Part III
Chapter 10
Discussion and conclusion
Sport socialisation

Many sport and health policies are aimed at increasing sport participation rates (e.g., European Commission, 2011; Ministry of OCW, 2012). In order to understand the processes leading to sport participation, there is a need for more research focused on sport socialisation (Devis-Devis, et al., 2013). As it is often conceived that school sport and PE can play a role in sport socialisation, more insight in the role of the school context in sport socialisation is necessary. Therefore, this thesis aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of sport socialisation, the possible relationship of sport participation and beneficial effects and the potential role of the school context in this.

Drawing on the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986), it was argued that sport related behaviour is influenced by the possession of a (sporting) habitus. Habitus can be defined as a set of dispositions that (unconsciously) guide actions, thoughts and judgements (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). The development of a sports habitus is dependent on the possession of what could be termed sporting capital (Coalter, 2007a; Nielsen, et al., 2012; Stuij, 2013; Wilson, 2002). Both technical aspects of sporting capital (e.g., sport skills, knowledge about rules and tactics) and socio-cultural aspects of sporting capital (e.g., a network of sports-minded people, knowing the social and cultural rules of engagement at sporting clubs, etc.) appear to be necessary for the development of the sports habitus and consequently for long-term sport participation (Green, et al., 2013; Light, et al., 2013; Nielsen, et al., 2012).

Bourdieu argued that the acquisition of capital was largely determined by intergenerational inheritance. This means that the family is the most important source of sporting capital. Although many studies confirmed the importance of the family in sport socialisation (e.g., Birchwood, et al., 2008; Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010; Wheeler, 2012), sport participation levels appear to be more susceptible to change than suggested by Bourdieu (e.g., Klostermann & Nagel, 2012; Ohl, 2000). In addition, the concepts of habitus and capital are rather hard to operationalise in empirical studies. Therefore, sport identity was used in this thesis as an indication of the role that sport plays in somebody’s self-concept and to refer to the possession of all relevant aspects of sporting capital.

The social context of sport participation

As mentioned in chapter 1, it is assumed in policy that sport participation has beneficial (health) effects and that sport participation can be stimulated by
increasing the fundamental movement skills or the physical literacy of children (e.g., DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002; Ministry of VWS, 2011b; NOC*NSF, 2012b; Office of Disease Prevention & Health Promotion, 2008; WHO, 2010). Two points have to be made with regard to these assumptions.

First, sport and physical activity should not be regarded as concepts that can be used interchangeably. In chapter 2 and 3, it has been argued that sport is a social phenomenon, in which certain activities are being done within a sports context (Bourdieu, 1984; Tamboer, 1992). Although it is generally assumed that physical activity is healthy (e.g., Bauman, 2004; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Peng, et al., 2011), it is often not explained for what type of physical activity and in which contexts these findings are valid. Therefore, it cannot be assumed without further elaboration that sport participation and PE will lead to health effects. Nevertheless, sport is often being put forward as a context in which children can meet the physical activity guidelines, as sport is the most obvious context for children to be physically active.

Second, sport participation is often considered behaviour that can be taught and shaped (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; European Commission, 2011; WHO, 2012). This means that projects and curricula aimed at increasing movement skills and knowledge about rules and tactics of sport are being endorsed with the aim of increasing sport participation levels. The concepts of fundamental movement skills and physical literacy are increasingly being put forward to substantiate this assumption (e.g., Barnett, et al., 2009; DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002; NOC*NSF, 2012b; Stodden, et al., 2008; Whitehead, 2010). However, in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis, it was argued that sport socialisation incorporates more than increasing movement skills (technical aspects of sporting capital). Although the possession of certain movement skills may be related to sport participation (e.g., Barnett, Cliff, Morgan, & Beurden, 2013), the social and cultural environment determines the possession of the social aspects of sporting capital, such as a ‘sporty’ social network and knowledge about the social rules of a sport and sporting club. Therefore, the social and cultural environment enables or constrains sport participation, as they afford the development and use of movement skills in a sports context. It was argued that neither fundamental movement skills or physical literacy, nor the socio-cultural context can explain sport socialisation on its own. Therefore, it was suggested to use the concept of sport identity, as an indication of the tendency to participate in sport (see chapter 2). Teaching sport skills in a relevant and realistic sport context might contribute to the development of a sport identity.
Based on studies from the United States of America (USA), it is expected in policy that extra-curricular sport initiatives in the Netherlands contribute to the development of long-term sport participation (Ministry of OCW, 2012; Ministry of VWS, 2008a, 2011a; Ministry of VWS & Ministry of OCW, 2008). In chapter 6, it was argued that the expectations of school sport in the Netherlands should not be based on studies about school sport in the USA, because of the differences in the cultural contexts of school sport in both countries. This study illustrates that policy endeavours should always be substantiated with research that is done in a context that is related to the context at which the policy is aiming. As this might not always be possible in practice, it is important that at least the context in which the research was conducted is kept in mind when using research results in policy development.

