Part I
Chapter 1
General introduction
Sport, physical activity and health

In recent years there has been an increasing concern about the health of the Western population, in particular of children (e.g., European Commission, 2007a; Ministry of VWS, 2011b; WHO, 2012). Figures show that the prevalence of obesity among children has been rising during the last part of the twentieth century (e.g., Lobstein & Frelut, 2003; Schokker, Visscher, Nooyens, Baak, & Seidell, 2006; Troiano, Flegal, Kuczynski, Campbell, & Johnson, 1995). Although there are indications that the percentage of children and adults with obesity is stabilising, it remains a major health problem (Hedley, et al., 2004; Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012).

A lack of physical activity is often mentioned as one of the major causes of the so-called ‘obesity epidemic.’ However, there is a dearth of evidence showing a decline in physical activity over the past decades (Gard, 2004). Notwithstanding the absence of scientific evidence indicating a causal link between declining physical activity levels and increasing health problems, many health policies are aiming at increasing the physical activity levels of the population in general and especially children (e.g., European Commission, 2007b, 2011; Ministry of VWS, 2008a, 2011a; Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, 2008). As a result, the effect of physical activity on the health of children is a topic of interest among scholars worldwide (e.g., Bauman, 2004; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Peng, Lin, & Crouse, 2011).

A commonality among most of these studies is that the type and context of physical activity is not the primary point of interest. Different types of physical activity are regarded as ways to burn calories, in order to counterbalance the excessive calorie intake of the Western population: physical activity is considered a medicine. In some cases, medical paradigms such as “dose-response relationship” are being used (e.g., Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010, p. 1). However, it seems too uncomplicated to regard Western health problems as a simple matter of energy-input versus energy-output (Gard, 2004).

Nevertheless, policy-makers and scholars have been looking for ways to increase the energy consumption of children. Often, the school environment has been studied as a context to increase the physical activity levels of children (e.g., Harris, Kuramoto, Schulzer, & Retallack, 2009; Jurg, Kremers, Candel, Van der Wal, & Meij, 2006; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Sallis, et al., 2001). Many projects aimed at improving a healthy lifestyle of children try to improve so-called physical activity and the fundamental movement skills of children.
This health debate also influences the view on sports in the Western world. Sport policies use health arguments (e.g., European Commission, 2011; Ministry of OCW, 2012) and health policies mentioned sport participation as a means to meet the daily physical activity guidelines (e.g., Ministry of VWS, 2011b; Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, 2008; WHO, 2010). In most of these policies, sport and physical activity are used interchangeably. A crucial question in this regard is whether interventions that increase physical activity or teach movement skills (such as jumping a rope or riding the bike to school) have an influence on long term sport participation. When sport is regarded as a social phenomenon that is embedded in society (Bottenburg, 2001; Bourdieu, 1984; Tamboer, 1992), it can be hypothesised that a focus on the social context in which sports take place is crucial for understanding ways to increase sport participation. Therefore, it is crucial to make a distinction between the concepts of physical activity and sports (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Tamboer, 1992). In chapter 2 and 3, this distinction and the consequences for sport policy and practice will be discussed in detail.

In this thesis, the focus is specifically on the social mechanisms influencing sport participation and not physical activity in general. The process leading to sport participation is called sport socialisation. The choice for this term is not random, as it is hypothesised that this process is to a great extent dependent on social and cultural structures (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Macphail, Gorely, & Kirk, 2003).

The assumption that underlies policies that aim at sport and health promotion is that by increasing sport participation levels health problems can be tackled. In addition, sport is assumed to have effects that go beyond health. For instance, sport participation is expected to counteract social problems (e.g., Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008; Spaaij, 2009b) and anti-social behaviour (e.g., Rutten, et al., 2007; Sandford, Duncombe, & Armour, 2008), increase self-esteem (e.g., Fisher, Juszczak, & Friedman, 1996; Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009) and moral functioning (e.g., Arnold, 1994), build social capital (e.g., Seippel, 2006; Spaaij, 2009a), stimulate academic achievement (e.g., Singh, Uijtdewilligen, Twisk, van Mechelen, & Chinapaw, 2012) and peace (Kidd, 2008).

Two important points regarding the interpretation of these studies have to be discussed. First, although most of these studies report correlations, they are often interpreted as causal relationships. However, the assumed causality between sport participation and the beneficial outcomes might be explained by other factors that have influenced both sport participation and the outcomes described
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(Brett Schneider, 2001; Green, 2012). Second, there appears to be a tendency to overgeneralize the results of these studies. Especially for policy-makers it seems tempting to interpret the correlations found in most of these studies to be applicable to everyone and everywhere, conserving a ‘mythopoeic’ image of sports (Coalter, 2007b, p. 1). However, what does seem to be a conclusion that can be drawn from most of these studies is that the context in which sport takes place is crucial for expected effects for participants (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2007a). It appears to be extremely important what kind of sport activity is performed, with whom, where, when and why. “The greatest risk is the belief held by many that we can make a difference by just ‘throwing the ball and letting them play’” (Danish, Forneris, & Wallace, 2005, p. 42).

