



Sport and the City

An Analysis of Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in Dublin

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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE



FOREWORD

Since its inception in 2003 the Dublin City Sports Network (DCSN) has been endeavoring to offer a support and co-ordination service to sports bodies, government agencies and physical activity providers.

The network has also delivered practical assistance to clubs and groups through its sport for young people small grant scheme while also supporting the identification of needs at local level which could be responded to by Dublin City Council's Sport and Recreation Team.

The DCSN has throughout this process recognised the need for dedicated research in a Dublin context.

This research would underpin the work of the DCSN and assist in the following:

- Give baseline data on participation trends.
- Develop targets and policies to address existing/emergency needs.
- Direct resources where gaps in provision exist.

This initial research carried out by the ESRI on behalf of the Dublin City Sports Network is a first step in the process whereby the network, its members and any individual or body interested in physical activity or sport can begin to debate what the research means in terms of responding to ever changing needs and lifestyles.

On behalf of the Dublin City Sports Network I would like to thank Pete Lunn of the ESRI, Peter Smyth of the Irish Sports Council and the DCSN Research sub group- Aileen O'Connor, Caroline Peppard, Sarah O'Connor and John Kerrane.

We sincerely hope you find this research beneficial in the goal to get more people, more active, more of the time.

Yours,
Karl Mitchell
Sport & Active Living Manager

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary | 1 |
| 1. Introduction | 2 |
| 2. Playing Sport: How Does Dublin Compare? | 5 |
| 3. Active Participation by Social Group | 9 |
| 4. The Life Course of Active Participation | 14 |
| 5. Popularity of Sporting Activities | 17 |
| 6. FITT Analysis | 20 |
| 7. Walking and Cycling | 24 |
| 8. Social Participation | 29 |
| 9. Policy Implications | 35 |

SUMMARY

- Almost one-third of adults (31.7%) in Dublin City actively participate in sport or exercise in a given week, somewhat below what is typical for Ireland as a whole.
- Active participation is more likely among those with higher educational attainment, males, younger people and those with higher income.
- Compared to Ireland as a whole, young adults (aged 26 – 35) and those in the bottom income categories have particularly low active participation rates
- The most popular sports in Dublin City are swimming, soccer and personal exercise, followed by golf, jogging and cycling.
- Compared to the rest of Ireland, Dublin City has lower active participation in personal exercise, golf and Gaelic games.
- Most active participants in Dublin City expend enough effort over a sufficient period to gain considerable health benefits from the physical activity involved.
- Fewer people take regular walks in Dublin City, but more cycle, resulting in a rate of sedentarism of 18.5%, similar to the national rate.
- Middle-aged men and older people in low income groups are much more likely to be sedentary.
- Social participation (volunteering, membership and attendance) is lower in Dublin City than elsewhere in Ireland, partly due to the lesser prominence of the GAA.
- The policy implications of these findings include: a need to target young adults and those in the lowest income groups; a need for sport policy to employ marketing methods that reach out beyond existing social networks; and a need to improve the built environment for walkers and cyclists.

1. INTRODUCTION

Dublin is European Capital of Sport 2010. This accolade represents an opportunity both to celebrate sport in Dublin and to promote it further, thereby offering the health and social benefits sport can bring to a greater number of people living in the city. Over and above the pleasure of participation itself, it has become widely recognised in recent years that physical activity reduces the risk of developing serious disease. Participation in sport has thus taken on a greater importance for policymakers.

Aims

This report provides a statistical snapshot of participation in sport in Dublin, based on the highest quality and most recently available data, to coincide with the beginning of the city's year as European Capital of Sport. To this end, the report makes use of the *Irish Sports Monitor* (ISM) data collected in 2007 and 2008. The primary aim is to provide robust evidence with respect to the level of participation and the factors that are associated with involvement in sport and physical exercise. The main focus is on active involvement, but social involvement, though volunteering, club membership and attendance at sporting events, is also addressed in a later section. The policy implications of the findings are discussed in the final section.

Method

The ISM is an initiative of the Irish Sports Council and is conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). It is an ongoing telephone survey of sporting participation based on a large, representative sample of adults aged 16 and over throughout Ireland. The design of the ISM questionnaire is based on best international practice and aims to obtain an accurate account of all sport and exercise activity undertaken by the respondent during the seven days prior to interview. The sample is weighted to be in accordance with the demographic characteristics of each region, as determined by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The survey responses have been tested for validity against other surveys conducted with different methodologies, including the CSO's *Quarterly National Household Survey*. The total nationwide sample for 2007-2008 is over 16,600, including 1,650

respondents in the Dublin City Council area, which are the basis for the main results reported here.

Most of the results are expressed as simple proportions, given in percentages. However, some findings are based on more complicated multivariate statistical analysis, where a statistical model has been built to isolate the strongest determinants of participation in sport. Only the relevant and significant relationships from the model output are reported (full models are available from the author on request).

Definition of 'Sport'

The definition of sporting activity adopted throughout this report is in line with the definition contained in the Irish Sports Council Act, 1999, which itself was based on the Council of Europe's 1992 *European Sports Charter*. The definition is broad, covering both competitive and recreational sport, and encompassing not only traditional games but also exercise activities aimed at improving physical fitness. Given that the primary stated aim of sports policy in Ireland is to improve health and quality of life, such a broad definition is appropriate.

This definition of sporting activity includes participation in recreational walking or, more simply, "going for a walk". Because recreational walking is so common, variation in this activity would dominate variation in other activities were it to be examined in conjunction with other sporting activities. Hence, walking is analysed separately. Similarly, because the distinction between recreational walking and walking as a mode of transport (hereafter "walking for transport") is not always clear, and nor is the distinction between recreational cycling and cycling for transport, walking and cycling for transport are also recorded and analysed.

Dublin City in Comparison

Although the focus of the present report is on the Dublin City Council area, many of the results are also given for Ireland as a whole and/or for the other three local authority areas in County Dublin (South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Fingal). This is done mainly for comparative purposes. Where the comparison is uninformative, results are given only for Dublin City. However, it should be borne in mind that for people going about their day-to-day lives, boundaries between local

authority areas are an irrelevancy. The ISM records where people live, it does not record where they play sport. Thus, the data tell us about the activities of residents, not where those activities take place. It is therefore possible that activity undertaken in the city is somewhat under-recorded relative to the surrounding areas. For instance, it is a reasonable presumption that more people from surrounding suburbs travel into the Dublin City area to work than travel from Dublin City to work in those suburbs. Nevertheless, participation in sport and exercise that takes place during the working day will be recorded according to the worker's place of residence, although it might actually have been undertaken near where they work.

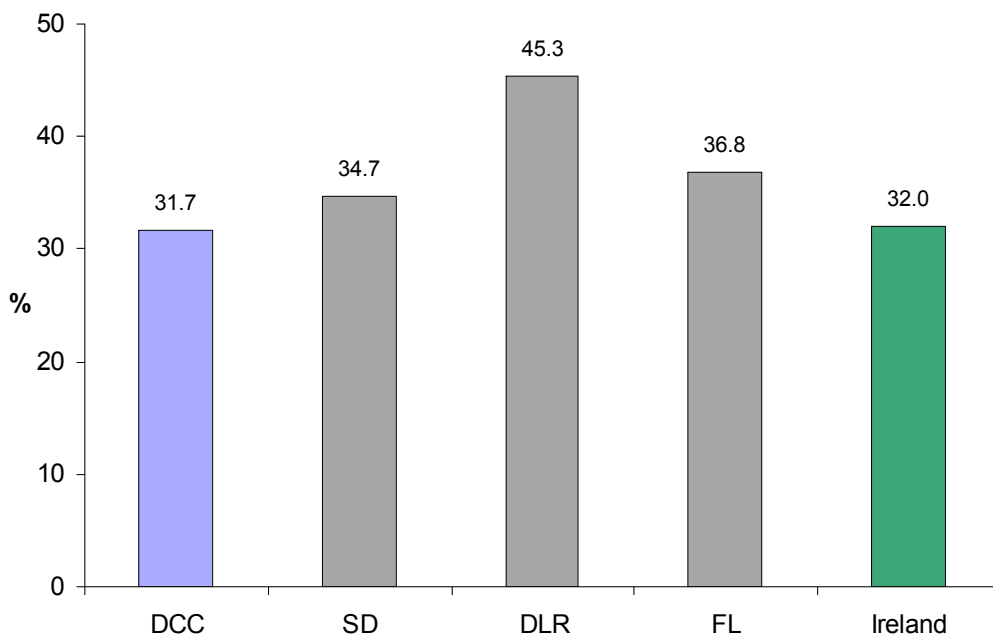
The abbreviations used throughout the report are: DCC – Dublin City; SD – South Dublin; DLR – Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown; and FL – Fingal. The sample for the three Dublin areas outside Dublin City was 2,804 (1,248 in SD; 662 in DLR; 894 in FL).

2. PLAYING SPORT: HOW DOES DUBLIN COMPARE?

This section compares the level of active participation in sport and exercise in Dublin City with that in the other local authority areas of Dublin and across the counties of Ireland.

For the purposes of the present report, individuals are counted as active participants in sport and physical exercise, or “players”, if they had participated for a period of 20 minutes or more at least once during the week prior to the survey.* The proportions of players in each of the four local authority areas during 2007 and 2008 are provided in Figure 2.1, together with the proportion of players in Ireland as a whole.

Figure 2.1: Playing sport by area, for Dublin City (DCC), South Dublin (SD), Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR), Fingal (FL) and Ireland



At 31.7%, the proportion of adults who play sport in Dublin City is just below the national rate. The participation rate is higher in the other three Dublin areas, especially Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown. While the participation rate represents a useful

* The cut-off of 20 minutes derives from the analysis of the ISM Annual Report, 2007, which found that significant numbers of people engaged in regular high intensity exercise for periods of between 20 and 30 minutes. Although national physical activity guidelines centre around 30 minutes of daily exercise, significant health benefits would be likely to accrue to many people involved in shorter duration exercise and hence they are counted as participants.

measure, it is too simplistic as a tool for comparing the likelihood of playing sport across different areas. This is because there are strong links between the likelihood of playing sport and an individual's demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Hence, areas with a higher proportion of young people, students and members of higher socio-economic groups are favoured by a straightforward comparison of participation rates, such as that in Figure 2.1.

A more appropriate comparison of the likelihood of playing sport by area can be provided by conducting multivariate analysis, which takes account of people's background characteristics in order to compare like with like. The analysis to be presented is based on a multivariate statistical model that simultaneously controls for the following population characteristics: educational attainment, age, gender, income, employment status, occupation, marital status, presence of children, car ownership, residential location and nationality. The model therefore estimates the relative likelihood that people with the same demographic profile (with respect to the background characteristics listed) play sport.

From this statistical model, it is possible to estimate an 'odds ratio' for each area. The odds ratio is the estimated odds that an individual with a given set of background characteristics plays sport, relative to the odds that the same individual would play sport if they lived in the median county, which is given the value 1.0. Figure 2.2 supplies odds ratios for the four Dublin areas and the other 26 counties (with Tipperary split into North and South). The abbreviations match the letters on the car number plates associated with each county. The median county is Co. Cavan (CN), which takes the value 1.0. The estimated odds of active participation in all other areas are therefore expressed relative to Cavan. Thus, we can conclude from Figure 2.2 that the estimated odds that someone living in Dublin City plays sport are lower (by a ratio of 0.84) than the odds that typically apply to similar individuals across Ireland as a whole. The odds that a given individual living in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown plays sport are more than two-thirds higher than is typically the case for a similar person living elsewhere in Ireland. Note that this means they are just over twice as high as for a similar person living in Dublin City.

