18
		Std. Deviation	5.06	9.03	6.51	7.90
25-29 yrs	Male	Mean	53.47	52.24	53.33	50.77
		Std. Deviation	6.07	6.39	6.61	10.97
	Female	Mean	53.98	49.21	52.88	49.04
		Std. Deviation	5.35	10.98	6.47	10.86
	Total	Mean	53.68	50.99	53.07	49.75
		Std. Deviation	5.79	8.72	6.53	10.94
30-39 yrs	Male	Mean	53.11	51.83	53.61	51.28
		Std. Deviation	6.48	8.12	5.55	9.18
	Female	Mean	53.09	48.50	52.24	49.56
		Std. Deviation	6.78	10.99	7.85	10.52
	Total	Mean	53.10	50.85	52.81	50.28
		Std. Deviation	6.57	9.20	7.01	10.02
40-49 yrs	Male	Mean	52.44	51.90	50.00	49.82
		Std. Deviation	7.20	7.38	9.88	9.33
	Female	Mean	52.71	50.18	50.94	48.82
		Std. Deviation	6.14	8.75	9.30	10.20
	Total	Mean	52.53	51.33	50.53	49.25
		Std. Deviation	6.87	7.90	9.57	9.85
50-65 yrs	Male	Mean	50.58	51.83	46.99	48.20
		Std. Deviation	7.58	7.66	11.37	11.86
	Female	Mean	50.88	51.07	49.09	49.00
		Std. Deviation	8.61	9.02	10.19	11.30
	Total	Mean	50.69	51.57	48.14	48.64
		Std. Deviation	7.96	8.17	10.79	11.56
65+ yrs	Male	Mean	47.34	52.13	40.21	49.49
		Std. Deviation	9.42	9.13	13.20	10.14
	Female	Mean	42.34	49.51	38.91	47.12
		Std. Deviation	11.81	10.48	13.65	11.90
	Total	Mean	45.72	51.28	39.43	48.06
		Std. Deviation	10.52	9.67	13.49	11.30
Total	Male	Mean	52.66	52.16	49.01	50.19
		Std. Deviation	6.71	7.86	10.68	10.01
	Female	Mean	52.14	49.61	48.97	48.88
		Std. Deviation	7.72	9.97	10.93	10.73
	Total	Mean	52.48	51.29	48.99	49.43
		Std. Deviation	7.07	8.72	10.83	10.45

effect on both physical and mental well being, controlling for age, gender and presence of children. As has been pointed out in the previous study (Fahey *et al.*, 2004), the data do not enable us to say that sports club membership *causes* higher levels of well being. The causal relationship could be the other way around: those with higher levels of well being may be more likely to join clubs, in which case sports club membership would be an *effect* rather than a cause of higher well being, or may be a consequence of other factors (such as having a good job) which tend to promote both well-being and club membership. Nevertheless, we can say that sports club membership is part of a lifestyle package which is associated with healthier living, whatever the underlying causal mechanisms may be.

**Figure 6.1: Physical Component Scores for Sports Members and Non-Members Broken Down by Age Group**



**Figure 6.2: Mental Component Scores for Sports Members and Non-Members Broken Down by Age Group**



---

## 6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has examined the social context in which sport is played and the socialising activities that revolve around sport. The majority of sports examined here are dominated by informal activity among friends or club members. The exceptions to this are the large team sports such as GAA, soccer and rugby where formal competition is more common. However, these team sports generate a great deal of social activity outside of playing, both among players themselves and among other club members and, to a lesser extent, among those who are involved as volunteers. Socialising associated with sport is more prevalent among men than among women, and reflects a centrality of sport to the lives of many men that persists through most of the life cycle. Combined with the results from the previous chapters, it is clear that men more than women utilise sport as a social resource and are more likely to participate in sports of a sociable nature. There is some cause for concern in the degree to which socialising associated with sport involves alcohol, particularly again in the case of team sports. Nevertheless, members of sports clubs report higher levels of physical and mental well being throughout the life cycle than the rest of the population. The causal relationship involved is not clear, since people who are physically and mentally well may be more likely to join sports clubs. Nevertheless, sports club membership seems to be part of a package that, relative to patterns in the rest of the population, is bound up with healthy living and successful ageing.

# 7. ECONOMIC VALUE OF IRISH SPORT

---

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines sport in Ireland as economic activity. It estimates the economic value of (i) volunteering, (ii) club membership, (iii) sports attendances and (iv) sports playing. This is not a complete economic analysis as it does not include wider aspects of commercial sport such as television subscriptions, gambling and retail sports merchandise. However, our valuation serves to focus attention on the economic value of the social aspects of sport that have been the subject of the previous chapters. We also go somewhat beyond these ‘social’ areas to construct a broader aggregate valuation of sporting activity in Ireland. This broader valuation includes figures on public expenditure on sport; along with estimates of the economic value of sports tourism derived from Fáilte Ireland and CSO tourism figures. With the exception of the valuation of sports volunteering, which is based on an imputed wage-value of the labour involved, our valuation of the social aspects of sport is based on data on what people spend on the areas examined, that is, on market transactions. As pointed out by O’Donoghue (1994) the official statistics collected by the CSO (e.g. National Accounts, Labour Force Survey) are not sufficiently disaggregated to provide a basis for a complete economic valuation of sport since they generally do not distinguish between sport and recreation more generally.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we utilise the ESRI “Survey of Sports and Physical Recreation”, which contains detailed information on expenditure associated with the broad areas of sport outlined above.

Two previous reports provide economic valuations of sport against which our valuation can be compared. O’Donoghue’s (1994) valuation utilised a combination of figures from the Household Budget Surveys, a specially carried out survey of sports organisations, and national accounts data. The main aim was to provide an economic valuation of direct sports activity, consisting principally of the playing of sport. It also included gambling and

<sup>3</sup> Two sources of information, however, could in principle be used; the CSO Household Budget Survey and the CSO Survey of Services both provide information which distinguishes between sport and other forms of recreation. However, they are not used here as there exists a significant potential for “double-counting”. For example, the CSO figure for sports services of approximately €330 million includes part of what we estimate as the economic activity of sports playing.

sports media, which are outside the focus of our study. The valuations arrived at were in the order of between 0.8 and 2 per cent of GDP, depending on the measures and boundaries used. The central valuation arrived at a value of sport of 1.28 per cent of GDP. This consisted of value-added from sports playing (0.83 per cent), print media (0.07 per cent), gambling (0.21 per cent) and travel (0.17 per cent). When estimates for the value of sports tourism and horse-racing were included, the valuation increased to 2 per cent of GDP.

A more recent study, carried out by the Smurfit School of Business (Smurfit School, 2004) collected revenue, membership and cost information (e.g., wages and rent) on 61 clubs and projected these figures onto the national level to provide an aggregate measure of economic impact. This study estimated the total economic impact of sports clubs to be approximately €733 million per year. This consists of subscription fees of approximately €200 million, with the remainder comprising of green fees, and bar and food revenue as well as other income accruing from land purchases. Given that their study was narrowly focused on sports clubs, their figures are only partly comparable with the more inclusive approach used both here and in O'Donoghue (1994).