**School sport participation and sport identity**

In the Netherlands, no previous research existed about the effects of extra-curricular school sports. Therefore, two collaborations between school and sport in the Netherlands were investigated in chapter 7 and 8. Both studies showed a positive relationship between participation and sport identity. There are indications that this relationship can be described in terms of a selection effect (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997). The study described in chapter 7 showed a positive correlation between sport participation and sport identity, although no differences existed in the sport identity of students participating in a sporting club at the school campus compared to students playing at a sporting club at another location. The study described in chapter 8 indicated that participants in the school sport competition had a higher sport identity prior to the competition, although this effect was not significant. Furthermore, the results in chapter 9 showed that the inclination to play sports was already formed in earlier years under influence of the family. This selection mechanism was also demonstrated in a large representative survey about school and sport in the Netherlands (Stuij, et al., 2011). That study showed that 77% of the participants in school sports were also a member of a regular (out of school) sporting club. In the study presented in chapter 8, 63% of the participants in the school sport competition were already a member of a sporting club at the start of the competition. These participants already had a strong sport identity, which influenced their decision to become a member of a sporting club and participate in school sport.
In a similar vein, research showed that projects in the Netherlands aimed at increasing sport participation have only limited effect, as most participants already play sports or have a 'healthy' exercise behaviour (Ooms & Veenhof, 2013). This could be explained by the same selection effect as described for the school sport studies.

The studies in this thesis did not provide evidence for a socialisation effect, in which school sports participation has an influence on the sport identity. The study described in chapter 8 showed that the sport identity of participants in a school sport competition did not change during the competition. In a similar fashion, it was found in chapter 9 that PE and school sport did not have an influence on the formation of the sport identity.

Both the indications of a selection effect and the absence of evidence for a socialisation effect (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997) can be explained by the dominant role of the family in sport socialisation, that was found in chapter 9 and in earlier studies (e.g., Birchwood, et al., 2008; Dagkas & Quarmanby, 2012; Quarmanby & Dagkas, 2010; Wheeler, 2012). Predispositions acquired early in life appear to be dominant in determining sport behaviour (e.g., Perkins, Jacobs, Barber, & Eccles, 2004; Scheerder, et al., 2006). However, as identity changes are in general time-consuming processes (Burke & Stets, 2009), it may be these relatively new school sport initiatives in the Netherlands require more time before they can have an influence on the sport identity of participants. A longitudinal study lasting multiple years would be required to gain a better insight in these processes.

The school context might appear to be a promising context for sport socialisation if that does not happen in the context of the family. However, it is the question whether the socialisation of the school can indeed complement the socialisation of the family, as Bourdieu argued that the choice for a school is influenced by the parent’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). Therefore, parents high in sporting capital will choose a school attended by children from a similar background who are likely to have a similar endowment in sporting capital. Even if children with different amounts of sporting capital are at the same school, children will seek friends who have similar dispositions (also in terms of sport participation). Therefore, sporting capital can be regarded as a self-enhancing, reproducing form of capital (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984). This may explain why the school context and peers have not been found to have an influence on the formation of the sport identity, although peers may enhance or amplify already existing predispositions. For instance, in chapter 9, it was shown that peers have an influence on the
introduction to new sporting contexts and the choice for a specific sport.