Figure 2.2: Estimated odds ratios for the likelihood of playing sport by county

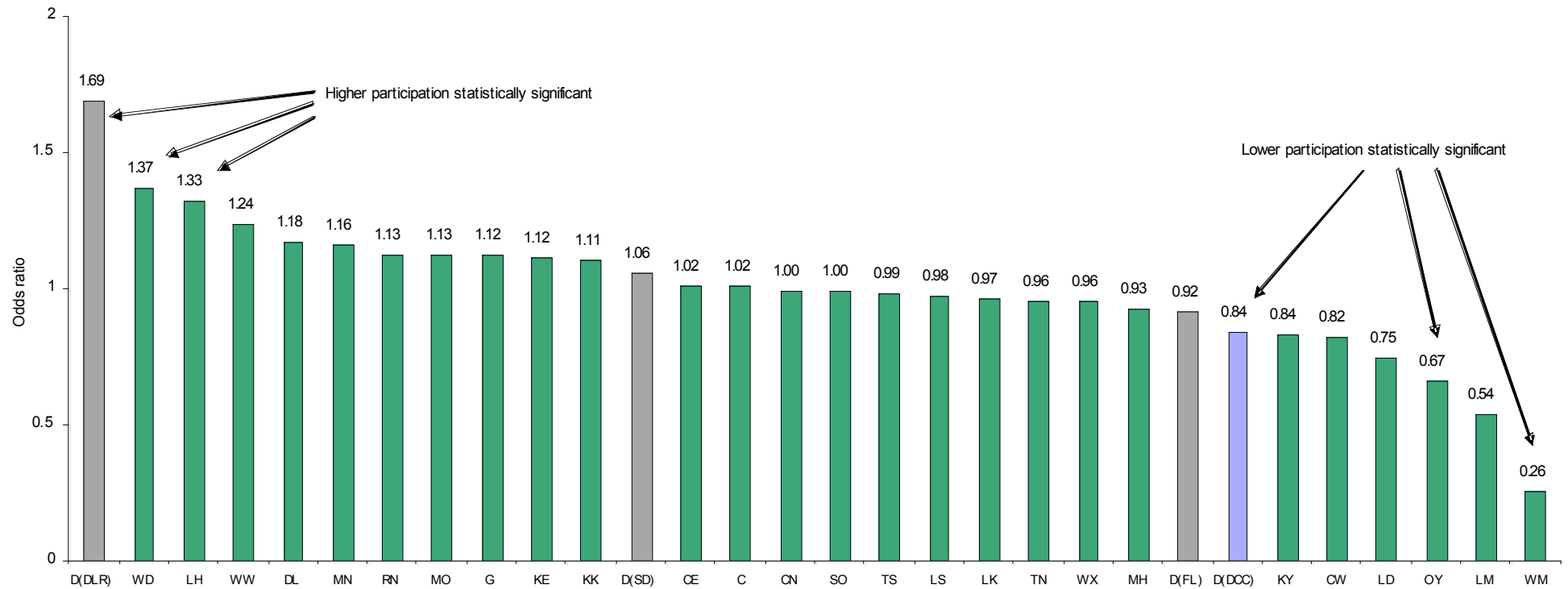


Figure 2.2 highlights those areas where the difference in the likelihood of participation, compared to the rest of country, is statistically significant. This depends not only on the odds ratio, but also the size of the sample from which it is estimated. The lower level of participation in Dublin City is statistically significant, as is the higher level in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. Participation in the other two Dublin areas, meanwhile, is not significantly different from that elsewhere in Ireland.

Summary

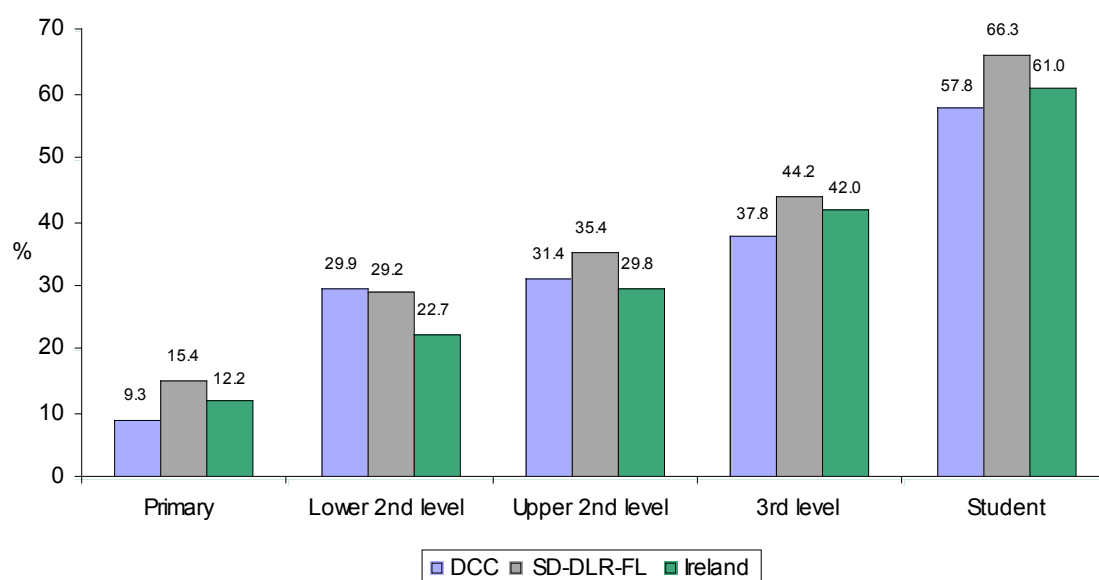
Almost one-third of adults (31.7%) in Dublin City play sport in a given week. Taking account of the demographic and socio-economic profile of its population, Dublin City's level of participation in is somewhat below what is typical for Ireland as a whole.

3. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION BY SOCIAL GROUP

This section examines who is most likely to play sport by looking at participation rates across different social groups. The results for Dublin City are again compared with those for the other Dublin areas and for Ireland as a whole, in order to highlight some factors behind the lower level of participation overall in Dublin City.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, the likelihood that people play sport is strongly influenced by their educational attainment, gender, age and income. Figures 3.1 – 3.4 confirm that this is also the case in Dublin City, in the other Dublin areas combined (SD-DLR-FL) and in Ireland generally. Educational attainment is invariably found to be a strong influence on whether an adult plays sport. Figure 3.1 shows that the participation rate rises steadily with educational attainment and is particularly high for people who are currently students. The differences between areas are not statistically significant.

Figure 3.1: Active participation in sport and exercise by educational attainment (highest level of educational qualification obtained) and area



These results underline the important contribution of educational institutions to participation in sport, not only during people's time as students, but once they have left education as well.

Figure 3.2 provides a similar comparison by gender. Men are significantly more likely to play sport than women in all areas. Again, there is no significant difference in the gender gap across areas.

Figure 3.2: Active participation by gender

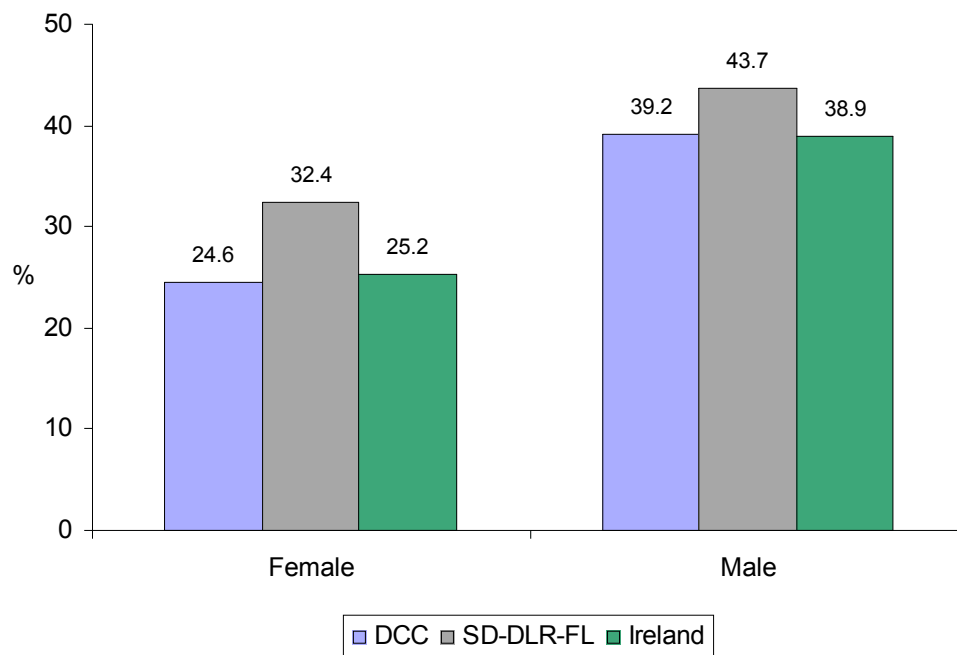


Figure 3.3 provides a breakdown by age. This time there is a significant difference between the pattern in Dublin City and elsewhere. In the rest of Ireland, including the other three Dublin areas, the decline in participation with age is steady. In Dublin City, a different pattern emerges. Participation falls sharply in the 26 – 35 age group, before rising again for the 36 – 45 age group. This pattern is analysed further below.