---

## 7.2 Economic Value of Volunteering

The *market* value of sport is estimated in later sections of this chapter using data on what people spend on club memberships, attendance at sports events and related forms of participation (including playing). However, measures of market value capture only part of the picture. As critics of existing national income accounting practices have often noted, many forms of labour, including voluntary labour, are excluded from standard economic valuations and their importance is neglected as a result. Given that we have highlighted volunteering as a key social aspect of sport in this report, it is important also to consider its economic value.

A first step is to decide what types of non-market activity in sport should be counted as 'labour' or 'work'. It would seem intuitive that we would not count a person's physical exercise as labour, even though it may require a great deal of effort. As Nordhaus points out, the point of going beyond a market concept of work is not to include everything but rather "...to include activities that are economic in nature and those that substitute for market activities" (Nordhaus, 2004). One commonly used heuristic is the *third-party* rule, which states that an activity should be counted as work if it could just as well be carried out by a third party for pay. Most forms of volunteer activity in sport would fit this criterion, since in most cases the activity in question could in principle be carried out by others for pay.

The most common method of valuing volunteer activity is to measure the amount of time spent volunteering and multiply this by a wage rate. This method poses a number of difficulties. The first is to arrive at an accurate measure of the time spent volunteering. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this is a difficult task and is sensitive to differences in measurement method. A second difficulty is to choose

the relevant wage rate to impute to volunteering. In the case of sports volunteering, for example, if a company director coaches an under-14s football team, his volunteering could be valued by reference to his wage-rate in his main job, the wage-rate for sports coaches who work with young people (e.g., in schools or sports clubs), or the wage rate that might apply to people who act as sports coaches even though they have little relevant training or skills (as would likely be the case with most volunteer coaches). The last of these three options would provide a lower valuation than either of the other two, but a case could be made that the second, or even the first, option is a valid basis for valuation. A third difficulty in valuing volunteer activity is to take account of resources other than time which volunteers may supply – e.g., use of their car or telephone.

In dealing with these three difficulties here, we opt for a conservative approach – that which would tend to err on the side of underestimation rather than overestimation. We project a reasonably cautious estimate of annual volunteering time per volunteer based on data on sessions of volunteering per week, we value that time at the minimum national wage rate (€7 per hour), and we ignore the value of other resources that volunteers may supply. We would consider that the valuation arising from this approach represents a lower bound estimate: the true value may be higher but it is unlikely to be substantially lower.

Data reported on more fully in Chapter 3 indicate that 14.4 per cent of the population volunteers for one form of sports activity, 4.5 per cent volunteer for two, and 1.5 per cent volunteer for three or more forms of sports activity. On the conservative assumption that each session of volunteering lasts one hour, Table 7.1 estimates the total national weekly amount of volunteering time for sport is 0.9 million hours and applies a value of €7 per hour to that total. It then adopts the further reasonably conservative assumption that volunteering occurs over 40 weeks of the year. **On that basis, it estimates the total annual value of volunteering time at €267 million.** For a full 52-week year, the value would be €347 million and for a 46-week year the value would be €307 million, but we discount these higher valuations here as excessive.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the extent of sports volunteering found by the present study is higher than that found by the NESF (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003), though it is closer to that implied by other studies (e.g., Ruddle and Mulvihill, 1999). A valuation of volunteering based on NESF data carried out by DKM Economic Consultants is correspondingly lower than that found here. On a minimum wage valuation basis, DKM estimated an upper valuation of *all* volunteering (sporting and non-sporting) at €259 million, which is similar to the valuation assigned here to sports volunteering alone (DKM Economic Consultants, 2004). However, DKM also acknowledged that other approaches could yield much higher valuations of volunteering, with an upper limit rising perhaps to as much as €1 billion per year (DKM Economic Consultants, 2004, p. 8).

**Table 7.1: Valuation of Number of Sessions Spent Volunteering**

	Estimated Number of People	No. of Hours Per Week	Weekly Value @ €7 Per Hour	Annual Value (40 Weeks Per Year)
<b>First Sport</b>				
Once per Week	117,078	117,078	819,546	32,781,840
Twice Per Week	100,055	200,110	1,400,770	56,030,800
Three Times Per Week	53,395	160,185	1,121,295	44,851,800
Four Times Per Week	20,892	83,568	584,976	23,399,040
Five Times Per Week	11,958	59,790	418,530	16,741,200
Six Times Per Week	2,270	13,620	95,340	3,813,600
Seven Times Per Week	5,064	35,448	248,136	9,925,440
Three Times per Month	24,437	18,327.75	128,294.25	5,131,770
Twice Per Month	20,207	10,103.5	70,724.5	2,828,980
Once Per Month	29,524	7,381	51,667	2,066,680
Less Than Once Per Month	22,388			
<b>Second Sport</b>				
Once per Week	43,213	43,213	302,491	12,099,640
Twice Per Week	32,182	64,364	450,548	18,021,920
Three Times Per Week	12,652	37,956	265,692	10,627,680
Four Times Per Week	8,634	34,536	241,752	9,670,080
Five Times Per Week	1,394	6,970	48,790	1,951,600
Six Times Per Week				
Seven Times Per Week	1,113	7,791	54,537	2,181,480
Three Times per Month	5,504	4,128	28,896	1,155,840
Twice Per Month	7,435	3,717.5	26,022.5	1,040,900
Once Per Month	8,360	2,090	14,630	585,200
Less Than Once Per Month	6,313			
<b>Third Sport</b>				
Once per Week	23,244	23,244	162,708	6,508,320
Twice Per Week	6,349	12,698	88,886	3,555,440
Three Times Per Week	1,929	5,787	40,509	1,620,360
Four Times Per Week				
Five Times Per Week				
Six Times Per Week				
Seven Times Per Week				
Three Times per Month	360	270	1,890	75,600
Twice Per Month	2,600	1,300	9,100	364,000
Once Per Month	2,413	603.25	4,222.75	168,910
Less Than Once Per Month	1,286			
		954,279	6,679,953	267,198,120

An alternative comparison with the present results is provided by an economic valuation of sports volunteering in England (Sport England, 2002). According to this valuation, 14.8 per cent of adults in England had volunteered for a sports activity in the previous year, which was very similar to the percentage for Ireland reported here (14.5 per cent). However, the estimate of time inputs per volunteer in England was almost three times higher and a higher valuation basis was adopted (the average industrial wage rather than the minimum wage as used here). Consequently, in proportional terms, the resulting valuation of sports volunteering in England was almost five times greater than that arrived at here (£1.4 billion, or 1.4 per cent GDP, compared to less than 0.3 per cent of GDP for Ireland estimated here). Consistent with the Irish findings, the English data report volunteering rates to be approximately twice as high among males and are highest in the 35-59 years age bracket.