Based on the studies in chapter 7, 8 and 9, it can be concluded that school sport initiatives in the Netherlands have no influence on the formation of a sport identity. It appears that the tendency to participate in sport, the acquisition of sporting capital and the development of a sport identity precede the actual participation in (school) sports, implying a selection effect (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997). This predisposition to participate in sports is likely to be transmitted through the family. These findings indicate that it is not likely that participating in these school sport initiatives will have a profound effect on sport participation levels, even for those who had no previous experience with organised sports. Birchwood et al. (2008) described this as follows:

“Our [...] evidence suggests that the crucial dispositions are transmitted through families via something akin to what Bourdieu (1984) calls ‘habitus’, which lays down a mini.–max. range within which policy interventions (via school programmes or providing facilities, for example) can be effective.” (p.284)

This is in contrast to policy expectations, suggesting a socialisation effect of school sports. The absence of an influence of school sport participation on the development of a sport identity is in line with earlier studies that indicated an absence of an effect of PE on sport participation (Evans & Davies, 2010; Green, 2012).

**Sport socialisation and socio-economic status**

Many studies showed that sport participation in general is socially stratified. Youngsters with a higher socio-economic status (SES) have higher participation rates than youngsters with a lower SES (e.g., Bourdieu, 1978, 1984; Hartmann-Tews, 2006; Nielsen, et al., 2012; Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010). It has been suggested that SES can explain why some youngsters are more inclined to participate in sport, as people with a lower SES possess less economic, cultural and sporting capital compared with people from higher SES families (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984).

Although youngsters with a lower SES participate in sport less often, the study described in chapter 9 shows that children with a lower SES that do participate in organised sports experience a similar socialisation as their peers with a higher SES background. Participants in that study showed a strong role of the parents in
the introduction and initial socialisation into sports. Furthermore, they indicated their friends to be important for the choice of a specific sport. This pattern of sport socialisation was similar for youngsters with a higher SES background (e.g., Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Stuij, 2013; Wheeler, 2012). What can be concluded from these findings is that a lower SES does not necessarily lead to a lower sport identity. Instead of a causal factor, SES might therefore be a confounding factor that is related to the endowment in time and money necessary for sport. Although this may explain the lower level of sport participation among persons with a lower SES found in large scale studies (e.g., Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2010), it does not mean that persons with a lower SES cannot possess sporting capital (the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in sport). In chapter 9, it became clear that persons with a lower SES might have a similar sport identity and a similar socialisation into sports as persons with a higher SES. In a similar vein, it can be hypothesised that there are persons with a higher SES that have no sport identity. It seems short sighted to regard SES as an explanatory factor for sport participation. Although large scale studies do show differences in participation rates, individual cases show that stratification along SES lines is not absolute. This finding is in line with Birchwood et al. (2008), who suggested that the propensity to play sport is relatively independent of SES (p.291). This would mean that the fields of sport and family are less interrelated by SES than assumed by Bourdieu (1978, 1984).

In conclusion, school sport does not affect the sport identity of children who already have a strong sport identity. In a similar vein, no indications were found that school sport participation might stimulate the formation of the sport identity for children with a lower sport identity. Parents seem to be dominant in developing a sport identity for children with a lower as well as a higher SES. As sport identity can be regarded as a strong predictor of sport participation (e.g., Brewer, et al., 1993; Curry & Weiss, 1989; Lau, et al., 2006; see also chapter 2 of this thesis), the studies in this thesis suggest that participation in school sports, at least the initiatives studied in this thesis, will not lead to changes in sport participation rates on the long term. The strong correlation found between sport identity and sport participation suggests that the inclination to participate in (school) sports can better be explained by the possession of a sport identity instead of the socio-economic status of youngsters.
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This means that policy endeavours aimed at increasing sport participation levels of youngsters with a lower SES background might not be effective, as SES is not a decisive factor in sport socialisation. Interventions might be more successful when they focus on the development of a sport identity, by means of a realistic introduction into the socio-cultural aspects of sport participation. Future studies should investigate whether interventions aimed at developing a sport identity are indeed more effective, as is hypothesised in this thesis.