Figure 3.3: Active participation by age

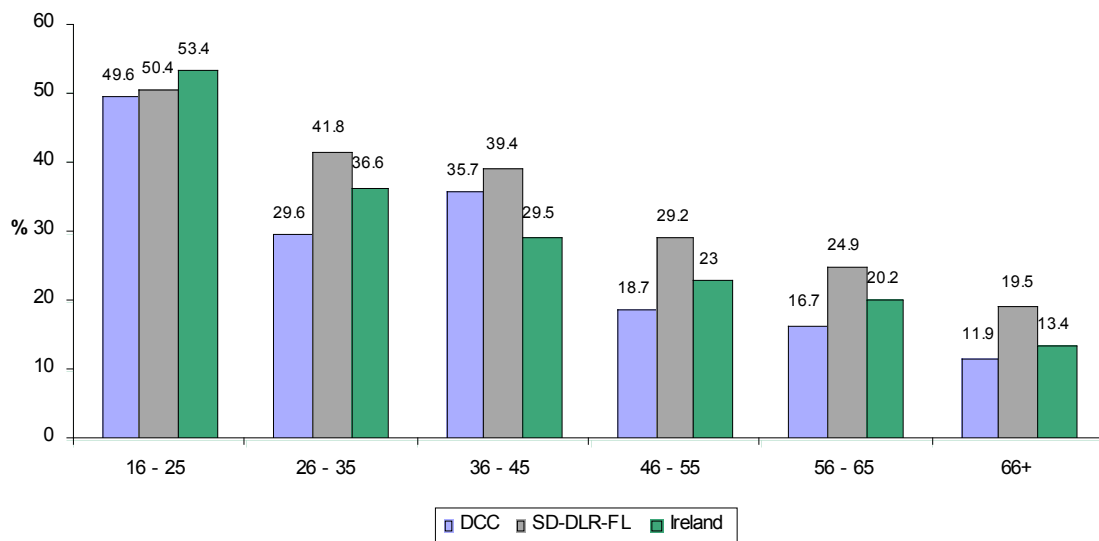
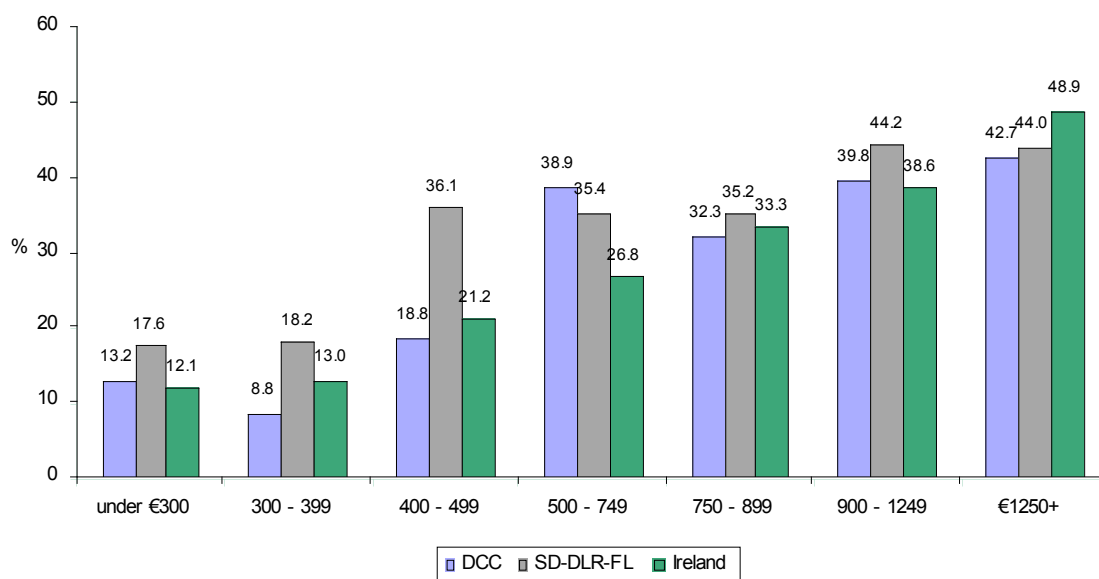


Figure 3.4 displays participation rates by seven categories of household income. In Ireland as a whole, there is a steady rise in participation with income. A similar pattern is evident in the data for Dublin, but in both Dublin City and the other Dublin areas, there is a suggestion that the increase in participation with income is not entirely smooth. Relatively high participation is recorded in some middle income categories.

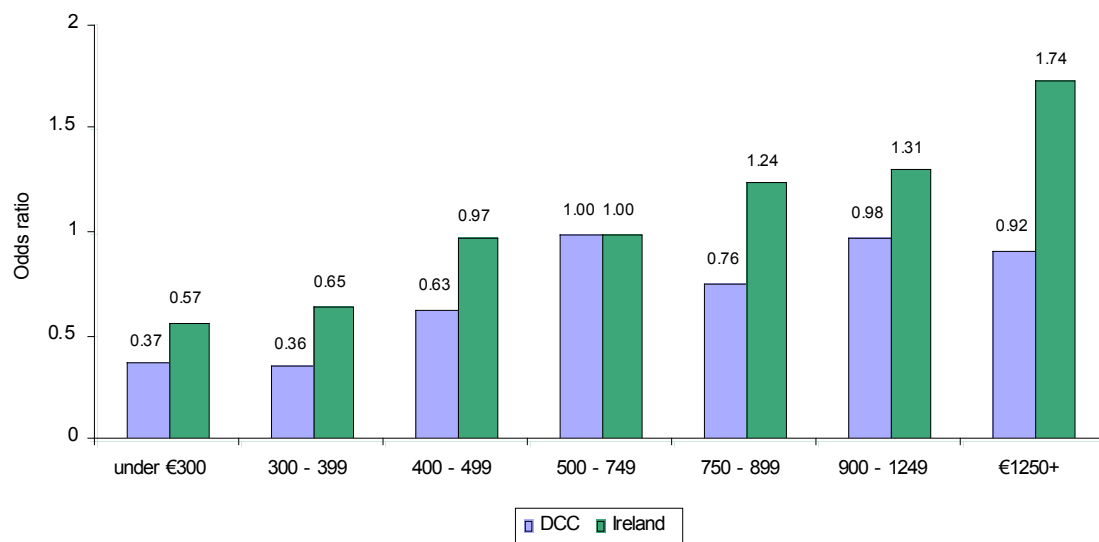
Figure 3.4: Active participation by weekly income



One difficulty in interpreting Figures 3.1 – 3.4 is that the four key variables are all partially correlated with each other. Income tends to be higher among more educated people, who also tend to be younger, while among young adults educational attainment is generally higher for females, and so on. When a multivariate (regression) model is used to control for each of the variables, simultaneously, it confirms that each of the relationships depicted in Figures 3.1 – 3.4 is robust.

Furthermore, the multivariate model also reveals more precisely how the effect of income differs between Dublin City and the rest of Ireland. Figure 3.5 provides odds ratios for the likelihood of participation for each of the seven income categories, once age, gender and educational attainment have been controlled for. The middle category (€500 – 749 per week) is set at 1.0. It is clear from this analysis that the effect of income on participation in Dublin City, unlike Ireland as a whole, consists primarily of a much lower likelihood of participation for people in the lowest income categories. Differences between the income categories above €500 per week are not significant.

Figure 3.5: Odds ratios for active participation by weekly income



Summary

Active participation in sport and exercise is higher for individuals with higher educational attainment, males, younger people and those with higher income. Although conforming to these general trends, the variation by social group in Dublin

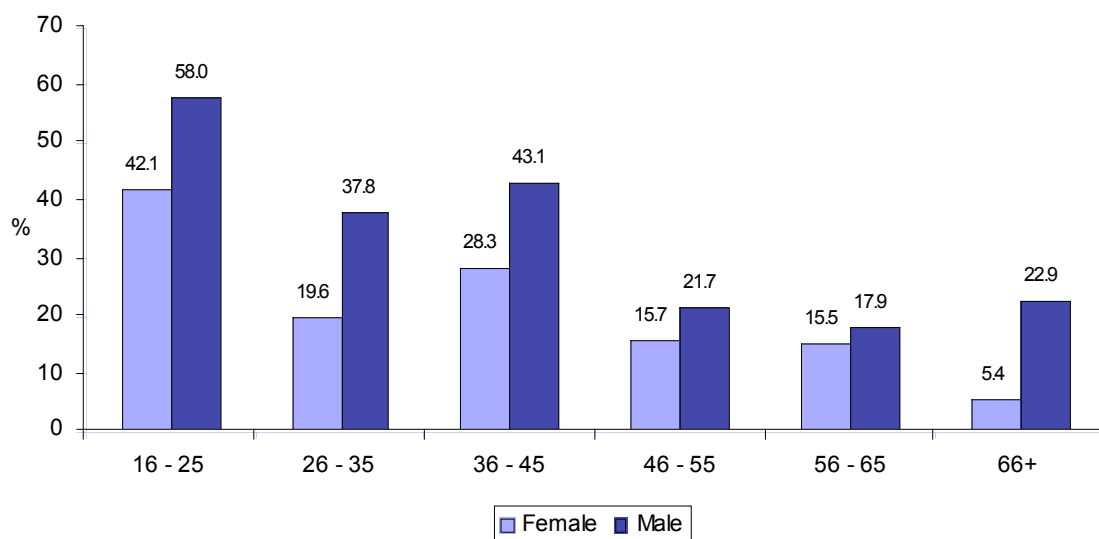
City differs somewhat from the pattern across Ireland as a whole. Two differences are particularly notable. First, people aged 26 – 35 in Dublin City have significantly lower participation than those in the 16 – 25 and 36 – 45 age groups. Second, people in lower income groups in Dublin City have a particularly low likelihood of playing sport.

4. THE LIFE COURSE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Changes in active participation over the life course are analysed in this section. The life course of participation typically involves changes in the types of activities that people undertake as they get older.

Figure 4.1 shows the decline in active participation by age separately for males and females in Dublin City only. It is apparent that both women and men display a marked drop in participation in their late twenties and early thirties. Thus, the distinctive pattern of participation by age is apparent for men and women.

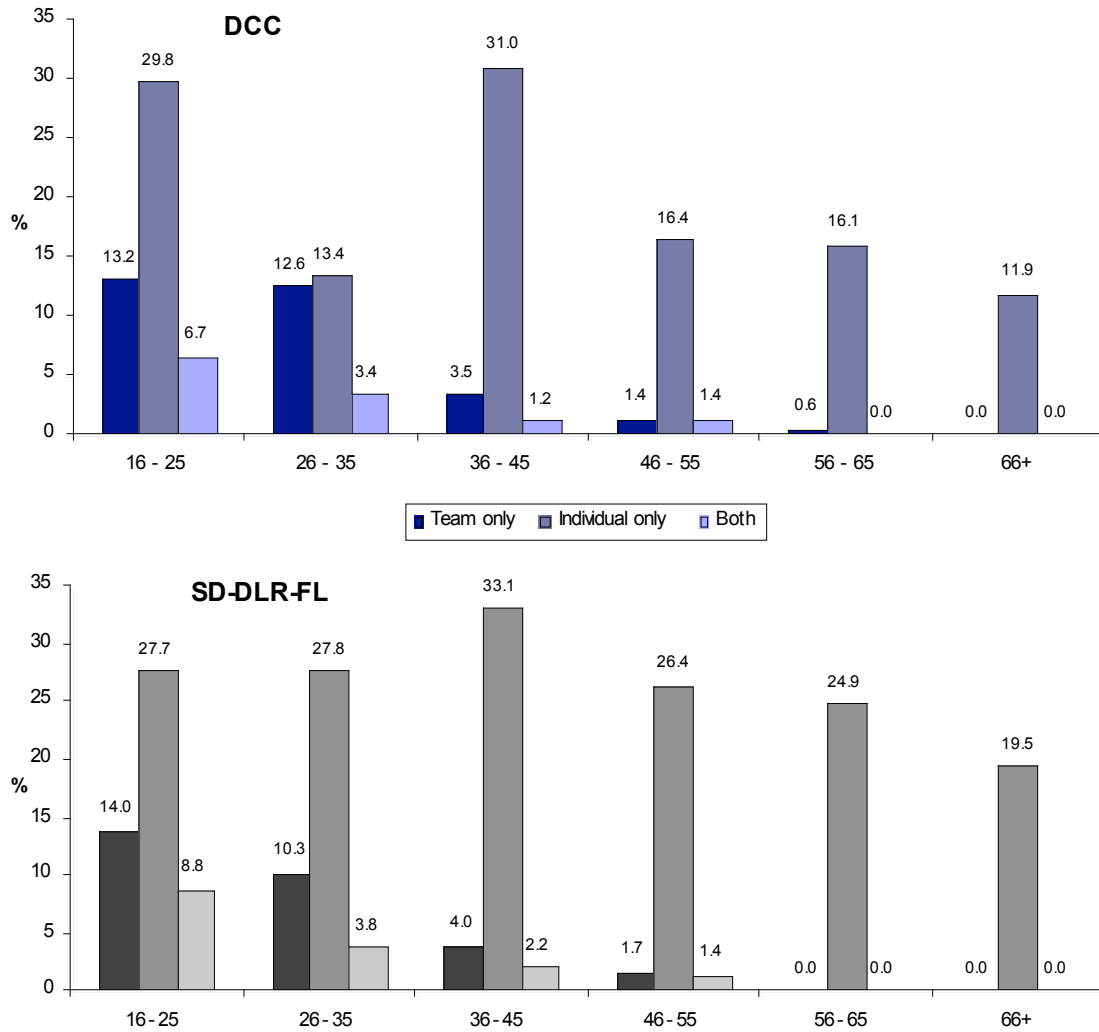
Figure 4.1: Active participation by gender and age



The typical sporting life course for very many, but not all, individuals involves a progression from playing traditional team sports during childhood, adolescence and (for men) young adulthood, before switching to individual sporting activities. The most common individual activities are personal exercise (going to the gym, fitness classes, fitness routines or exercise machines in the home etc.) and swimming, with golf also becoming increasingly popular as people age. In seeking to understand the pattern of activity in Dublin City, it is important to separate out the types of sport people engage in across their life course. Figure 4.2 provides participation rates by age for Dublin City and, for comparison, the other three Dublin areas combined. Figure 4.2 offers

insight, both into the possible reasons why Dublin City has a different age profile of participation and why participation is generally high in the other three areas, especially Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.