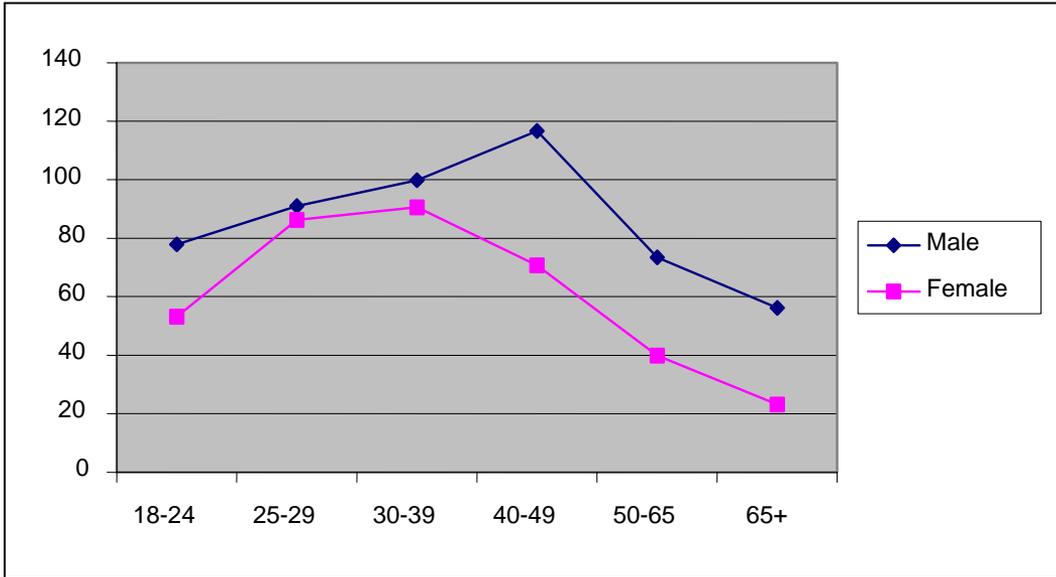
---

### 7.3 Expenditure on Club Memberships

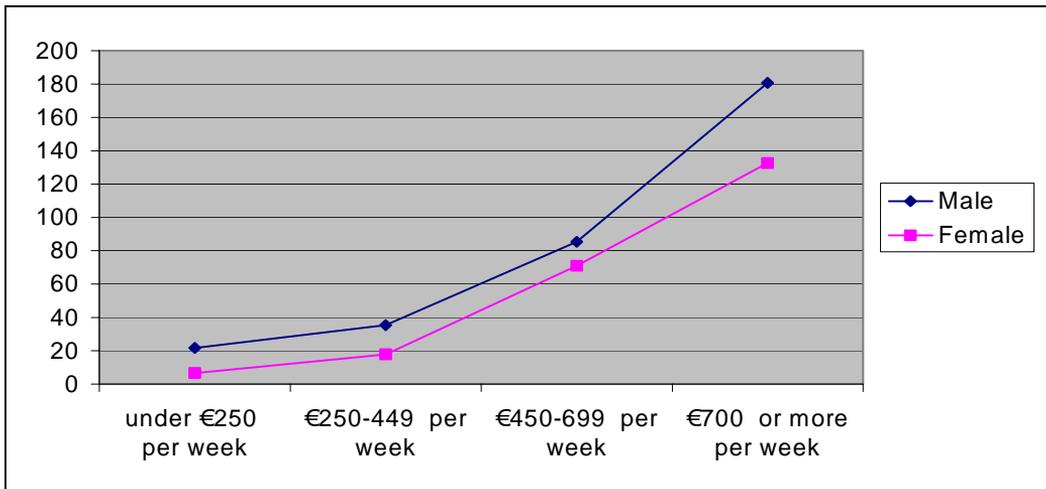
Chapter 4 revealed that 30 per cent of adults were members of sports/fitness clubs, 40 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women. In order to estimate total spending on membership fees, we rely on overall *mean* membership fees rather than *median* membership fees reported in Chapter 4. The mean is better at capturing the impact of the small numbers of people who pay quite high club membership fees (occasional high club membership fees are found especially in the GAA and may reflect exceptional donations to clubs built into club membership fees during fund-raising drives).

The average sports club member spent €242 per year on membership fees. This averages out at €73 per year over the entire adult population. Summing up over the population yields an estimate of total amount spent on subscriptions to sports clubs of over €200 million per annum. The amount spent varies across age groups with spending being lower at higher age groups. Spending peaks at different age groups for men and women, with women's spending declining significantly after the age of 40 years with men's declining after the age of 50 years (Figure 7.1). The amount spent on subscriptions increases steeply with household income for both men and women (Figure 7.2). Furthermore, the pattern of spending by age and income groups reveals that spending on subscriptions is determined to a much greater degree by income rather than by age, with for example the amount spent being higher for the highest income bracket across all age groups (Figure 7.3).

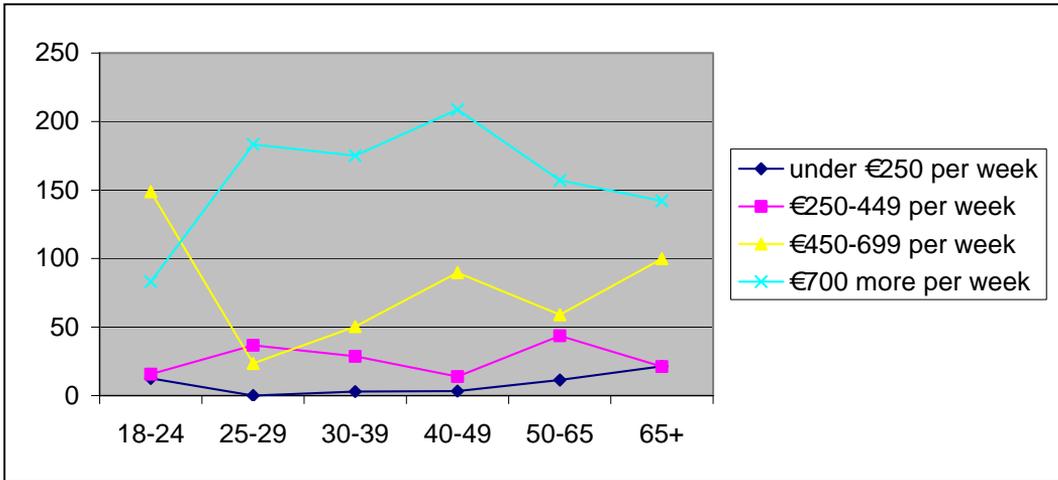
**Figure 7.1: Spending on Sport's Subscriptions by Gender and Age Group (€Per Year)**



