

‘International Perspectives On The Role Of Grassroots Sports Clubs In Their Local Communities.’

For a variety of historical and contemporary reasons, grassroots sports clubs in the UK have received relatively little attention in terms of the wider work that they are involved with and/or capable of. UK health policies, by way of example, have often focused on physical activity programmes to the neglect of participation in sports or joining clubs, and sports-related policies have often been oriented towards elite provision. Targeted activity programmes and time-limited interventions, often delivered by social enterprises or private companies have proliferated whilst neighbourhood-based grassroots clubs have often struggled for funding and support, as a ‘mixed economy’ of grassroots sports provision has emerged. At the same time, funding for other community-based organisations has become more difficult to secure and many voluntary and community sector organisations are struggling to survive. This situation is slightly different in different contexts, and grassroots sports clubs are acknowledged to perform a variety of functions and roles in different countries, especially in mainland Europe and Scandinavia. This research will hopefully examine some of the literature relating to grassroots sports provision in the UK and other countries to understand some of the similarities and differences in the roles that they can and do play in local communities, as well as alternative policy agendas and governance arrangements in other countries.

There is a potential international dimension to this research in both years 1 & 2. The research is planned as a mixed method, qualitative exploration. In year 1 the research would first be conducted via desk research and a literature review in regard to theories and primary and secondary data on the subject. This will be both UK wide and International grassroots sports provision research. During year 2 I intend to conduct the research internationally; it is envisaged that the research will adopt a participatory action research (PAR) methodology. PAR is a theoretical standpoint and collaborative process that is designed to ensure a voice for those who are affected by a research project (McIntyre 2008; Nelson et al. 1998). I intend to produce a report into the provision of supported grassroots sports projects and their

impact on the local participants and communities in which they're situated. This research might also make recommendations of how such projects, may be replicated in the UK.

The research exhibits potential for an interdisciplinary dimension, from a sociology and business discipline. The research seeks to address issues affecting perceived or real marginalised, and/or disadvantaged communities, who may at times feel voiceless. The research may also be considered academically impactful by redressing the balance of research thus far, because the subject has received relatively little attention. The potential impact of this research stretches beyond the academic community and has the potential to benefit society through economic and social impact.

An output of my research will be the production of a mapping report summarising the literature examined relating to grassroots sports provision in the UK and other countries. This mapping report will aid in better understanding some of the similarities and differences in the roles that grassroots sports can and do play in local communities, as well as alternative policy agendas and governance arrangements in other countries around supporting grassroots sports provision. In order to communicate the research to a wider audience I intend to produce a visual output such as a mapping poster and/or infographics that can be shared through social media channels as well as being presented for discussion.

In summary, my research will review what provision of grassroots sports there is in the UK, the role grassroots sports provision plays on local communities, and how this relates to other international grassroots sports provision. The research will report on any policies or agendas in the provision within the UK, and discuss how provision is supported internationally. The research will also look into models of governance and support from other provision sources, such as the business sector through initiatives like Corporate Social Responsibility.

## References

McIntyre, A. (2008) Participatory Action Research: Qualitative Research Methods Series. London: Sage

Nelson, G., Ochkoeka, J., Griffin, K. and Lord, L. (1998) 'Nothing about me, without me': Participatory Action Research with self help/mutual aid organisations for psychiatric consumer/survivors. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26, 881-892.