Figure 4.2: Participation in team and individual sports by age



There are several points to note about Figure 4.2. First, it reveals that the fall-off in participation among young adults in Dublin City exclusively involves individual activities. There is no significant difference in the pattern of playing team sports between Dublin City and the other three Dublin areas. Second, the scale of the difference in participation in individual activities is large. Compared to 16 – 25 year-olds and 36 – 45 year-olds in Dublin City, and to all those under the age of 55 in the other three areas, participation in individual activities among 26 – 35 year-olds is

reduced by more than one half. Third, there is also markedly lower participation among older people in individual activities. Lastly, Figure 4.2 shows how high adult participation in sport is primarily driven by high participation in individual activities. The playing of team sports inevitably falls away with age, such that for the majority of the life course, it is individual activities that form the bulk of sport and exercise activity.

The findings in relation to Figure 4.2 are suggestive of possible influences that might help to explain the pattern in Dublin City. There are a number of reasons why young adults living closer to the centre of Dublin rather than in more suburban areas might find it more difficult to participate. These include additional congestion, lack of leisure time, the likelihood of being a recent arrival and cost. Once people have left education, individual sporting activities tend to be more expensive. Costs do not only involve membership fees for gyms, health centres, golf clubs (which may also be relatively inaccessible for city residents) and so on, but also equipment and transport. Given the extraordinary rises in house prices, particularly within Dublin City, sharp increases in the cost of living and greatly increased congestion that each accompanied the economic boom, young adults may have found it more difficult to make the switch from team to individual sports and thus to keep up their participation. Inner city populations also tend to be relatively mobile and those who have recently relocated are more likely to have severed social ties, including sporting ones. An alternative explanation is that, perhaps especially for people without young children, the city offers more leisure activities that compete with sport for attention. We have no direct way to test these hypotheses, which must be regarded as speculative, but they are worth bearing in mind when examining participation rates for specific sporting activities in the next section.

Summary

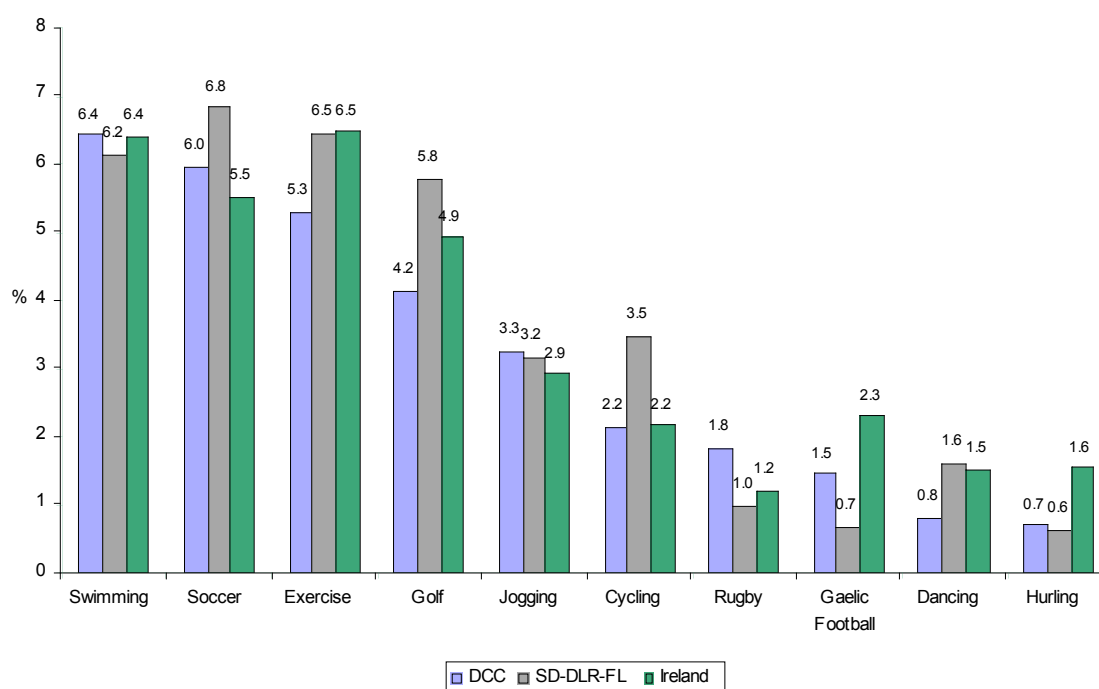
Participation in sport is lower among young adults in Dublin City, both male and female. This fall-off in participation for this age group is confined to individual sport and exercise activities. Older people in Dublin City are also less likely to engage in such activities than those living in the other three Dublin areas.

5. POPULARITY OF SPORTING ACTIVITIES

This section looks at the relative popularity of specific sport and exercise activities.

Figure 5.1 provides participation rates for the most popular 10 sporting activities, for Dublin City, the other three Dublin areas and Ireland as a whole. The most popular activities are swimming, soccer and personal exercise, followed by golf, jogging and cycling.[†] While the spectacle of traditional team sports grants them much media interest, and they are also the main focus of sports policy, it is again worth noting that only soccer can compete with the most popular individual activities in terms of active participation among the adult population.

Figure 5.1: Active participation by activity



There is considerable similarity between the participation rates in the different areas, but also some notable differences. Compared to Ireland as a whole, Dublin City has lower levels of participation in personal exercise, golf and Gaelic games. The latter is

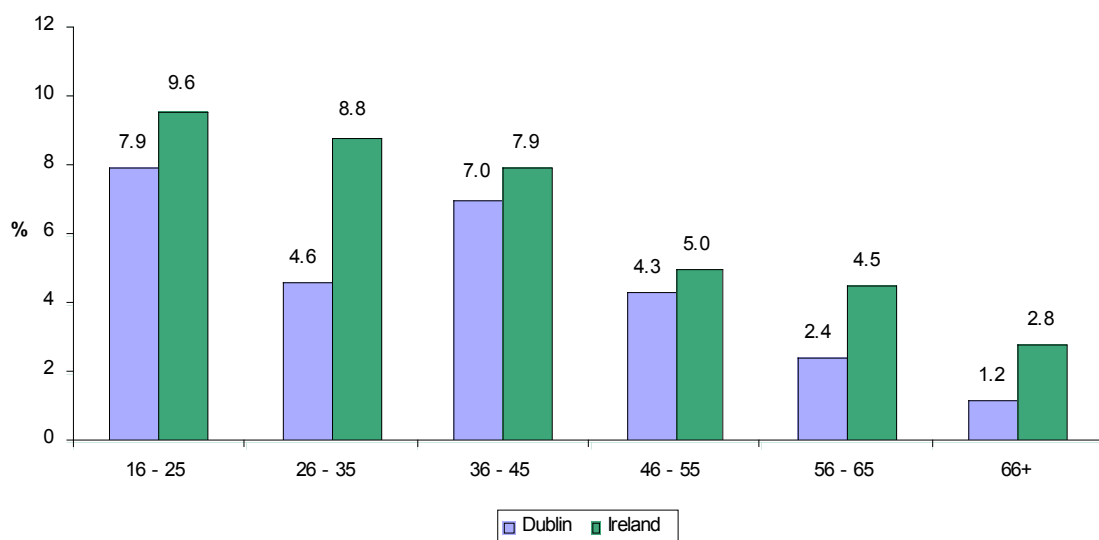
[†] In this context, cycling refers to road racing, mountain biking and leisure cycling, but does not include cycling for transport. If cycling for transport were to be included, cycling would be the most popular activity by a considerable margin (see Section 7).

largely compensated for by higher participation in soccer and rugby, but the lower participation in exercise and golf is not compensated for by higher participation in other individual activities. At first sight, this pattern is in keeping with the analysis of the previous section regarding potential influences on participation associated with living in the city during the boom. Later analysis in Section 8 (see Figure 8.4), however, shows that membership of gyms and health clubs is no lower in Dublin City than elsewhere, suggesting that membership fees are unlikely to be behind the lower level of involvement in personal exercise. People in Dublin City join gyms and health clubs as much as everyone else, but use them less.

Figure 5.1 also provides insight into the high participation rates in the other three areas of Dublin, especially Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. Greater involvement in soccer, golf and cycling account for the difference.

The lower level of participation in personal exercise is largely responsible for the dip in participation among the 26 – 35 age group, as Figure 5.2 shows. Looking back to Figure 3.3, the difference in participation between Dublin City and Ireland as a whole for this age group is seven percentage points. From Figure 5.2, we can see that 4.2 percentage points of that difference is due to lower participation in personal exercise. While it may be particularly true of the 26 – 35 age group, Figure 5.2 shows that participation in personal exercise is lower in Dublin City at all ages.

Figure 5.2: Active participation in personal exercise by age



Summary

The most popular sports in Dublin City, as in the rest of the country, are swimming, soccer and personal exercise, followed by golf, jogging and cycling. Dublin City has lower participation in personal exercise, golf and Gaelic games. The first of these accounts for much of the reduction in participation apparent in the 26 – 35 age group.

6. FITT ANALYSIS

“FITT” analysis stands for Frequency, Intensity, Time and Type. It is a standard decomposition of sporting activity and forms the focus of this section. All of the charts refer to activity in Dublin City only.

The primary aim is to assess the degree of potential health benefit associated with activity. The World Health Organisation guidelines and Ireland’s National Guidelines on Physical Activity, recommend 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five days per week, or 150 minutes per week, where “moderate” activity is defined as at least sufficient to increase the heart or breathing rate. A secondary aim is to understand more about the context in which people play sport. This is particularly helpful when considering the possible policy interventions that might increase participation.

Figure 6.1 separates those who played some sport during the previous seven days according to the number of sessions they were involved in. The majority of players were involved in more than one session, but less than one in six players participated more than three times.