**Figure 7.2: Spending on Subscriptions to Sports Clubs by Gender and Income Group (€Per Year)**



**Figure 7.3: Spending on Subscriptions to Sports Clubs by Income and Age Group (€Per Year)**



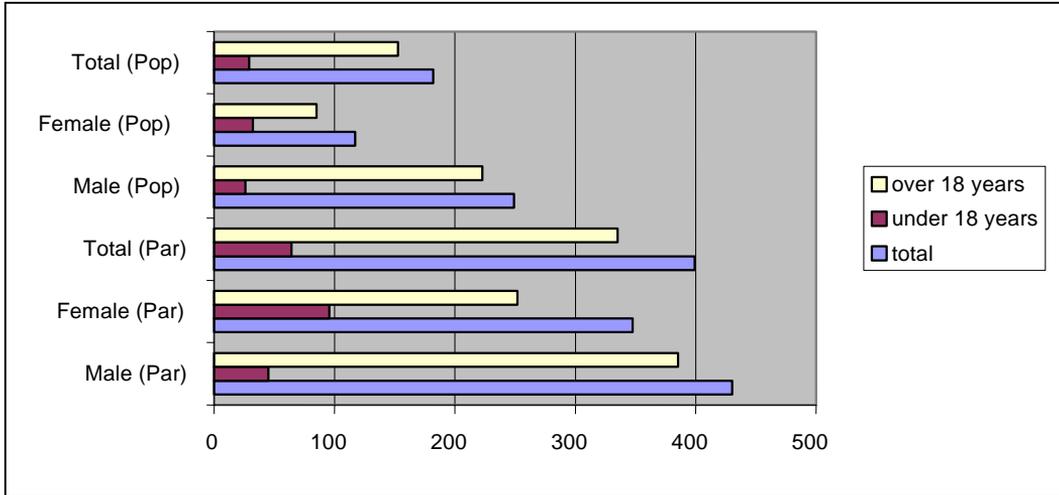
## 7.4 Spending on Attendances

Attendance is discussed more extensively in Chapter 5. Almost half of Irish adults (46 per cent) attended a domestic sports fixture over the previous twelve months, while 6 per cent attended a sports fixture outside of Ireland. Those who attended sports events in Ireland spent a mean of €116 over the year on events where the participants were aged under 18 years and €282 over the year where the participants were aged over 18 years, €398 per attendee below). The mean ticket price per event for over-18 sports was €15 and the mean amount spent travelling per event was €25 although this is a great deal more variable with many respondents paying zero or a very small amount to attend their sports fixture, and other respondents spending far more than the average. The mean total amount spent by the 46 per cent of respondents who attended at least one event was €398 over the past twelve months. The mean total amount spent per adult (i.e., including those who do not attend an event at all) in Ireland is €181, with a mean amount of €29 spent on events where the participants are less than 18 years old, and €152 spent on events where the participants are greater than 18 years old. Women spend more on average than men on events where the participants are less than 18 years old, but men spend substantially more than women on attending/travelling to sports events where the participants were aged 18 years and over than women. Spending on attending sports events is also sensitive to household income as can be seen from Figure 7.5 but with different responses from men and women, with wealthier men being by far the biggest spending category.

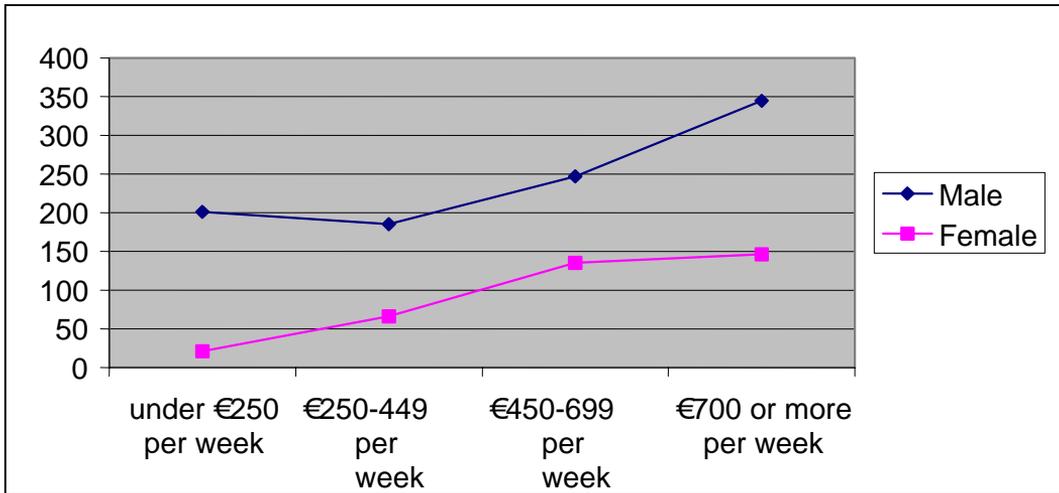
To estimate the total economic value of attendance in Ireland, we take the average spend on tickets and travel/accommodation per adult referred to above (€181) and gross up to the total population. This yields a figure of €525 million. Of this, approximately €440 million consists of spending on tickets/travel for events in which the competitors were 18 years, and the balance of approximately €85

million was spent on attending events where the competitors were under 18 years.

**Figure 7.4: Mean Spending (€ Per Annum by Gender (Pop = Total Population, Par = Subset of Respondents Who Attended at Least One Event)**



**Figure 7.5: Mean Spending (€ Per Annum by Gender and Income Group (Income on the Horizontal)**

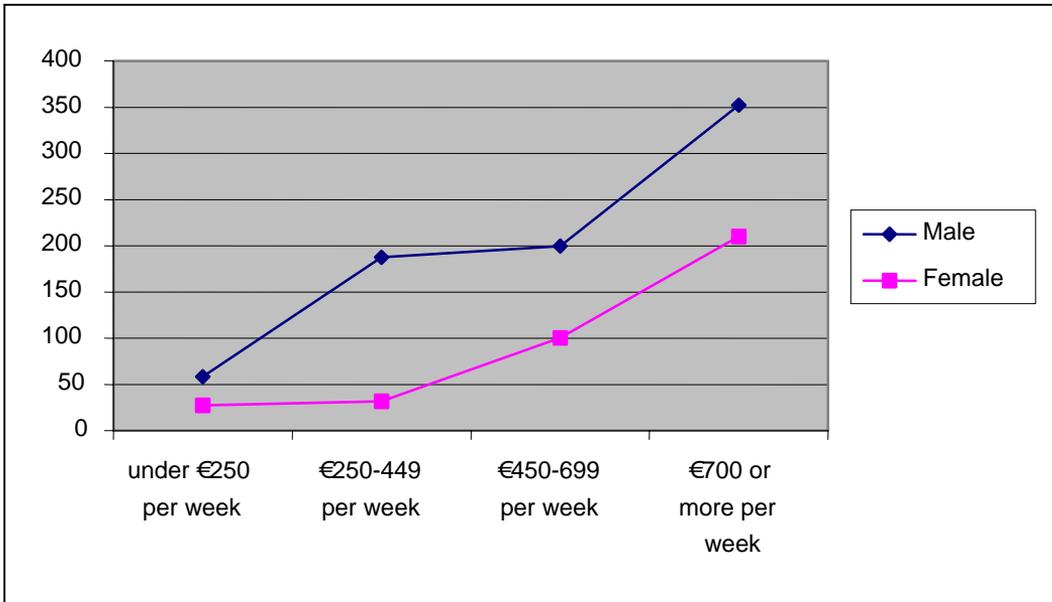


### 7.5 Expenditure on Playing

A previous report on sports participation found that 78 per cent of adults had participated in at least one sport in the past twelve months and 43 per cent participated in sports or exercise activities other than walking (Fahey *et al.*, 2004). In total, the average respondent (i.e., including players and non-players) spent a mean of €143 per year on sports equipment and other participation costs. Summing over the population for the amount of money spent on clothing, equipment and other participation costs per year on sports activity yields an estimate of just over €413 million. The volume of spending on sports equipment and clothing increases substantially

with income for both men and women, with men spending more than women in all categories as displayed in Figure 7.6 below.

**Figure 7.6: Mean Annual Spending (€) on Sports Clothes and Equipment by Gender and Household Income**



## 7.6 Aggregate National Estimates of Economic Activity in Sport

Considering the approximate nature of the figures presented so far, it is not possible to provide a pinpoint estimate of the aggregate economic value of sport in Ireland. Nevertheless, a rough aggregate can be compiled by summing the various sub-estimates.