The fact that not many studies have found evidence for positive causal effects of community sport, physical education or school sport participation (Bailey, et al., 2009; Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2007a, 2007b; Green, 2012) does not mean that sport participation cannot be beneficial. However, it is unclear whether sport participation actually contributes to the development of children (socialisation hypothesis) or whether children with certain dispositions are more inclined to participate in sports (selection hypothesis) (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brett Schneider, 1997).

There is a need for more – and perhaps a different type of – research to study sport socialisation in more detail and the possible effects of specific types of sport participation (Devis-Devis, Beltrán-Carrillo, & Peiró-Velert, 2013). Therefore, the general aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of sport socialisation, the potential role of the school context in this and the possible relationship between (school) sport participation and its presumed beneficial effects.

Determinants of sport participation

When discussing ways to increase sport participation levels, it is important to know why children play sports. Therefore, many scholars have investigated the motivations and determinants of sport participation for children. In policy it is often presumed that the possession of sport skills is an important determinant of sport participation (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002; NOC*NSF, 2011). However, embodied (sport) skills are at best considered a minor determinant of long-term engagement in structured physical activity, such as sports (e.g., McKenzie, et al., 2002; Okely, Booth, & Patterson, 2001). Nevertheless, an absence of such skills may become a barrier for sport participation later in life.
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(Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006; Cools, Martelaer, Samaey, & Andries, 2011).

It is conceived that sport participation at an early age is correlated with sport participation throughout life (Birchwood, Roberts, & Pollock, 2008; Scheerder, et al., 2006; Telama, et al., 2005; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Because the family is the primary socialising context at a young age, the family is considered a major determinant of sport behaviour (e.g., Green, Smith, & Roberts, 2005; Scheerder, et al., 2006). Indeed, many studies have found evidence for a strong influence of the family on sport participation and leisure-time physical activity (Birchwood, et al., 2008; Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Eime, Harvey, Craike, Symons, & Payne, 2013; Kraaykamp, Oldenkamp, & Breedveld, 2013; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010; Wheeler, 2012). Interestingly, Nielsen, Grønfeldt, Toftegaard-Støckel and Andersen (2012) found that family background is important for sporting club membership, but not for physical activity levels. This is an important finding with regard to the policy goal of increasing sport participation levels with the aim of improving physical activity levels.

Although the family is considered a major determinant of sport behaviour, there seem to be some differences in the extent to which other sources of sport socialisation are also important for children. For instance, not only the nuclear family, but a network of families (Wheeler, 2012), peers or the school context can have an influence on sport socialisation (Allender, et al., 2006; Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Green, et al., 2005; Wright, MacDonald, & Groom, 2003). The interplay between these socialising contexts has been found to depend on social class (Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Humbert, et al., 2006; Stuij, 2013). Furthermore, the cultural context of a country is of influence on sport socialisation (Bottenburg, 2001; Green, Thurston, Vaage, & Roberts, 2013).

Considering these studies, it appears that a complex interplay of different abilities, socialising contexts and motivations determines (sport) behaviour (Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Green, et al., 2013; Wright, et al., 2003). Therefore, the main aim of the literature review in Part I of this thesis is:

To investigate to what extent sport socialisation is determined by the possession of sport skills and what the influence of the social context in this process is?

Part II of this thesis will be introduced in chapter 4. In the next paragraph the theoretical framework that is used to understand the interaction between the determinants of sport behaviour are further explained.
Theoretical framework

Bourdieu's social theory
The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) can be used to understand the interaction between different determinants of sport behaviour. His key concepts of habitus, capital and field offer insight in how and why individuals behave, choose and value the way they do.

Bourdieu (1984) defined the concept of habitus as a set of “durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world” (Wacquant, 2006, p. 6). The habitus acts as an unconscious structure that gives meaning to the world and at the same time is shaped by the world. It is the product of life-long internalisation of social conditions, constraints and opportunities of the environment people are exposed to (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). Habitus is thus considered susceptible to minor changes if new social contexts are encountered. If sport has been part of the socialisation process, it can be expected that sport has become part of the (sporting) habitus. Sport participation can then be considered a manifestation of the (sporting) habitus (Skille, 2007).

The formation of the habitus is dependent on the amount and types of capital one possesses or acquires. Bourdieu (1986) considers capital to be a resource that is valuable in a particular context. He distinguishes three primary types of capital: economic capital (monetary resources and material possessions), cultural capital (skills and symbolic assets such as titles or knowledge) and social capital (social connections or networks and the resources that can be drawn from those networks) (Wacquant, 2006).