Figure 6.1: Frequency of active participation in sessions per week

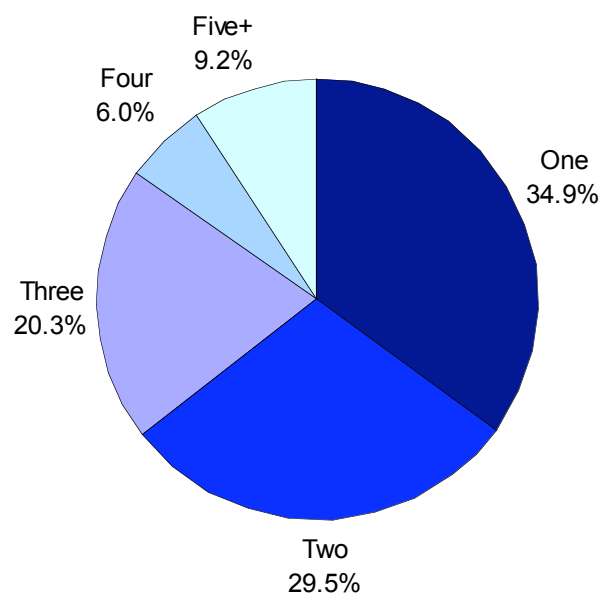


Figure 6.2 shows that most participants engaged in their chosen activity sufficiently to make them out of breath or sweat, while just under 16% expended only little effort. Thus, the large majority of sporting activity undertaken in Dublin City contributes to individuals meeting the targets set in the physical activity guidelines.

Figure 6.2: Intensity of participation in a typical session

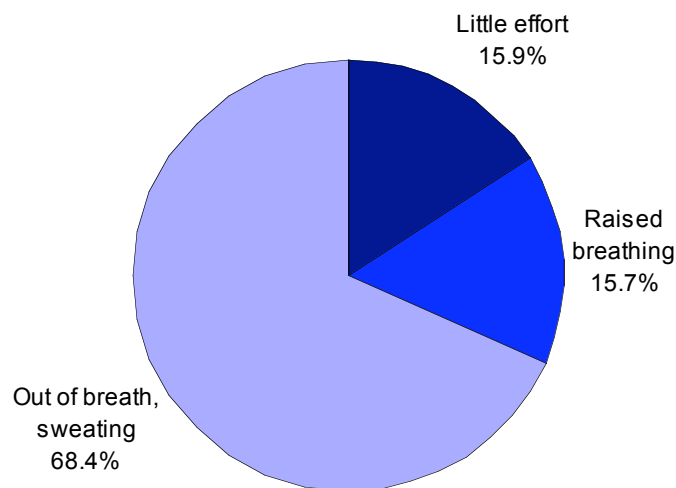
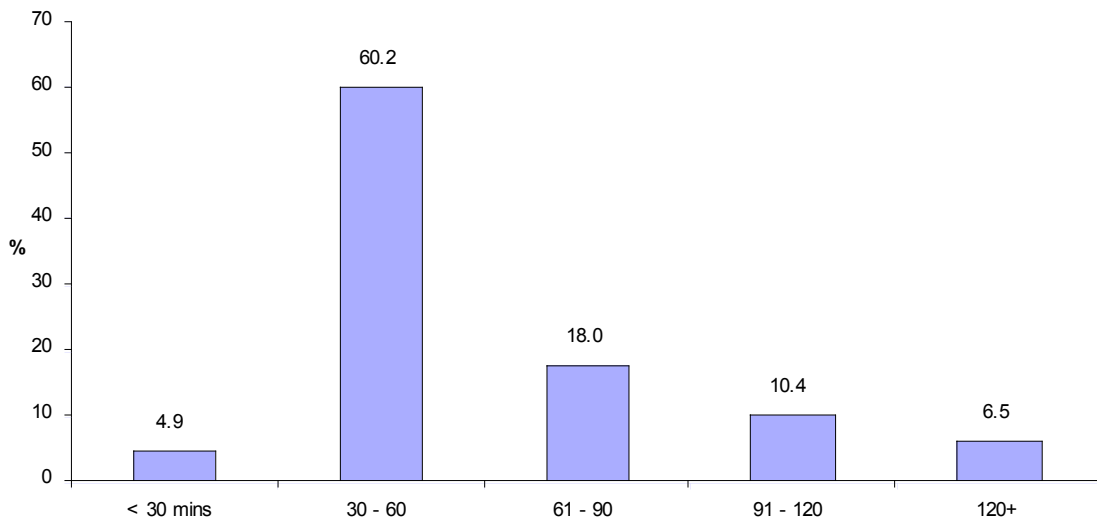


Figure 6.3 shows that the duration of a typical session of sporting activity is in excess of half-an-hour, with the majority lasting for 30 to 60 minutes. Combining the information from Figures 5.1 – 5.3, for most of those who participate in sport, there is likely to be a clear health benefit. Further calculations reveal that the median participant engages in two sessions that combine to a total of approximately an hour-and-a-half of fairly vigorous activity. This implies that most of the almost 32% of Dubliners who participate obtain more than half, but not all, of their recommended weekly physical activity through their participation in sport.

Figure 6.3: Duration of a typical session



The types of specific sporting activity undertaken were addressed in the preceding section, but it is also instructive to consider the context in which the activity took place. The ISM asks respondents whether they participated in an 'organised training/coaching/lesson', in an 'organised competition', 'casually with family or friends', or 'on their own'. ('Other' is also an option, selected by less than 1% of participants). Figure 6.4 shows the distribution of activity across the main four categories, separately for males and females.

Figure 6.4: Context for active participation by gender



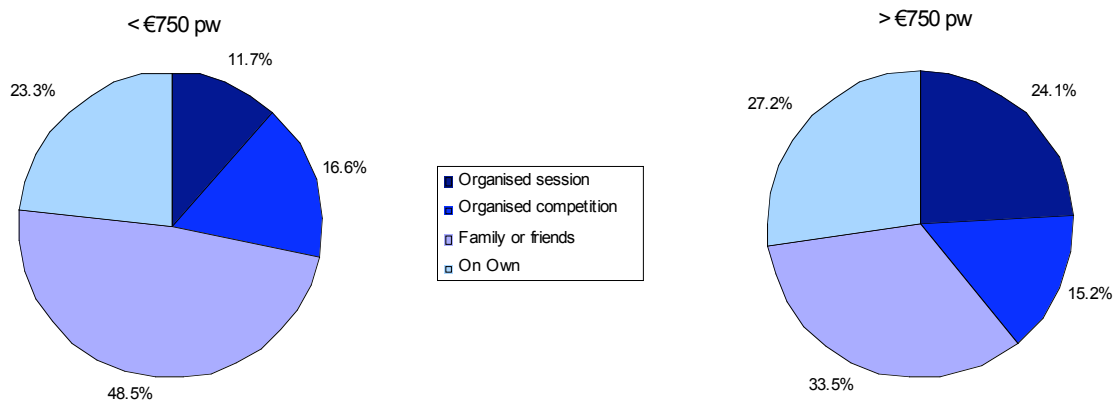
What is striking about these results is that the majority of sporting activity undertaken in Dublin City takes place outside of organised settings. This finding (which in fact

applies throughout Ireland), is important from a policy perspective. For people working in an organised sporting context, such as with a local sports partnership, a local authority, a national governing body of sport, a sports club, and so on, it implies that efforts to raise the numbers who participate must reach out beyond established sporting networks. The finding also suggests that the built environment may be influential, since it dictates the availability of public space for casual participation.

Gender differences are also notable in Figure 6.4. Women are more likely to engage in sport and exercise with their friends and family. Where they do participate in an organised setting, it is likely to be a non-competitive one.

Figure 6.5 reveals that there are similar differences in the context of activity associated with income. Those in the richer half of the income distribution are much more likely to participate in an organised setting, while those in the poorer half are more likely to do so with friends and family. The policy implications of this finding are considered further in Section 9.

Figure 6.5: Context for active participation by income



Summary

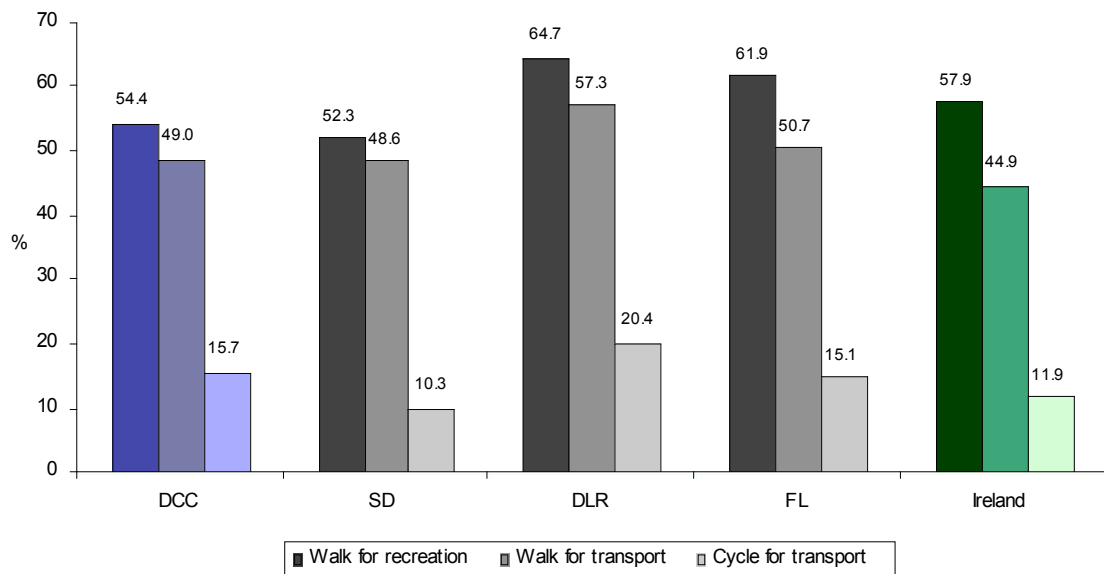
Most participants in sport in Dublin City engage in more than one session a week, expend considerable physical effort and do so for sufficient time to contribute much of their recommended weekly physical activity. These findings suggest that sport offers considerable health benefits to those who actively participate.

7. WALKING AND CYCLING

This section extends the previous analysis to cover walking (for recreation and for transport) and cycling for transport. Expanding the analysis to cover these groups, it is possible to estimate the proportion of the population that is effectively sedentary. Given the importance of physical activity for health, the extent of sedentarism across the population is important from a policy perspective.

Figure 7.1 shows the proportion of the population that walks for recreation (i.e. “goes for a walk” of at least 20 minutes at a steady pace), walks for transport, or cycles for transport, with separate results given for Dublin City, the three other Dublin areas and Ireland as a whole.

Figure 7.1: Walking and cycling by area



Compared to Ireland as a whole, the somewhat lower level of walking for recreation in Dublin City is more than compensated for by the increased level of walking and cycling for transport. These measures, however, vary considerably for the other three Dublin areas. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, in addition to having the highest level of participation in sport in the country, also has higher levels of walking and cycling. Fingal, too, is ahead of the national level for all three activities. One possible factor

here is that the greater use of public transport in the Dublin region has a knock-on effect for walking and cycling, since people have to get to stations and bus stops.