- Assuming that volunteers provide an average of one hour per session and do so over 40 weeks of the year, and valuing this labour at the minimum wage (€7 per hour), the estimate of the value of the labour provided by Irish sports volunteers is €267 million per year. This is not counting the provision of equipment by volunteers such as the use of their home or car. Furthermore, it is assuming that the opportunity cost of their time is the minimum wage. Therefore, this figure can be viewed as a lower bound.
- Approximately €200 million per year is spent annually on membership subscriptions to sports clubs.
- Economic activity generated by attendances at sports events is in the region of €525 million per year. This includes both ticket prices and the costs of travel and accommodation associated with attending matches.
- Approximately €400 million per year is spent on sports equipment, sports clothing and related costs of playing sport.

These four areas of activity, which approximate to the social dimensions of sport that we have examined in this report, thus have a combined economic value of about **€1.4 billion**, which is the

equivalent of **1.26 per cent of GNP in 2003** (1.04 per cent of GDP).

Further additions to this valuation could reasonably be made. One major additional area, for example, is the economic value of sports tourism into Ireland. According to Fáilte Ireland/CSO data for 2003, each visitor to the country spends approximately €660 (Tourism Ireland, 2005). Approximately 536,000 people stated that their purpose in coming to Ireland was to engage in some form of sports activity, of which golf; equestrian activities; cruising; walking/hiking and angling were the most important. If we assume that the spend per visitor who came for sporting purposes was the same as the average for all visitors, the estimate of the economic value of sports tourism would be approximately **€350 million**. A broad economic valuation could also include government spending on sport; a dimension of sports-related spending that has not already been included in the estimates presented above. As discussed in Chapter 2, total public spending on sport is not easy to identify, since some of it is included in large non-sport areas of expenditure, such as education, health promotion and spending on local amenities by local authorities. Focusing solely on the sports budget of the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism and excluding that allocated to horse and dog racing (areas of sport not dealt with in this report), the amount involved was €112 million in 2004. Aggregating all the estimates mentioned so far, we arrive at a total valuation of approximately €1.86 billion (1.4 per cent of GNP in 2003, or 1.7 per cent of GDP).

---

## 7.7 Conclusions

Sport is a significant part of the Irish economy, though there is no agreement as to the precise location of the boundary between sporting and non-sporting economic activity. This chapter has focused mainly on the economic value of the social aspects of sport highlighted in this study, that is, volunteering for sport, membership of sports clubs, attendance at sports events, and various expenditures associated with playing sport. The estimate of the economic value of these activities is €1.4 billion, or 1.26 per cent of GNP in 2003. Of this total, €267 million was accounted for by sports volunteering, an activity not included in standard approaches to national income accounting. The present overall valuation is broadly similar to the valuation of sport of 1.28 per cent of GDP derived by O'Donoghue (1994) even though the valuation methodologies differed. These valuations provide a context in which the extent of state funding for sport might be viewed: the €112 million expended on sport by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism is the equivalent of less than 10 per cent of the economic value of the social dimensions of sport.

There are a number of aspects of the economic valuation of sport for which the current data does not allow us to provide estimates but which could potentially be estimated subject to improvements in measurement. The contribution of sport to employment in Ireland is difficult to assess without disaggregated labour force data. If we

assume that the amount of people employed as a result of sport is similar to the percentage of GDP that we estimate to be related to sport, this would give a figure of approximately 25,000 employed as a result of sporting activity.<sup>4</sup> However, it is not possible to make authoritative statements about the employment contribution with the current data. Furthermore, the potential contribution of sport to reducing the costs of healthcare would require a separate study in itself.

One conclusion from the O'Donoghue (1994) report was on the need for consultation between the CSO and relevant sports bodies to tighten the classifications in National Income Accounting and Labour Force Surveys to isolate economic activity relating to sport (p 34). This has yet to be achieved to a level where the existing CSO information could be used to provide an estimate of the value of sport in Ireland as opposed to general recreational activities. One immediate policy solution that would increase the evidence base of sport in Ireland with reference to its role in the economy would be a process of consultation between sports authorities and the CSO with a view to narrowing the classifications in major CSO publications and surveys to include sport as opposed to recreation in general.

<sup>4</sup> It should be pointed out that the employment created by sport would not be added to the economic value derived here by aggregating sporting expenditure, as we would be double-counting the value added by sporting organisations. This does not apply to the volunteer labour figure, as the output created by volunteer labour is almost exclusively non-marketed and would not appear elsewhere in the figures.

# 8. CONCLUSIONS

This report has provided a quantitative account of key social aspects of sport in Ireland and has placed an economic value on these social dimensions. In this chapter we summarise the main findings under a number of headings and draw implications for sports policy in Ireland. Combined with information on the life-cycle aspects of participation from the previous ESRI reports (Fahey *et al.*, 2004), this account adds considerably to the information available to policymakers on different factors affecting individuals' relationship with sport at different stages of their life.

---

## 8.1 The Importance of Sports Volunteers

A feature of Irish sport that has both economic and social significance is the extent to which it is driven by volunteering. Approximately 400,000 adults, 15 per cent of the adult population, volunteer for sport in some way during the course of the sporting year in Ireland. Men (18 per cent) are more likely to volunteer than women (12 per cent). Volunteering varies by age groups, with those in the 40-49 year old age group most likely to volunteer and volunteering rates falling sharply after the age of 65 years. Volunteer rates also vary across social class, with professionals more likely to volunteer than non-professionals. The GAA is dominant in terms of the sports for which people volunteer. One-third of all of those who volunteer for sports do so for the GAA. This is almost double the level of volunteering of the next largest sport – soccer – which recruits 17 per cent of all sports volunteers. The sports with the widest gender differences in levels of volunteering are soccer (22 per cent of male volunteers, 18 per cent of female volunteers), hurling (19 per cent of male volunteers, 11 per cent of female volunteers) and swimming (9 per cent of female volunteers, 2 per cent of male volunteers).

---

## 8.2 Extent of Attendance and Club Membership

Sports club membership and attendance are widespread among the Irish population. Amongst Irish adults 30 per cent are members of sports clubs, 40 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women. The GAA is the largest membership body, with over a quarter of all memberships; aerobics/fitness is next at 20 per cent of memberships. Some high participation sports have relatively low club membership (e.g. swimming, soccer), whereas the GAA is unusual in that club members are a good deal more numerous than players. Within Ireland 46 per cent of the adult population had attended a sports event in the past twelve months and 6 per cent

had attended a sports event outside of Ireland. The predominant role of the GAA in Irish sport is borne out by attendance figures, which accounts for over 60 per cent of sports attendances in Ireland. There are significant gender differences in patterns of attendance and in the life cycle course of attendance.