School bonding

In policy, sports that are organised in cooperation with schools are often suggested to have effects that are related to school achievements or academic aspirations (European Commission, 2011; Ministry of VWS, 2008a, 2011a; Ministry of VWS & Ministry of OCW, 2008). Studies from Anglo-Saxon countries indeed indicated relationships between school sport participation, school grades, academic aspirations and reductions in school drop-out (e.g., Bailey, et al., 2009; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Melnick, et al., 1992). In chapter 6, it was suggested that this relationship can be explained by the effect that school sport participation in the USA has on school bonding (e.g., Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Stokvis, 2009; Sturm, et al., 2011). However, given the different cultural context of school sports, it is the question whether this relationship also exists in the Netherlands (see chapter 6). Therefore, a second research question of this thesis was whether school sport participation in the Netherlands is related to school bonding.

In chapter 6, school sports in the Netherlands were found to differ markedly from school sports in the USA in the competitiveness, intensity, prestige, the status that student-athletes can derive from school sports and the use of eligibility criteria. Because of these differences, it was hypothesised that school sports in the Netherlands was not related to school bonding.

The study described in chapter 7 showed that neither participating in a sporting club at the campus, nor participating in a sporting club located elsewhere was related to school bonding. These findings were confirmed in the study described in chapter 8, in which no relationship was found between participation in a school sport competition and school bonding. Although participants enjoyed participating in the school sports, they did not appear to associate this enjoyment with the relationship they have with their school. It may be that if the competitiveness, intensity and prestige that can be gained from participating in school sports would be more similar to the USA, a school bonding effect might be
found. However, the specific organisation of youth sports in independent clubs in
the Netherlands (see chapter 5 and 6) does not leave much room for school sports
to develop in a way that a more explicit and intense relationship with the school
is possible.

Based on the findings in chapter 7 and 8, it can be concluded that school
sport participation in the Netherlands is not related to school bonding, as was
hypothesised in chapter 6.

The potential of school sport

The lack of a relationship between school sport participation, sport identity and
school bonding does not mean that organising school sport is useless. First, school
sport does seem to attract some children that are not a member of a sporting club:
37% in the school sport competition described in chapter 8 and 23% in a large scale
study on school and sports in the Netherlands (Stuij, et al., 2011). This means that
for these youngsters, school sport does seem to offer an introduction into sports
in which they can sample multiple sports. This sampling function of PE and school
sport was also found in the study described in chapter 9 and can be considered
an important basis on which sport socialisation can build (Macphail, et al., 2003;
Macphail & Kirk, 2006). Especially for youngsters lower in SES, this sampling of new
sports might serve as an instructional context in which they can be introduced to
the rules, techniques and tactics of certain sports (technical aspects of sporting
capital) (Stuij, 2013; see also chapter 9). However, based on the findings in this
thesis, it can be questioned what the relevance of such an introduction is if they are
not introduced to the social aspects of sporting capital. In a similar vein, it can be
argued that many government initiatives, ‘sport-friendly’ neighbourhoods, sport
introductions of sport federations and play courts can provide an introduction
into sports. This means that many, if not most, children will be introduced to the
technical aspects of sporting capital. Nevertheless, the studies in this thesis have
shown no indication of the formation of a sport identity during the introduction
into sports through school sports. This can be explained by the dominance of the
parents in sport socialisation (chapter 9) and the finding that the school context
does not offer the opportunity to develop the socio-cultural aspects of sporting
capital (Dagkas & Stathi, 2007; Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Stuij, 2013; see also chapter
9). Without these aspects of sporting capital, long-term sport participation is not
very likely. It would be interesting to study the engagement in sports of participants
in school sports and other government initiatives after the specific projects ended.
Based on the framework presented in this thesis, it can be hypothesised that not
many will start or continue participating in sports, if they did not participate in sport before the sport stimulation programme started. If sport is not part of the internalised behaviour (sport identity), it is unlikely that sport will become a robust behaviour that becomes part of the identity and is continued in the long run.