Of course, these results do not consider the possible overlap between the three activities, or between these activities and playing sport. Figure 7.2 does this explicitly, by showing the proportion of the population that did not engage in any of the four activities in the previous seven days. Aside from any physical activity associated with work, household chores or gardening, this group can be classified as effectively sedentary.

Figure 7.2: Sedentarism by area

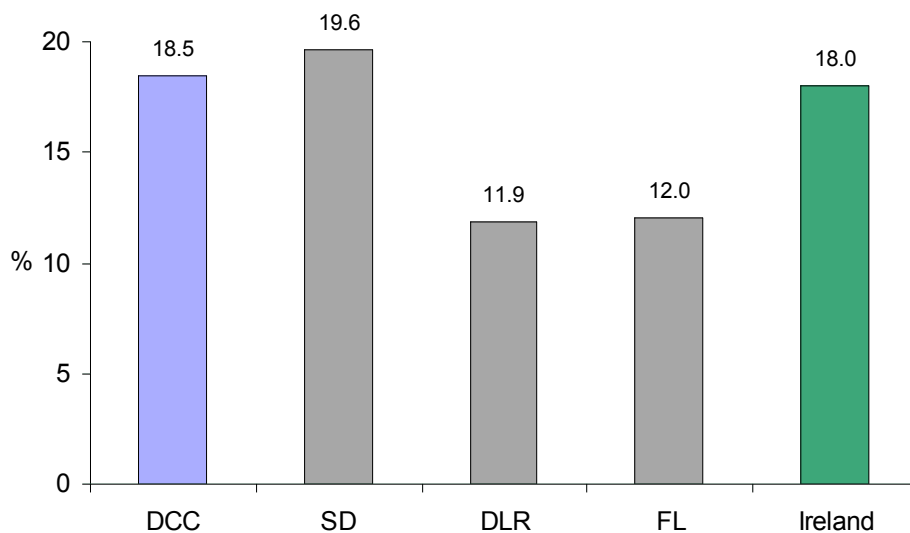
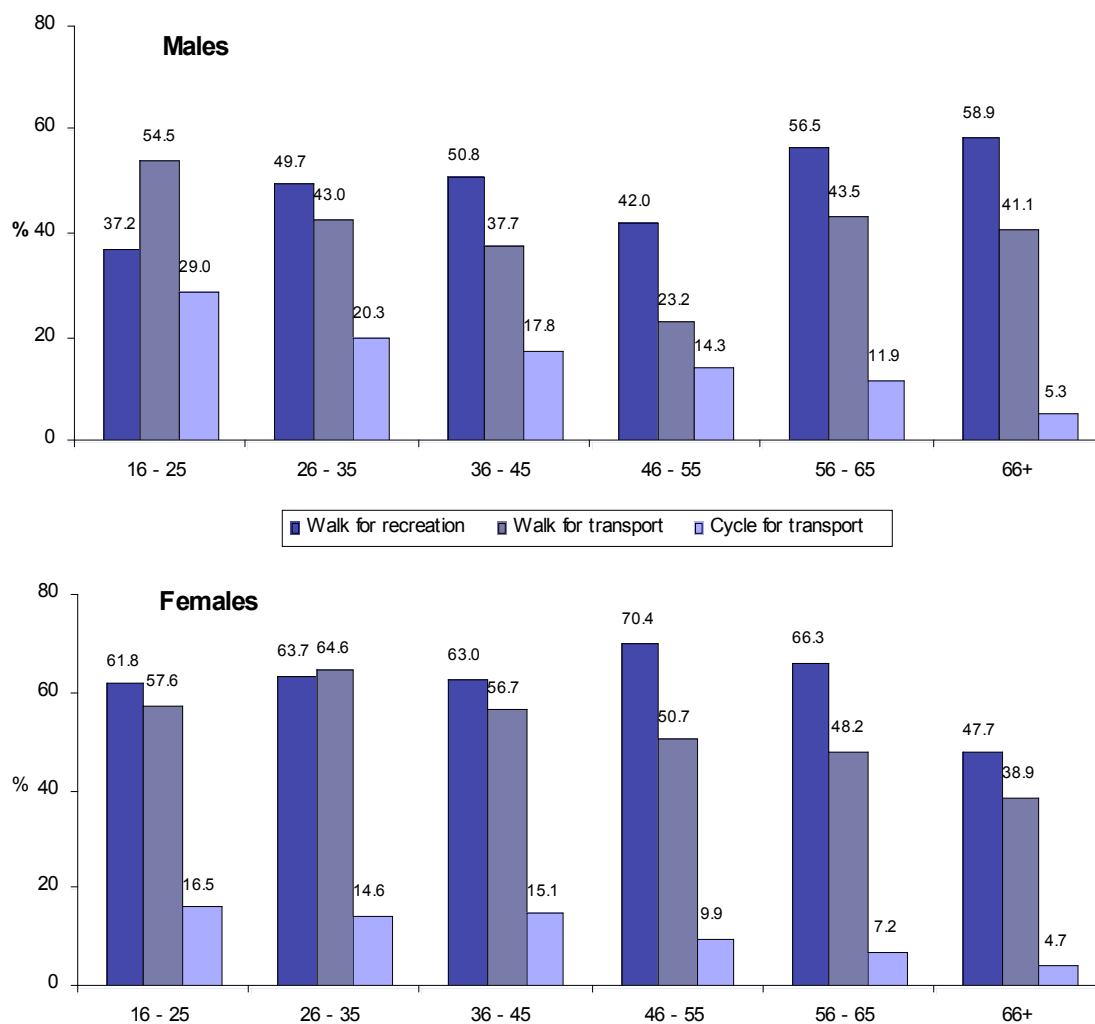


Figure 7.2 reveals striking differences. Sedentarism in Dublin City is not significantly different from that in Ireland as a whole, with somewhere approaching one-in-five people not engaging in any of the physical activities. The level is slightly higher in South Dublin, primarily because of its low level of recreational walking. But Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Fingal enjoy far lower levels of sedentarism, with less than one-in-eight people not engaging in any activity.

Figures 7.3 and 7.4 offer a similar analysis for the Dublin City area by age and gender. Walking for both transport and recreation is more common among women for all ages below 66, but particularly among young women. Men are more likely to cycle for transport, especially when young. Walking only becomes more common in later life, probably after retirement.

Figure 7.3: Walking and cycling by gender and age



These patterns have important consequences for sedentarism, as Figure 7.4 reveals. Sedentarism is low among young people, due primarily to walking by women and playing sport or cycling among men. It tends to increase with age, but there is a striking gender gap that opens up in middle age, when many men have ceased playing sport or cycling and yet do no walking. Over one-third of men aged 46 – 55 appear to be sedentary. This is a very high proportion. (The gender gap seems to reverse among the over 65s, but this is largely due to women’s greater longevity, since the very old are more likely to be inactive.)

Figure 7.4: Sedentarism by gender and age

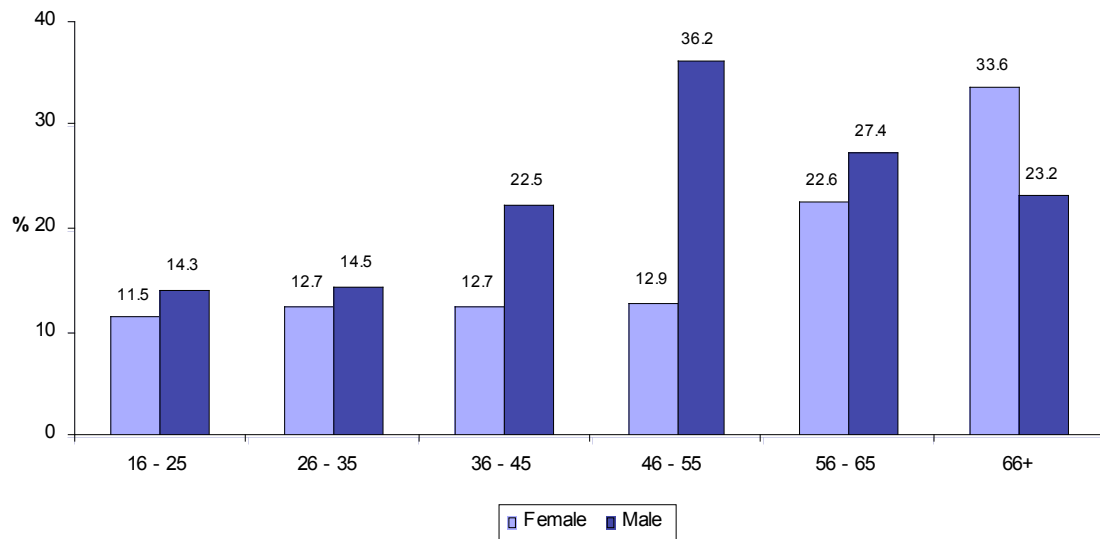
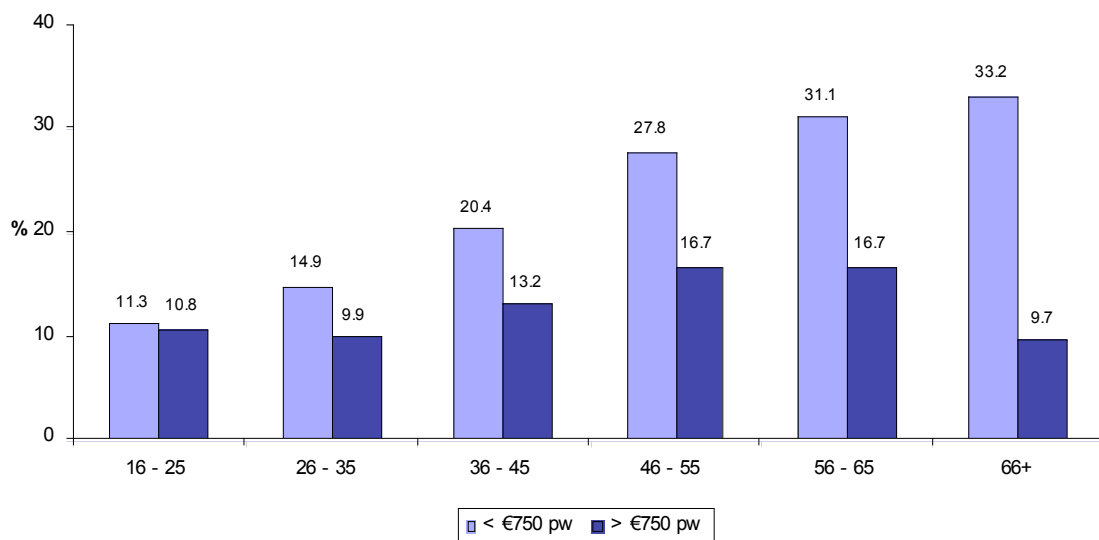


Figure 7.5 presents a similarly arresting picture by income. In the lower half of the income distribution, sedentarism displays a large and steady increase with age. In the upper half, while there is an increase in middle age, mostly among males, the level falls again among older people. Further analysis of these patterns reveals that they are mainly driven by steep declines in recreational walking and cycling for transport, with little or no gap between the income groups with respect to walking for transport.