The social world is divided into different fields, which can be defined as contexts with their own values, rules, regulations and practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). To be successful in a specific field, one needs a certain amount of capital relevant to that field. In addition, fields offers individuals different opportunities to act. Every action has specific consequences related to the values, rules, regulations and practices in that specific field (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). Fields can also be interrelated. For instance, according to Bourdieu (1984) the field of sport and the field of family are strongly connected through social economic status. This results in a specific social stratification of (type of) sport participation, with typical upper class sports (e.g., golf and tennis) and typical lower class sports (e.g., football) (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 213).

Applied to sport socialisation, this means that those who want to participate in the field of sport need a certain amount of sporting capital, which can be considered a sub-group of cultural and social capital.
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(Coalter, 2007a; Nielsen, et al., 2012; Stuij, 2013; Wilson, 2002). If sport participation becomes self-evident and a natural part of a person's behaviour, sport becomes part of the (sporting) habitus. As the habitus has a lasting influence on behaviour, it can be suggested that if sport is part of the habitus, long-term sport participation is more likely to occur.

Sporting capital can be divided into technical aspects of sporting capital (e.g., sport skills, knowledge about rules and tactics) and socio-cultural aspects of sporting capital (e.g., network of sports-minded people, knowing social and cultural rules of engagement at sporting clubs, etc.) (Nielsen, et al., 2012). Both these aspects of sporting capital provide the foundation for the sports habitus and consequently for long-term sport participation (Green, et al., 2013; Light, Harvey, & Memmert, 2013; Nielsen, et al., 2012).

Although the habitus concept offers room for change when new fields are encountered (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2012; Wacquant, 2006), the empirical work based on Bourdieu (1984) shows a strong reproduction of sport practices between generations of families (intergenerational transmission). The acquisition of new capital and dispositions related to sports by means of encountering new social settings does not occur very often. More specifically, Bourdieu (1978, 1984) showed that sport participation and the taste for certain sports are strongly determined by (socio-economic) background (Stempel, 2005). As this socio-economic background is primarily determined by the family, it is not surprising that numerous studies have shown an important role of the family context in sport socialisation (e.g., Birchwood, et al., 2008; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010; Wheeler, 2012).

However, it can be questioned whether this reproduction and stratification of sport participation is still able to explain the complex reality of sport socialisation (Ohl, 2000). Some studies have shown that other contexts than the family, such as school or peers, might contribute to the acquisition of sporting capital (Green, et al., 2005; Macphail & Kirk, 2006; Stuij, 2013). In line with that, there are indications that sport participation patterns are more flexible than suggested by Bourdieu and that social class differences between (the type of) sport participation become less fixed (Hover, Romijn, & Breedveld, 2010; Kamphuis & Dool, 2008). In addition, the definition of sport has changed (e.g., fitness, life-style sports), which has consequences for the way in which sport participation is socially stratified. Furthermore, sport participation rates have increased in the last decades (e.g., Klostermann & Nagel, 2012; Scheerder & Vos, 2011), indicating more flexibility in sport socialisation than mere intergenerational reproduction. Therefore, it can be...
questioned whether the concept of habitus is the most suitable when discussing sport socialisation. In addition, the rather abstract nature of the concepts of habitus and capital make them relatively hard to operationalise in empirical work, especially in quantitative studies. Therefore, the concept of *sport identity* is used as an indication of sports habitus and the possession of sporting capital in this thesis.

**Sport identity**

Sport identity and habitus seem to be adjacent concepts (Bottero, 2010; Zevenbergen, 2006), as they both refer to a (mostly unconscious) influence of social contexts on values, decisions and behaviour. However, there appears to be a small but important difference, as the concept of identity offers more room for change compared to the concept of habitus (Bottero, 2010).