However, as said before, the introduction into sports that school sports might offer to some, can be a good basis on which sport socialisation can build. In the Netherlands, this means that school sports should be organised in a way that not only the technical aspects of sporting capital are learned. In order to stimulate the formation of a sport identity, school sports should introduce children to a socially and culturally relevant context of sport participation, in which the socio-cultural aspects of sporting capital can be learned. Given the specific youth sport context in the Netherlands (see chapter 5), this means that school sports should introduce students to the social context of the sporting club. This is possible in different organisational structures that might serve as a starting point for discussing the future of school sports in the Netherlands (Reijgersberg, Lucassen, Pot, & Hilvoorde, 2012). Four possible scenarios can be proposed: (i) school sporting clubs that offer training and competition in different sports, (ii) multiple-sport platforms in which the school can mediate between students and sporting clubs, (iii) school sport events in non-traditional sports (e.g., mud-race; free-running) that focus on participation instead of winning, and (iv) school sport competitions with several local, regional and national rounds (Reijgersberg, et al., 2012). These alternative organisational structures of school sport might increase the potential to influence the sport identity, as they offer more insight into the social connotations of club and competitive sports (Reijgersberg, et al., 2012).

A second way in which school sport can be valuable is the capital that the mere experiences with sport seem to offer. From the notes taken during the studies and informal talks with the participants of the studies presented in this thesis, it can be concluded that the participants considered sport participation or sport experiences to be a status symbol. Participants were very happy to talk about their sport experiences and did this with a lot of pride and enjoyment. In that sense, being sporty acted as a form of capital in itself, which might be converted into other forms of (economic, cultural and social) capital (Driscoll & Wood, 1999; Stempel, 2006). Therefore, the sport experiences during school sport participation might assist in transcending SES stratifications in other spheres of society.

A third merit of school sport is the finding that most students consider it great fun. For instance, participants in the school sport competition described in chapter
8, graded the competition with an 8.8 out of ten (Pot & Hilvoorde, 2011). The importance of having fun and enjoying sports should not be underestimated, as they often serve as motivations to stay engaged in sports (e.g., Allender, et al., 2006). School sports can therefore have the important role in letting children experience the enjoyment that sports can bring. However, in an age of accountability, hard to measure outcomes (such as enjoyment) might be not enough to substantiate the existence of school sport and continue the (financial) endorsement of the government (Feingold, 2013).

**Limitations and future research directions**

Some limitations of the studies presented in this thesis need to be considered. First, the relationship between habitus, sporting capital and sport identity can be discussed. The concept of sporting capital is used to describe the technical and social/cultural aspects of sport participation. In this thesis, these aspects of sporting capital were expected to have an influence on the sport identity, in a similar way as Bourdieu described capital to influence the formation of the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2006). It can therefore be suggested that identity and habitus are adjacent concepts (Bottero, 2010; Zevenbergen, 2006). Nevertheless, it was decided to use the concept of sport identity for two main reasons. First, sport identity is more reflexive in response to (new) social contexts that are encountered. Bourdieu (1984) already acknowledged that the habitus is open to change when new social contexts are encountered (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2012; Wacquant, 2006). However, habitus is still expected to be strongly dependent on (cultural) inheritance. This appears to contradict with changing sport participation patterns and choices for sport. In this thesis, it was argued that identity, when regarded from identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), shows a similar influence of the social environment as Bourdieu suggested. In addition, sport identity incorporates the influence that skills have on the identity, albeit in a more flexible manner than suggested by Bourdieu. Second, sport identity was easier to measure using a validated questionnaire (Brewer, et al., 1993; Cieslak, 2004) in contrast to the rather hard to operationalise concept of habitus.