Figure 7.5: Sedentarism by income



Summary

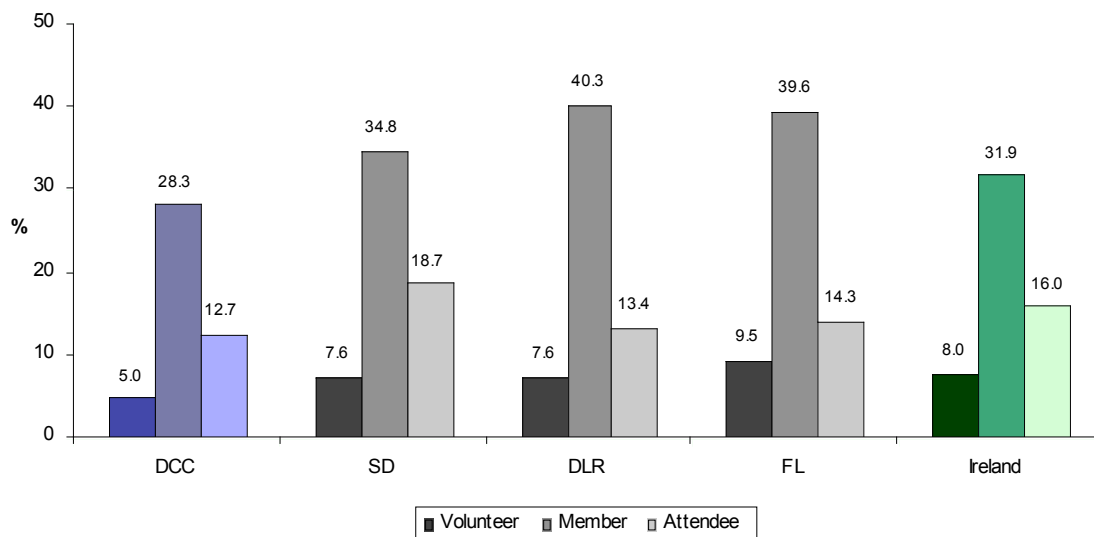
Compared to Ireland as a whole, fewer people in Dublin City walk for recreation, while more cycle for transport, resulting in a rate of effective sedentarism of 18.5%, similar to the national picture. Middle-aged men and older people in low income groups are much more likely to be sedentary. The proportion who are sedentary in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Fingal is much lower, at around 12%.

8. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

In addition to active participation in sport and exercise, sport offers the opportunity to participate socially, through volunteering, club membership and attendance at events or fixtures. Social participation is examined in this section.

Figure 8.1 supplies participation rates for each of the three forms of social participation, in Dublin City, the three other Dublin areas and Ireland as a whole. Social participation in Dublin City is lower than in it is in all other areas, for all three forms of social participation.

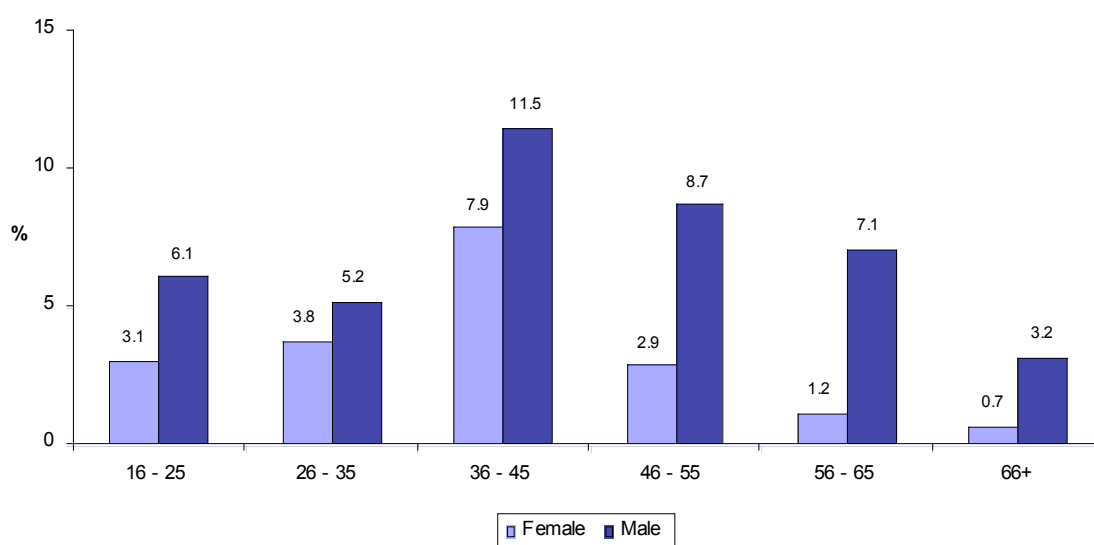
Figure 8.1: Social participation by area



To some extent this difference is accounted for by levels of participation of all kinds in Gaelic games, which are much lower in the Dublin region. Across Ireland as a whole, the GAA is the dominant force in social participation, registering much higher levels of volunteering, membership and attendance than most other sports, in spite of its relatively low level of active participation by adults. However, if lower GAA activity were the sole explanation for lower social participation in Dublin City, social participation would also be lower in the other three Dublin areas, which also have lower active and social participation in the GAA. This is not the case.

Despite its lower prevalence, volunteering in Dublin resembles volunteering in the rest of Ireland in terms of age and gender profile. Those who are or have been active participants are more likely to volunteer, but volunteering is more strongly affected by having children who participate in sport. Thus, as Figure 8.2 shows, volunteering peaks in early middle age, especially for women. Men are more likely to continue volunteering as they get older.

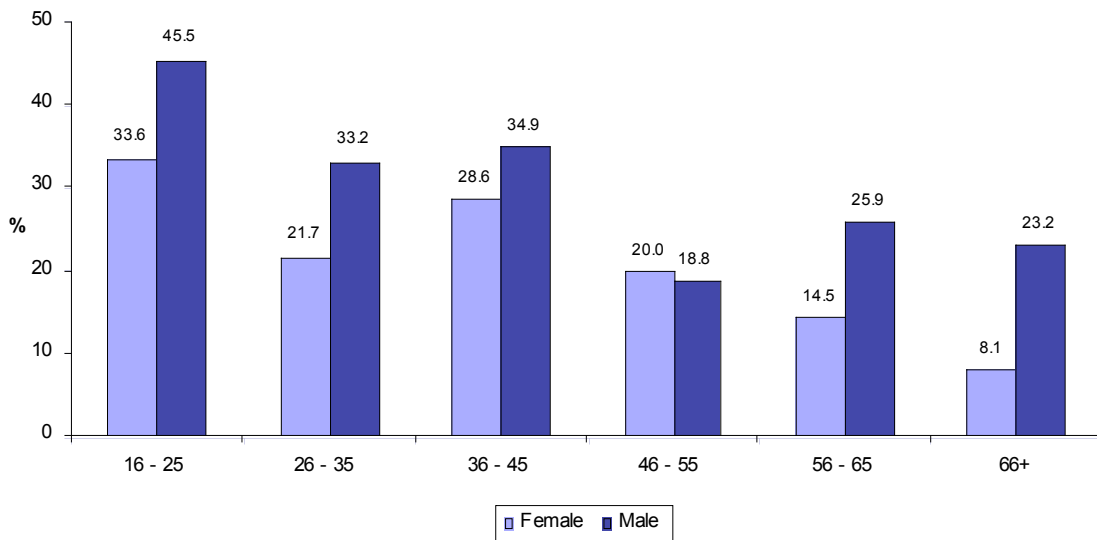
Figure 8.2: Volunteering by gender and age



Most volunteering is associated with team sports, which tallies with the fact that it is mostly driven by the involvement of people’s children. In Dublin City, volunteering associated with soccer is on a par with that associated with Gaelic games, primarily because of the lower rate of volunteering for the latter.

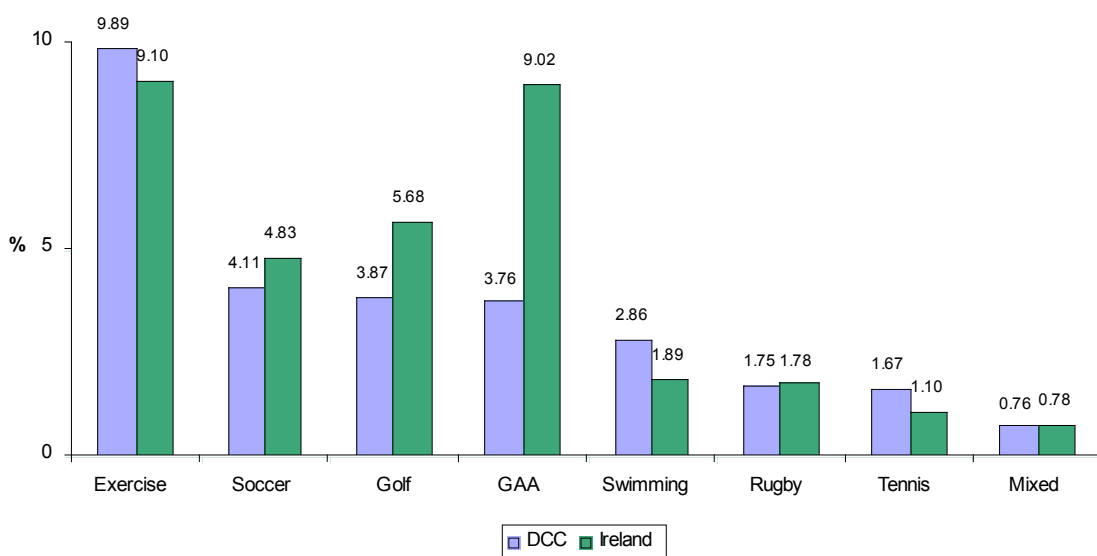
The pattern of club membership by age and gender in Dublin City, shown in Figure 8.3, mirrors that for playing sport, including a similar drop in participation among 26 – 35 year-olds. The gender gap narrows in middle age then widens as people approach retirement age. Again, this pattern is not dissimilar to that in the rest of Ireland.

Figure 8.3: Club membership by gender and age



More marked differences emerge when the specific type of club is considered, as in Figure 8.4. Dublin City has less than half the proportion of GAA members as is the case across Ireland as a whole. The only other statistically significant difference concerns membership of golf clubs, where again the proportion of members is lower in Dublin City.