---

### 8.3 The Role of Sport in Building Social Capital

The social capital literature has heavily stressed the role of activities such as sport in bringing people together, counteracting loneliness and social isolation, forming networks and strengthening communities. In this regard, many activities connected with sport, such as playing in team games, volunteering for sports or taking part in club activities, are highly social in that the activities themselves bring people into social contact with each other. Making new friends was considered by 60 per cent of men and 51 per cent of women an important benefit to be obtained from sport. Some sports are more social than others: team sports are never played alone and golf rarely is, but over one-third of swimmers and of those who do aerobics engage in those activities alone. Social contact associated with sport often extends into socialising beyond the activity itself, and again this is truer of some sports than others. The vast majority of those who play rugby, soccer and GAA games socialise weekly with each other, but over half of swimmers and those who take part in aerobics never socialise with other participants. Socialising connected with sport is not confined to players: for example, 86 per cent of rugby club members socialise with each other on a weekly basis, as do 75 per cent of hurling club members, and 71 per cent of soccer club members. Volunteering is less likely to lead to socialising than is club membership or playing, though it occurs: 39 per cent of male volunteers, and 25 per cent of female volunteers socialise with other volunteers on a weekly basis. Such socialising has been placed on the heart of modern theories of social capital formation and it is clear that sport has a significant role in promoting the type of low-level relationship building and network formation implicit in the social capital approach.

---

### 8.4 The Social Role of Sport and the Life Cycle

An aspect of the life cycle patterns of sports volunteering, membership and attendance that has some significance for policy is the degree to which it differs from the life cycle patterns of playing sport. Many people continue to volunteer in sport, attend sports events or socialise in their sports club long after they have ceased to play. This gives sport a considerable social significance in the middle and later stages of the life cycle, especially among men. For example, men attend sports events for most of their lives, with a marked decline only after the age of 65 years – and even then, over 30 per cent of men aged over 65 years had attended a sports event in the past twelve months. The life cycle of female attendance is different with a peak in the 40-49 year age bracket and a decline to just above 10 per cent over the age of 65 years. It is clear that sport does not occupy as important a role in the lives of women as they

age when compared to men. Taken in conjunction with similar age patterns in sports club membership, it is clear that is an important mechanism for maintaining social and cultural contact for men as they age.

---

## 8.5 Economic Value of Sport

Previous economic valuations of sport in Ireland, Northern Ireland and England, which as already mentioned would indicate a value of sport in Ireland today of about €1.7 billion, have been based on an inclusive definition of relevant activities. Our approach here is narrower in most respects, in that it focuses mainly on key social aspects of sport and excludes activities such as gambling, horse racing and much tourist activity related to sport. In some respects, however, it may be broader, especially in that, in valuing attendance at sports events, we include not just purchase of tickets but also costs of transport and food. Differences in approach to the economic valuation of sport in part reflect the different purposes for which valuations may be undertaken (e.g., a health-oriented approach might also attempt to value the health benefits or savings to health expenditure arising from sport). It also arises from the fuzziness of the boundaries around sport and the consequent element of arbitrariness in defining those boundaries.

Aside from questions of definition, our estimates are based on sample survey data. They therefore cannot be regarded as providing precise quantification but rather as giving approximate indications of orders of magnitude involved. The key estimates are as follows:

- *Volunteering* for sport provides an annual labour input which is the equivalent of 22,500 full-time workers. Valued at the minimum hourly wage rate, this would give an economic value for volunteering of €267 million per year.
- *Subscriptions to sports clubs* amount to about €200 million annually.
- *Participation Costs for Sports Events Including Equipment* amounts to €413 million annually.
- *Attendance at sports events* generates about €525 million worth of economic activity. This includes purchase of tickets and the costs of attending matches including transport and food

These four areas of activity alone, which we have identified earlier as the main *social* aspects of sport, have a combined economic value of €1.4 billion (1.26 per cent of GNP in 2003). Other areas could be added to this, for example, sports tourism into Ireland and the value of government expenditure on sport. Together, these would raise the value of sport in Ireland to €1.86 billion (1.7 per cent of GNP in 2003).

---

## 8.6 Policy Implications

The social aspects of sport examined here are of major relevance to two areas of public policy in Ireland: sports policy and emerging policy on social capital and volunteering. Although the importance of the social dimensions of sport is implicit in the underlying

definition of both these fields of policy, it has not been adequately recognised in either. Sports policy has focused on sport as a physical activity and has paid little attention to its social dimensions, even though the legislation underpinning sports policy refers to the formation of social relationships as an integral feature of sport. Social capital in general, and in particular volunteering and associational membership viewed as components of social capital, have acquired an emerging policy prominence in recent years, exemplified in the commitment in the *Programme for Government* (2002) to introduce measures to promote social capital and social cohesion. Research on social capital and volunteering has highlighted the importance of sport in this regard, showing, for example, that volunteering for sport is the most extensive form of volunteering in Ireland and that more people are members of sports and recreation clubs than any other form of voluntary or community organisation. Yet, policy reflection on social capital and volunteering has not followed through with appropriate recognition of the importance of sport. The *White Paper on Voluntary Activity* (2000), the report of the National Committee on Volunteering (2002), the report on social capital by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF, 2003), and the report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on *Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland* (2005) all deal with volunteering but none makes recommendations that directly recognise or address the role of sport.

In that context, two key empirical aspects of sport already referred to need to be highlighted. The first is that the role of sport in generating social engagement and social capital is not far short of its role in generating physical exercise. For every four adults who play sport with enough regularity and effort to gain significant physical benefit, there are three who volunteer for sports, the vast majority of whom do so at least once per week. There are others who join sports clubs for social reasons or regularly attend sports events. There is some overlap between those who play sports and those who are socially engaged in it in these ways, but they are also distinct to a great degree, particularly in that much social engagement arising from sport occurs in middle age or older while playing is concentrated among younger people.

***A key recommendation arising from these patterns is that sports policy in Ireland should recognise those social aspects of sport, taking account of the social bonding, community involvement and general contribution to the effective functioning of society which they help bring about, and frame policy accordingly.*** Funding for sport should be shaped with a view to supporting the social as well as the physical benefits of sport, particularly by encouraging the development of community-based models of sports organisation, sustaining or increasing the numbers who volunteer for sport, enhancing the volunteer experience, promoting social membership as well as playing membership of sports clubs, and facilitating attendance at sports

events (for example, in connection with funding for sports stadiums and club facilities for members).

The second empirical pattern to note is the importance of sport in comparison to other generators of social capital: no other type of activity gives rise to as much volunteering or club membership or is as effective in giving expression to collective identity. ***Recently enunciated policy commitments to promote social capital (as in the Programme for Government 2002) need to take account of the social aspects of sport and their potential contribution to the further development of social capital and volunteering in Ireland.***

The implication of these recommendations is that both sports policy and emerging policy on social capital and volunteering have a shared interest in the social aspects of sport. This shared interest needs to be recognised by both sides and taken account of in future policy development. ***There should be greater dialogue between those concerned with sports policy and those concerned with policy on social capital and volunteering, their common interest in sport should be recognised and explored, and their efforts to support social capital and volunteering should be co-ordinated.***

One area where dialogue and possible co-operation could usefully occur is in connection with funding for volunteering. There has been some recent policy discussion on the level of public funding that should be devoted to volunteering and how that funding should be distributed (see especially the report of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005). Debate on this question needs to take into account that much of the public funding of sport referred to earlier is provided to sports organisations that are largely voluntary in character. That funding could therefore be considered as a major indirect support to volunteering. However, its possible status in this regard is uncertain, and needs to be considered and clarified if an overall national funding policy for volunteering is to be developed. ***Policy discussion on public funding for volunteering needs to take account of sports funding, to clarify its status as a dimension of public funding for volunteering generally, and to keep it in mind as efforts are made to develop national mechanisms for funding and supporting volunteering.***

