

The impact of structural conditions in communes on physical activity and sports behaviour of adolescents and young adults in Switzerland

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Introduction

The physical activity of the Swiss population differs considerably depending on the linguistic region. German speakers are more often physically active than people living in the French- or Italian-speaking part of Switzerland (Stamm & Lamprecht, 2008). This study analyses how differing structural conditions in communes (e.g. sport facilities, significance of the municipal promotion of sport) across different linguistic regions of Switzerland correlate with physical activity and sports participation for adolescents and young adults.

Methodological approach

Based on the theory of social action (Coleman, 1990), it is assumed that individual behaviour is not only determined by individual but also by structural and socio-cultural factors in which a person is socially embedded. In two case studies, multilevel data was gathered analysing possible influences of structural factors on sports behaviour. Using an online survey, 15 to 25 year old inhabitants ($N = 205$) living in a German- and French-speaking commune were questioned about their sports participation in and outside of their commune, as well as their perception of sport-related structural characteristics in their commune. To collect information about communes' sport facilities, the sport providers ($N = 23$) were interviewed. Sport-related characteristics of the communes were also collected through two interviews with representatives of the municipal administration.

Results and discussion

Physical activity is significantly higher ($\text{Chi}^2(1, N = 183) = 4.78, p < .05$) and sport participation is significantly lower in the French speaking commune ($\text{Chi}^2(1, N = 205) = 3.84, p < .05$). Adolescents and young adults in the French speaking commune ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.23$) are less satisfied with the opportunities to be physically active in the environment than their counterparts living in the German speaking commune ($p < .001$, Mann-Whitney U – test). These first findings show the impact of structural conditions in communes on physical activity and sport participation of adolescents and young people. However, it must be noted that this study is explorative and further communes would need to be examined in order to generalize the results.

References

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