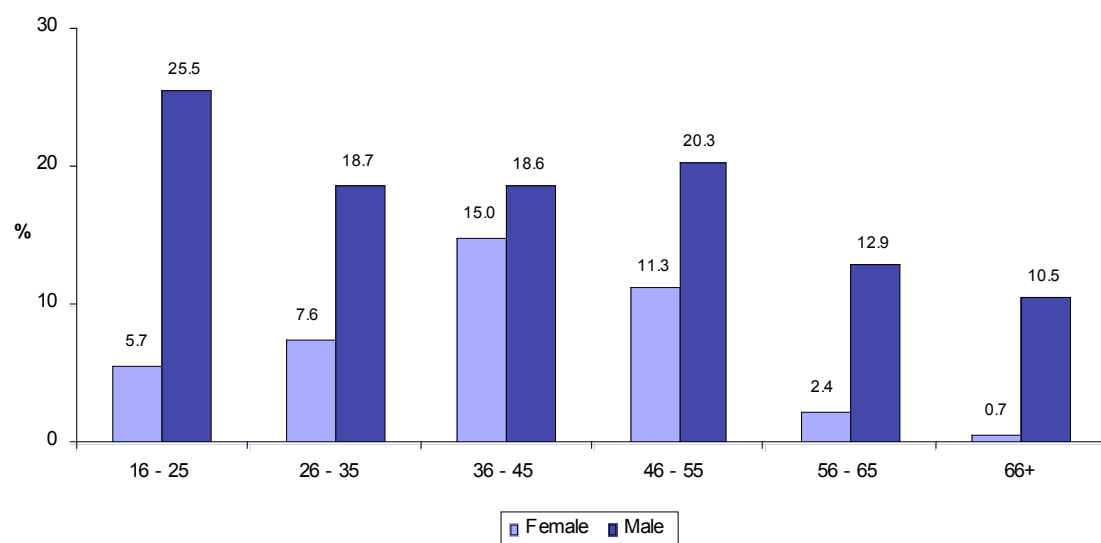
Figure 8.4: Club membership by activity



It is notable, given the lower level of active participation in personal exercise, that Dublin matches the national membership rate for clubs that offer facilities and support for personal exercise, which consist mostly of gyms and health clubs. Members in Dublin City sign up to use these facilities, but actually use them less often. Although membership fees form only part of the costs associated with active participation, this result nevertheless suggests that the lower rate of participation in Dublin City probably involves factors other than cost (see discussion in Section 4).

Attendance at events is dominated by males (Figure 8.5). This is mainly because most spectator sports are team sports, which display the largest gender gap in participation. This gap is somewhat narrowed in early middle age, when women are likely to attend events involving their own children. As with volunteering, the pattern of attendance in Dublin City differs from that in the rest of Ireland, in that the GAA is again less prominent, with attendance more evenly spread across Gaelic games, soccer and rugby.

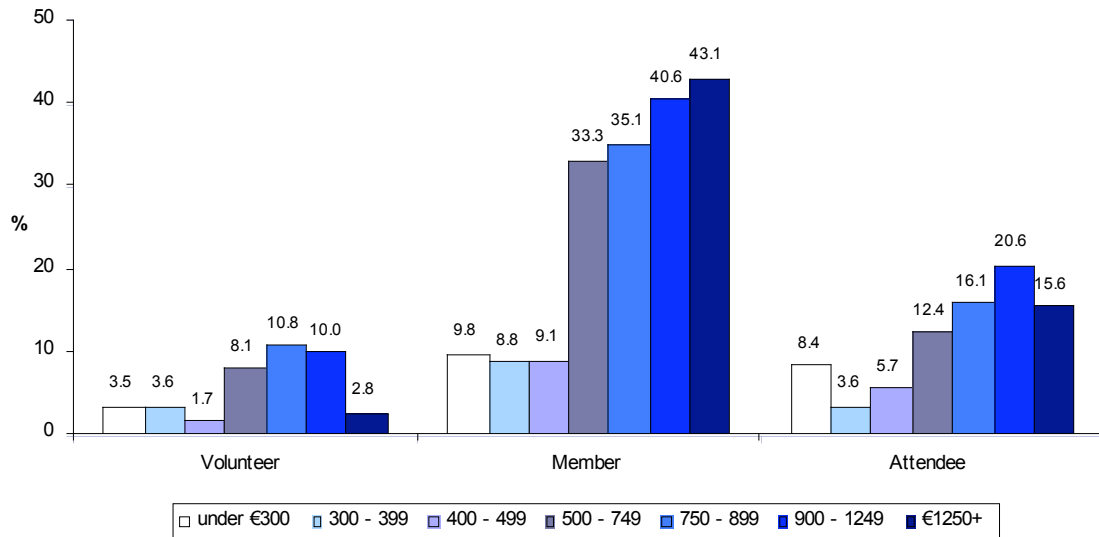
Figure 8.5: Attendance at sporting events by gender and age



As with active participation, there are strong socio-economic influences on social participation. Figure 8.6 provides separate participation rates for seven household income categories. There is a sizeable jump in all forms of social participation between the bottom three income categories and the rest, although the very low volunteering rate among the richest category also stands out. Families in this

category are very likely to have two full-time workers and are probably, therefore, less likely to devote time to other work, such as volunteering.

Figure 8.6: Social participation by income



Because participation in sport of all forms is lower in Dublin City than in other parts of Ireland, it is possible that some common constraints apply to participation in this most urbanised area. One potential constraint involves transport. Dublin is notable for the fact that it has a significantly lower rate of car ownership than the rest of Ireland, with more than one-in-five adults living in a household with no car. On the other hand, it could be argued that people living in the city have less need for access to a car, given the availability of public transport and the geographical proximity of potential travel destinations.

Given this, one interesting question to ask is whether car ownership has an impact on the likelihood of participation in sport. Figure 8.7 compares the relative likelihood of participation of car-owners and non-car-owners in Dublin City and in Ireland as a whole. The likelihoods are expressed as odds ratios, with non-car-owners being given the value 1.0 and the odds that car-owners participate being expressed relative to non-car-owners.

Figure 8.7: Relative odds of participation for car-owners, compared to non-car-owners



The pattern is telling. Owning a car in Dublin City has a larger effect on participation in sport than in the rest of the country. The effect is smaller for attendance at events, which probably reflects the fact that much attendance surrounds the participation of children, who are likely to attend schools nearby.

Why would car ownership matter more in Dublin, where car dependency is lower? One possibility is that urban transport is primarily designed to get people to and from the city centre, whereas sporting venues tend to be in localities, away from the city centre. Despite the greater degree of car dependency in and around smaller villages and towns, sporting venues may be more likely to coincide with other accessible amenities. Another possibility is that there is a stronger link between car ownership and socio-economic circumstances in an inner city area.

Summary

Social participation, which covers volunteering for sport, club membership and attendance at sporting events and fixtures, is significantly lower in Dublin City than elsewhere in Ireland. As in other areas, it is strongly influenced by the active involvement of people's children. The lesser prominence of the GAA in Dublin is one reason for the lower level of social participation. Transport difficulties may be another factor, affecting active participation also.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in collaboration with the Irish Sports Council has previously published a series of reports on participation in sport in Ireland, covering active and social participation by children and adults. These reports contain discussion of both research findings specific to Ireland and findings gleaned from a large international literature on sport and physical activity. Although some results contained in the present report are specific to Dublin City, the large majority are common to the whole country and the pattern is similar to that found in many other countries. Readers interested in the implications of this body of research for policymakers, especially what they might do to promote greater participation in sport and physical activity, are strongly advised to consult these reports, because it is not possible to rehearse all of the policy implications in this present report.[‡] Instead, this final section concentrates on policy implications specific to the findings relating to adult participation in sport in Dublin City.

The first implication of the research findings contained here is that there are particular groups that have lower participation in Dublin City than elsewhere in Ireland. Two such groups stand out: those in the age group 26 – 35 and people with the low levels of household income. Given that people in these two groups are more likely to participate elsewhere in the country, there is a strong case for trying to identify and tackle barriers specific to these groups, since it is very likely that they contain untapped demand for active participation in sport and exercise.

Dealing first with the 26 – 35 year age group, it is very unlikely that the barriers they face are connected to the provision of sporting facilities, since the facilities available to them are the same as those available to everyone else. Furthermore, previous research in Ireland has strongly suggested that lack of facilities is not an important barrier to participation (although there remains unmet demand for swimming pools). A number of other barriers are more likely to be involved. First, this age group contains a greater proportion of people who have recently moved into the city, including non-Irish nationals. This means that they will have more recently severed ties with friends and sporting networks. Second, it is likely that this age group

[‡] These reports are available for free download at:
http://www.esri.ie/research/research_areas/social_cohesion_and_quality_of_life/centre_for_research_into/

contains many couples in which both partners work and, given the distribution of mortgage debt, household finances may be fairly tight. Expense may matter and lacking the time to organise leisure activities may matter more. There are clearly many young adults in Dublin City who would like to do more sport and exercise, and who may even have the best intentions to do so, but who fail to get around to it, or to encounter an event or opportunity that kick-starts the process for them. Reconnecting such people and tapping into the latent demand for sporting opportunity that they represent may well be, therefore, largely a matter of targeted marketing activity. People within this group will be most likely to respond to sporting opportunities that involve individual sports, are relatively inexpensive, take place outside of working hours and require little organisational effort on their part.

Many people who play sport as children drop out as young adults and it seems that in Dublin City this is particularly common. Policymakers aiming to increase participation in sport commonly state that the main focus should be on getting children and young people involved. More could doubtless be done to raise participation in this group, perhaps especially among females. However, events and opportunities that occur during young adulthood, when people move away from the world of education and into the world of work, often leaving their parents and home town behind in the process, may be equally if not more important factors in whether they participate in sport as an adult. This period of the life-course deserves much greater attention from policymakers generally and, given the results presented here, especially so in Dublin City.

Turning to the low income group, one clear indication is that transport is a problem. There is considerable overlap between members of the low income groups and non-car-owners. Policy to increase activity among these groups therefore needs to consider ways to tackle this particular issue and to make sporting organisations aware of it. Beyond this, a range of policy implications arising from the link between participation in sport and socio-economic disadvantage are discussed in *Fair Play? Sport and Social Disadvantage in Ireland* (2007, published by the ESRI and the Irish Sports Council). Most notable among these is the need to communicate, through marketing and other activity, with those on low incomes.

The need for policy to find new ways to communicate with potential participants is highlighted by the fact that the majority of sporting activity takes place in non-organised contexts, involving friends and family or simply alone, particularly among

low income groups. While the activity may nevertheless involve a facility or public space, the point to be absorbed is that communication through existing sporting organisations is unlikely to be sufficient to reach many people who currently participate in this way or, more importantly, those who might begin to do so. Instead, the management and marketing of public space may be a bigger factor in encouraging its use for sport and exercise.

This implication extends to aspects of the built environment beyond parks, pools and other public sports facilities. Walking and cycling in particular have a strong influence on the likelihood that individuals are sedentary, with important implications for health. One notable finding of this report is the very high rate of sedentarism among middle-aged men and older adults on low incomes. Walking and cycling are unusual in that members of the public state that they would be more inclined to undertake them if local facilities were improved, something that is typically not the case for other sporting activities. The facilities in question here are walkways and cycle paths, which together with swimming pools are the only additional sporting facilities demanded by respondents in national surveys. Improving the environment for walkers and cyclists in Dublin City would therefore be likely to produce significant health benefits.

Overall, the patterns contained within the data for Dublin City indicate that, while it shares many sporting patterns with other parts of Ireland, it also has some unique features and, hence, specific challenges for policy. It is hoped that the present report provides some evidence from which policy responses might benefit.

Sport and the City An Analysis of Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in Dublin

Pete Lunn

Dublin is European Capital of Sport 2010. This accolade has been awarded at a time when policymakers around the world are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of physical activity. In particular, international research has shown that higher levels of activity significantly reduce the risk of developing serious disease.

Sport and the City uses the most recent data available to provide a statistical snapshot of participation in sport and exercise in Dublin. The primary aim is to provide robust evidence with respect to the level of participation and the factors that are associated with involvement in sport and exercise. The data reveal substantial differences in levels of participation across the population. The report considers the policy implications of the findings and is of relevance for policymakers and other interested parties in the areas of sport and recreation, public health, social exclusion, transport and planning.