Other aspects of sports volunteering that might be viewed and supported as part of a comprehensive national approach include the management and training of volunteers and attempts to understand how volunteering works. Many of the challenges in these areas may be context specific and may not be common across the sports/non-sports divide, or even across all sports. Training for voluntary sports coaches and referees, for example, which this study found to be well regarded by those who receive it, might best be provided within the setting of specific sports. It is also possible, however, that some aspects of the recruitment, retention, training, motivation and deployment of volunteers may be generic or may have enough in common across areas to benefit from sharing of insights and best

practice. *It should be a priority for policy on the social aspects of sport to focus on sports volunteering, enhance understanding of both its context-specific and generic aspects, and develop supports to improve the practice and experience of volunteering, drawing where appropriate on insights and best practice from other fields of volunteering.*

It is not possible to assess the relative importance of the social as against the physical benefits of sport and it is therefore difficult to devise an objective basis on which to allocate public supports for sport between the physical and social benefits. This is a question of some significance since certain sports that may be important from a physical exercise point of view may have only slight social dimensions (for example, aerobics and fitness activities, which are engaged in by many adults, especially women, as physical exercise, often take place in contexts where social interaction or the community dimension is limited or absent). Particular sports that may be supported as physical activity cannot be assumed automatically to deliver parallel social benefits. *While both the physical and social aspects of sport should be kept in mind in framing policy, it may be a matter of judgement in particular contexts as to the relative importance that should be assigned to each and how this should be reflected in the allocation of public supports to particular sports.*

Even with sports where the potential for social activity and a community dimension seems strong, the degree to which that potential has been realised may vary a great deal, depending on the historical development and current circumstances of particular sports. Sports may also differ in their *future* potential as far as social benefits are concerned, and it is likely to be a complex matter to evaluate such future potential, or even to establish a basis on which future potential might be judged. It is an open question, for example, whether the social presence and community benefits of sport might be most effectively extended in the future through those sports which are already strong but which may be reaching the limits of maturity, or through those which are underdeveloped but could be judged to have an untapped potential for the future. The question here is whether it is better to focus on existing 'winners' as far as social and community impact is concerned and support them further, or to identify promising underperformers and help them realise their full potential. *In devising policy and allocating resources to support the social dimensions of sport, it will be necessary to evaluate the performance and potential of individual sports in these areas, while recognising that such evaluation is an uncertain science and, while necessary, is unlikely to yield hard and fast guidelines as to the level of support that should be given to particular sports.*

*In considering the social aspects of sport, special account must be taken of the GAA, which is the largest sports body in the country and the outstanding representative of the volunteer, community-based model of sports organisation.* The importance of the GAA in social terms lies primarily in its

network of community-based clubs, of which there are now over 2,100 in the Republic of Ireland (almost 2,600 if Northern Ireland is included). These typically have substantial physical infrastructure and organisational capacity, developed largely through voluntary effort. Reflecting the strength of this club structure, the GAA accounts for a disproportionately large share of the national total of sports volunteering and membership in sports clubs. Its membership spans the ages, social classes and genders in Irish society. Its games also account for a majority share of attendance at sports events in Ireland. Many other sports in Ireland are organised along amateur, voluntarist and community based lines (for example, rugby, though now professional at the elite level, is based on a broadly similar model of club organisation at the local level). However, no sport has demonstrated the capacity of this organisational model to thrive in modern Ireland as the GAA has done.

Were the GAA, or any other sport that is organised along similar community lines, to weaken in the future, it is possible in theory that other sports might expand to fill the gaps in local sports infrastructure that would result and that no net loss in the community benefits of sport would arise. It is also possible, however, that no such replacement process would take place. The conditions that allowed the GAA and similar community-based sports to develop and grow may no longer hold, making it difficult today for new community based sports organisations to emerge in a similar way (though we do not have clear evidence on this one way or the other). ***A central general objective of policy on the social aspects of sport in Ireland should be to ensure the voluntarist, community-based model of sport organisation continues to play a major role, either through recognition and support for existing organisations based on this model or through support for replacements where existing organisations are weak or absent.***

Of the sports that could be identified from the present broad national study as having untapped potential as far as the social benefits of sport are concerned, soccer is the most important (other smaller sports may have a similar potential in particular localities or population segments, but these could not be identified from the broad data available to us here). Soccer is the most widely played team sport in Ireland and the international game has a very large following among the Irish public. At the local, amateur level, soccer has an organisational infrastructure (in the form of clubs, club members, volunteers and general social activity associated with soccer) that is not insignificant. However, its social dimensions are less developed than the potential represented by the size of its playing population and its national profile as a spectator sport would point to. While strong community-based soccer clubs do exist, the overall club network at the community level seems to be limited in organisational capacity and physical facilities and to be weakly integrated into national structures. Its numerous players, former players and parents of children who play provide a large

pool of potential volunteers and members that is not reflected in actual volunteering or membership of community based clubs. ***Soccer represents the obvious (though perhaps not the only) instance of a sport where existing community-level structures, supports and resources need to be better understood with a view to developing their evident potential for a stronger contribution to the social benefits of sport in the future.***

A number of further points may be made in regard to the policy significance of the social aspects of sport.

1. The social aspects of sport have life cycle dimensions that differ from those associated with the playing of sport and that extend the contribution of sport to people's lives as they age. Many people progress from being players when they are younger to being volunteers, club members, and team supporters as they get older. Thus, the social contacts and engagement arising from *playing* of sport is more important among younger than older people, while other forms of sports participation (especially volunteering and social activity in clubs) are more important for older people. Sport thus deploys different mechanisms for involving people in social activity at different life cycle stages. This diversity and inclusiveness of the social functions of sport across the life cycle are an important part of its value as an instrument of social capital and social cohesion and adds to its appeal for policy purposes in these areas.
2. The social role of sport is gendered: sport is socially more important for men than for women. Women are less likely to accord sport an important place in their social lives than are men, and many women who are socially involved in sport (for example, as volunteers) do so as a back-up to children or other family members rather than out of an interest in sport for its own sake. Men's involvement in sport is more likely to reflect an interest in sport for its own sake and is more likely either to accompany or follow on from playing of sport. Sport is therefore particularly important as a means of providing access to the social lives of men and of promoting social engagement and social cohesion among them.
3. The social dimensions of sport are unequally distributed in society: they are less prevalent among the socially disadvantaged (for example, in that the unemployed and the low skilled are much less likely to volunteer for sport than the employed and those in professional occupations). Policy directed towards the support of the social aspects of sport needs to take account of these inequalities and develop means to redress them.
4. While the social aspects of sport in Ireland are generally positive, there is cause for concern about their link with alcohol. The social aspects of sport for players, volunteers, club members, those who attend sports events are often associated with alcohol consumption and give rise to risks

- of excess drinking. Both sports policy and health promotion policy should be aware of this link and where possible should seek to weaken the link between sport and alcohol.
5. Sports policy needs to address questions of measurement on a national level. It is well established that one of the main reasons that public goods are under-valued in public policy is that the benefits derived from them cannot be quantified as easily as the benefits deriving from private goods. A standardised, routine and convenient method whereby statistical data on volunteering, membership and attendances could be collected and compiled would substantially aid in the advancement of evidence-based policymaking for Irish sport. This process has been greatly accelerated since the advent of widespread sports funding. However at present, research and policy evaluation on sport in Ireland still must rely heavily on survey data, which allows an overview but is insufficient for detailed policy evaluation of specific spending projects. Consultation between sports researchers, sports policymakers, National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships is necessary to arrive at a formula for measuring outcomes and evaluating sports policy over the medium and long term.
  6. The international literature on sport has focused on the role of sport in maintaining or alleviating racial and cultural divisions in society. This should be an area of concern for future research in the Irish context.