Another point to discuss with regard to the theoretical framework is that the transmission of capital is a rather opaque process that often happens during a longer period of socialisation. Therefore, in order to get a clear understanding of the ways in which sporting capital is acquired, more longitudinal studies are needed. Although the study presented in chapter 8 gives some insight into the process of sport socialisation, more longitudinal studies investigating (changes in)
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The process of sport socialisation must be conducted. The absence of a socialising effect of school sport on sport identity, concluded in chapter 8, may be explained by the short duration of the study. However, this does not change anything about the conclusions of the study, as most interventions aimed at increasing sport identity are of short duration as well.

Many other studies in the field of school and sport measure easier to measure outcomes, such as school grades, fundamental movement skills, physical activity (e.g., with a pedometer), sporting club membership or motor skills. However, from a sociological perspective, these variables are not very informative about long-term sport participation. Therefore, in this thesis the incorporation of social context in school sport studies was stressed. This resulted in the use of the concept of sport identity that is informative about the chances on long-term sport participation. Trying to measure identity formation and socialisation processes is probably harder and less reliable than measuring the outcomes described before. Nevertheless, studies like the ones described in this thesis are indispensable when trying to increase the validity of school sport studies, as “sports participation is multi-dimensional and the ‘causal’ explanation is likely, therefore, to be multi-factorial” (Green, et al., 2013, p. 11). For that reason a multi-methodological approach was taken in this thesis. Although this increased the external validity, this multi-methodological approach might had a negative impact on the reliability of the studies (Goodwin & Horowitz, 2002). The choice for external validity in favour of reliability was made because the general aim of this thesis was to contribute to a richer and deeper understanding of the determinants of sport participation and the role of the school context therein. In contrast to what sometimes seems to be practice in educational research, it was attempted to measure what is considered valuable, instead of valuing what can be measured easily (Biesta, 2010). Future studies should therefore apply a multi-method, multi-disciplinary approach in order to increase the understanding of sport socialisation.

The studies in this thesis are limited to school sports in the Dutch context. This means that sport socialisation was interpreted as socialisation into organised sports in independent sporting clubs, as that is the main youth sport context in the Netherlands. Given the importance of the cultural context on school sport participation and socialisation (see chapter 6), it can be argued that the relationship between school sports participation, identity formation and school bonding is stronger in countries where sport is more integrated in the school context. However, also in countries where sports have a more prominent place in
the PE curriculum, the school context only has a marginal role in sport socialisation (Devis-Devis, et al., 2013; Evans & Davies, 2010; Green, 2012). However, it has to be noted that these studies focussed more on PE instead of extra-curricular school sports. Given the influence of the cultural context of school sports on the effects that participating in school sports may have, school sport studies should always be interpreted in the light of the cultural context in which the studies were performed. This means that the results of the studies described in chapter 7, 8 and 9 may not be applicable to other countries. Moreover, it is very likely that even other school sport initiatives in the Netherlands generate different results. However, what the studies do show is that the effects expected from school sports are not as straightforward as suggested in policy and that policy-makers and scholars should be aware of the influence of the specific cultural context of school sports (chapter 6). A conclusion that is applicable in a wider context is that results of sport studies should not be ‘over generalised’ and context specific research is necessary. Therefore, more studies in the specific Dutch (school) sport context should be performed in the future, in order to inform policy and practice in the Netherlands in a reliable way.

It can be argued that other variables than school sport have an influence on how the sport identity can be developed, for instance, religion, ethnicity, sex, PE, neighbourhood characteristics, economic and time barriers and the accessibility of sport facilities. Although some of these potential determinants of sport identity have been discussed in the studies described in chapter 7, 8 and 9, the thesis was mainly focussed on school sports. In chapter 8 and 9, it was indicated that age and ethnic background may have an influence on how sport socialisation takes place. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies should focus on a broader range of socialising contexts and on how they influence people from different ages, sex, ethnic backgrounds and dispositions in sport identity.