Identity theory is based on the work of the ‘symbolic interactionists’ (e.g., Mead, 1934), who recognised the social environment as important in the development of the self. Drawing on identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), the self-concept of a person can be considered to consist of multiple identities, related to different social contexts that are encountered. The process of *identification* is a continuing process which is shaped by the contexts one encounters and the people one meets (Santee & Jackson, 1979). A given person can be a student, a son, a team member, a sportsman, a thief, a friend, a lover and so on. These different identities form a hierarchy, in which more prominent identities have the largest influence on behaviour, values and taste (Adler & Adler, 1987; Callero, 1985; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In identity theory, these role identities (McCall & Simmons, 1978) are formed by a process of identification in which the person categorises him or herself as taking up a role in pre-existing categories or groups. In this sense, individuals make use of existing social structures (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identification can precede actions and certain actions can help to realise and validate the role identities (Callero, 1985). Therefore, the interaction between identity formation and behaviour that is related to that identity is a reciprocal and self-reinforcing process. Identity theorists regard these role-identities to be defined partially by the group or social structure and partially by the person’s self, instead of a hierarchical relation in which the group identity overrides the personal identity. In that way, individuals acting as members of a group retain their uniqueness. A role identity is formed by integrating the expectations and standards belonging to a role in a group (behaviour, knowledge, attitudes, etc.) with an already existing (relatively stable) self-concept, which is a product of the unique set of different role identities. In other words, identities are composed of
the self-views that emerge through identification with the unique set of roles in
groups or social contexts (Stets & Burke, 2000). The strongest confirmation that
a person is a member of a group, is the acceptance of others in the group (Stets
& Burke, 2000). These role identities serve as bridges between the individual
personalities and societal structures (Callero, 1985). They cannot be considered
purely psychological, since they are related to social positions. Nor can they be
considered purely sociological, in the sense that they are partly based on the
personality (or personal identity) of the actor (Callero, 1985). In a similar vein,
Bourdieu indicated that a layering of schemata make up the habitus (Bourdieu,
1984; Wacquant, 2006). Within identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), the different
identities that make up the self-concept are constantly being recalibrated and
reorganised under the influence of social encounters, although this probably
occurs within the limits of (inherited) predispositions.

Sport identity is defined as the role that sport plays in somebody’s self-concept
and is positively correlated to the sport participation of a person throughout the
life course (Brewer, Vanraalte, & Linder, 1993; Curry & Weiss, 1989; Curtis, McTeer,
& White, 1999; Downs & Ashton, 2011; Lau, Fox, & Cheung, 2006; Wright & Laverty,
2010). Social interactions do have an influence on the place and meaning of sport
in the lives of children, even though the role that sport plays in the life of children
appears to be rather predetermined, within the limits of these preset conditions
(Birchwood, et al., 2008; Miller, 2009; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2012; Weiss, 2001). Given
the reciprocal nature of identification, as outlined above, individuals with a strong
sport identity are more inclined to participate in sports, but sport participation
also has an influence on the formation of the sport identity. The concepts of sport
identity and sports habitus are similar, although the identity concept offers more
room for other socialising agents or contexts, such as school, peers or sporting
clubs. In addition, an advantage of using the concept of sport identity is that it can
be measured by means of a validated questionnaire (Brewer, et al., 1993).

Within the field of sport, certain skills and knowledge (sporting capital) are valued.
When a child internalises the behaviour, values and rules of that field (habitus),
it can be expected that this has an influence on the self-concept of the child
(sport identity). Therefore, social encounters in the field of sport (social aspects
of sporting capital) may lead to the formation of a sport identity. In addition to
social encounters, perceived competence (technical aspects of sporting capital)
also has an influence on the sport identity (Brewer, et al., 1993; Weiss, 2001; Wright
& Laverty, 2010). Therefore, it can be suggested that both socio-cultural and
technical aspects of sporting capital have an influence on sport identity formation.
In chapter 2 and 3, the intricate relationship between these concepts will be discussed further.

The question is whether the relationship between sport participation and sport identity can be explained in terms of a selection effect or a socialisation effect (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997)? In other words, are individuals with a strong sport identity more likely to play sports, or can sport participation also lead to the formation of a sport identity, and if so, under which circumstances?

**Research methods and thesis outline**

In this thesis, several scientifically relevant questions have been studied. Some studies were conducted in cooperation with external parties who were interested in questions related to school sports. This resulted in a variety of methodologies on which the studies in this thesis have been built. The array of methodologies contributed to the external validity of the studies in this thesis (Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002).

In the remaining chapters of part I, the importance of the social aspects of sport socialisation will be further investigated. In chapter 2, the interplay between embodied skills, sport skills, social structures and sport participation will be explored by means of a conceptual analysis of the concept of physical literacy. The paper in chapter 3 will discuss the use of the concept of physical literacy in the Netherlands by using a similar theoretical approach as in chapter 2, complemented with a policy analysis.

Part II of this thesis will be introduced in more detail in chapter 4 and focuses on the potential role of school sport in sport socialisation. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the history of school sport in the Netherlands and is based on policy documents and scientific literature discussing sport policy. In Chapter 6 the Dutch and American school sport contexts will be compared based on a combination of historical and policy analysis and a description of empirical literature. In Chapters 7, 8 and 9 three different studies about school and sports in the Netherlands will be discussed. The data for chapter 7 and 8 were gathered by means of written surveys. As this thesis concerns sport socialisation of children and youngsters, it was considered important to give these groups a direct voice in one of the studies (Dedding, Jurrius, Moonen, & Rutjes, 2013). Therefore, semi-structured interviews with high school students were used in chapter 9.

Part III provides a discussion and conclusion of this thesis in chapter 10.