## REFERENCES

- ALEXANDRIS, K. and B. CARROLL, 1997. "Demographic differences in the perception of constraints on recreational sport participation: results from a study in Greece", *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 107-124.
- ANHEIER, H. K. and L. M. SALAMON, 2001. "Volunteering in cross-national perspective: Initial comparisons", *Civil Society Working Paper No. 10*, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics. [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/publications/cswp/civil\\_society\\_wp.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/publications/cswp/civil_society_wp.htm)
- BAIRNER, A. (ed.), 2005. *Sport and the Irish. Histories, Identities, Issues*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- BAIRNER, A., 1999. "Civic and ethnic nationalism in the Celtic vision of Irish sport", in G. Jarvie (ed.), *Sport in the Making of Celtic Cultures*, Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- CRONIN, M., 1999. *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- DARBY, P., 2005. "Gaelic games and the Irish immigrant experience in Boston", in A. Bairner, (ed.), *Sport and the Irish. Histories, Identities, Issues*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

- DALY, S., 2004. "Social Capital and the Cultural Sector: Literature Review Prepared for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport," Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/pdf/Social\\_capital\\_and\\_the\\_cultural\\_sector.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/pdf/Social_capital_and_the_cultural_sector.pdf).
- DE BÚRCA, M., 1999. *The GAA: A History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- DELANEY, L., 2005. "Cultural Participation and Social Capital: Evidence from Survey Data," Paper Presented at the ippr Conference, "Cultural Participation and Communities", held at the UK Home Office, January.
- DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT, UK, 2002. *Game Plan: A strategy for delivering Government's Sport and Physical Activity Objectives*. London: Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office.
- De VAUS, D., M. GRAY and D. STANTON, 2003. Measuring the value of unpaid household, caring and voluntary activity of older Australians. Economics Working Paper Archive at WUSTL, Labour and Demography. <http://econwpa.wustl.edu/>.
- DKM ECONOMIC CONSULTANTS, 2004. *Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland. Report for the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs*. Dublin: DKM Economic Consultants Ltd.
- DYRESON, M., 2001. "Maybe it's better to bowl alone: Sport, community and democracy in American thought", *Culture, Sport and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 19-30.
- DONOGHUE, F., H.K. ANHEIER and L.K SALAMON, 2004. *Uncovering the Nonprofit Sector in Ireland. Its Economic Value and Significance*, The Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies and National College of Ireland. <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/publications/uncovering%20pdf.pdf>
- FAHEY, T., R. LAYTE and B. GANNON, 2004. *Sports Participation and Health Among Adults in Ireland*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.  
<http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/pressandpub-iscpub-research.aspx?ObjID=news>
- FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND (n.d.) *Football for the Future. Technical Development Plan 2004-2008*. Dublin: Football Association of Ireland.
- GAA, 2002. *Strategic Review. Enhancing Community Identity*. Dublin: Gaelic Athletic Association.
- GAA, 2004. *An Chomhdháil Bhliantúil 2004. Tuarascáil, Cuntas Airgid agus Ráin don Chomhdháil*. Dublin: Gaelic Athletic Association.
- GAA, 2005. *An Chomhdháil Bhliantúil 2005. Tuarascáil, Cuntas Airgid agus Ráin don Chomhdháil*. Dublin: Gaelic Athletic Association.
- GROOTAERT, C. and T. VAN BASTELAER (eds.), 2002. *The Role of Social Capital in Development: An Empirical Assessment*, with a foreword by Robert D. Putnam. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- HASSAN, D., 2005. 'Sport, identity and Irish nationalism in Northern Ireland: in A. Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish. Histories, Identities, Issues*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- HEMINGWAY, J.L., 1999. "Leisure, Social Capital and Democratic Citizenship," *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 150-165.
- HOWARD, D. and J. CROMPTON, 1995. *Financing Sport, Fitness Information Technology Publishers*.
- IRISH SPORTS COUNCIL, 2003. *Sport For Life: The Irish Sports Council's Statement of Strategy 2003-2005*. Dublin: Irish Sports Council.

- IRISH SPORTS COUNCIL, 2004. *Annual Report*, Dublin: Irish Sports Council.
- JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS, SPORT, TOURISM, COMMUNITY, RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS, 2005. *Sixth Report. Volunteers and Volunteering in Ireland*. Dublin: Stationery Office. <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?DocID=3429&CatID=78>.
- NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VOLUNTEERING, 2002. *Tipping the Balance. Report and Recommendations to Government on Supporting and Developing Volunteering in Ireland*. Dublin: National Committee on Volunteering.
- NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM, 2003. *The Policy Implications of Social Capital*. Dublin: NESF.
- NORDHAUS, W. D., 2004. "Principles of National Accounting for Non-Market Accounts", Paper presented at the CRIW Architecture for the National Accounts Conference, April 16-17, Washington, DC: Department of Economics, Yale University.
- OECD, 2001. *The Well-being of Nations. The Role of Human and Social Capital*, Paris: OECD.
- PUTNAM, R. D., 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Decline and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon Schuster.
- RUDDLE, H. and R. MULVIHILL, 1999. *Reaching Out. Charitable Giving and Volunteering in the Republic of Ireland*. Dublin: National College of Ireland.
- SALAMON, L. M. and W. SOKOLOWSKI, 2001. "Volunteering in cross-national perspective: Evidence from 24 countries" *Working Papers of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project*. Johns Hopkins University. <http://www.jhu.edu/ccss/pubs/cnpwork/>
- SPORTS ENGLAND, 2002. "Sports Volunteering in England: A report for Sport England"; Leisure Industries Research Centre, Sheffield, 2002. Sport England Website [www.sportengland.org](http://www.sportengland.org).
- SUGDEN, J. and A. BAIRNER, 1993. *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland*, Leicester: Leicester University Press.
- TOURISM IRELAND, 2005. "Fact Cards on Irish Tourism": Available from [http://www.tourismireland.com/corporate/publications/index.cfm/level/category/aID/358/sub\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_page/publications\\_details/Cp\\_PublicationCategory\\_key/8/type/Category/CatName/Publications-ireland.html](http://www.tourismireland.com/corporate/publications/index.cfm/level/category/aID/358/sub_____page/publications_details/Cp_PublicationCategory_key/8/type/Category/CatName/Publications-ireland.html). Accessed: August 28th 2005.
- TUCK, J., 2005. "Rugby union and national identity politics", in A. Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish. Histories, Identities, Issues*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.
- WARDE, A. and G. TAMPUBOLON, 2002. "Social Capital, Networks and Leisure Consumption," *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 155-180.
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, 2003. Consultation Document to Guide Development of a WHO strategy for Diet, Physical Activity and Health. Geneva: WHO.