**Implications for policy and practice**

Many governments, including the Dutch, aim at improving the health of youngsters by means of increasing sport participation levels (e.g., European Commission, 2011; Ministry of OCW, 2012). Often, the school has been put forward as a context that can contribute to stimulating sport participation. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, a relevant question is whether sport participation is healthy all together and whether the amount of physical activity provided during PE and school sport makes a significant contribution to overall physical activity levels
Moreover, there are indications that (‘healthy’ levels of) physical activity is not as stratified as sporting club membership (Nielsen, et al., 2012). This means that increasing sport participation levels might be of limited value with regard to health goals.

The results of this thesis have some implications for the aim of increasing sport participation for health reasons. In this thesis, it has been argued that long-term sport participation is strongly related to predispositions that have been formed early in life (see part I). Furthermore, it was found that the location of the sporting club (either near the school or at another place) is not related to differences in sport identity (chapter 7), that school sport participation does not stimulate the formation of a sport identity (chapter 8) and that the school is not experienced as a socialising context for sport participation (chapter 9). Therefore, it can be argued that policy interventions aimed at increasing sport participation by means of school sport, at least in the Dutch school sport context, are in vain. Given the strong role of the family in the formation of the sport identity (see chapter 9), it is likely that the family characteristics determine the boundaries within which policy campaigns, school sport or friends can be effective in increasing levels of sport participation or stimulating continued participation in sports (Birchwood, et al., 2008). Green et al. (2013) expressed this as follows:

"Whether or not young people start or stop participating in sport or, for that matter, increase or decrease their levels of participation as they approach and negotiate adolescence and adulthood may very well depend upon pre-dispositions that have been formed earlier in life (Birchwood et al., 2008) rather than any well-meaning policy interventions or, for that matter, lengthened education." (p.11)

Merely trying to increase sport participation is very likely to be unsuccessful when socio-cultural aspects of sport participation are not recognised (Haycock & Smith, 2011). Therefore, focussing policies and practices aimed at stimulating long-term sport participation on the formation of a sport identity will increase their chances of success. This can be done by incorporating more socio-cultural aspects of sports into school sport and PE, in a wide variety of activities and contexts (Devis-Devis, et al., 2013). Alternative forms of organisation that might lead to the formation of sport identity have been suggested (Reijgersberg, et al., 2012).

Another finding relevant to policy-makers is that socio-economic status might not be a determining factor in how sport socialisation works (chapter 9). This means
that policy interventions aimed at increasing sport participation levels should not merely focus on families and schools in lower SES neighbourhoods and children from lower SES families. Instead, they should focus on youngsters not endowed with sporting capital.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this thesis can be summarised as follows:

- Sport is more than techniques and tactics, the social context is crucial.
- School sport participation has no influence on sport identity.
- School sport participation appears to be subject to self-selection.
- Sport identity rather than socio-economic status should be the focus of policy.
- In the Netherlands, school sport might influence sport identity if organised differently.
- School sport participation in the Netherlands is not related to school bonding.
- School sport is considered fun. Policy-makers should be careful with expectations beyond mere enjoyment.
- Policy and practice should be informed with context relevant research.

The findings in this thesis might pose a rather pessimistic view on the potential that school sports have for changing sport participation patterns. As sport participation is expected to offer health benefits (e.g., European Commission, 2011; Ministry of OCW, 2012), school sport may not have the effects desired by policy-makers. However, this thesis should not be regarded as a critique to the practice of school sports. It provides insight in the way in which sport socialisation takes place and the potential role that the school context can play in that process. In order to actually contribute to sport socialisation, it is suggested that more of the personal, socio-cultural aspects of sport participation should be incorporated in the organisation of school sports.

There are no indications that school sport, as it is presently organised in the Netherlands, contributes to the development of the sport identity and school bonding of youngsters. This means that school sports, in the broadest sense of the definition, is no omnipotent intervention that stimulates sport participation and school bonding for everyone, everywhere and every time. However, many (school) sport initiatives are considered a lot of fun by the participants, which provides a raison d’être in itself. This implies that sport participation should be considered an end in itself, as opposed to a means to an end, as it is commonly used in sport policies in the last decades.