

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 3¹

Are we a sporting nation – what are the levels of Sporting Capital in England?

Introduction

This Resource Sheet¹ examines the levels of Sporting Capital in the English adult population. Using a 10 point scale – the Sporting Capital Index – it shows how Sporting Capital is distributed by age, sex and social class. The potential for inequities in Sporting Capital across different social groups is introduced. The implications for public policy and practice are summarised.

What is Sporting Capital?

Sporting Capital is analogous to the theory of Human Capital and may be defined as:

“The stock of physical, social and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time.” It is a theory that can help us to better understand and explain

sporting behaviour across individuals, communities and populations. More information about the nature of Sporting Capital and its important characteristics is provided in **Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1**.

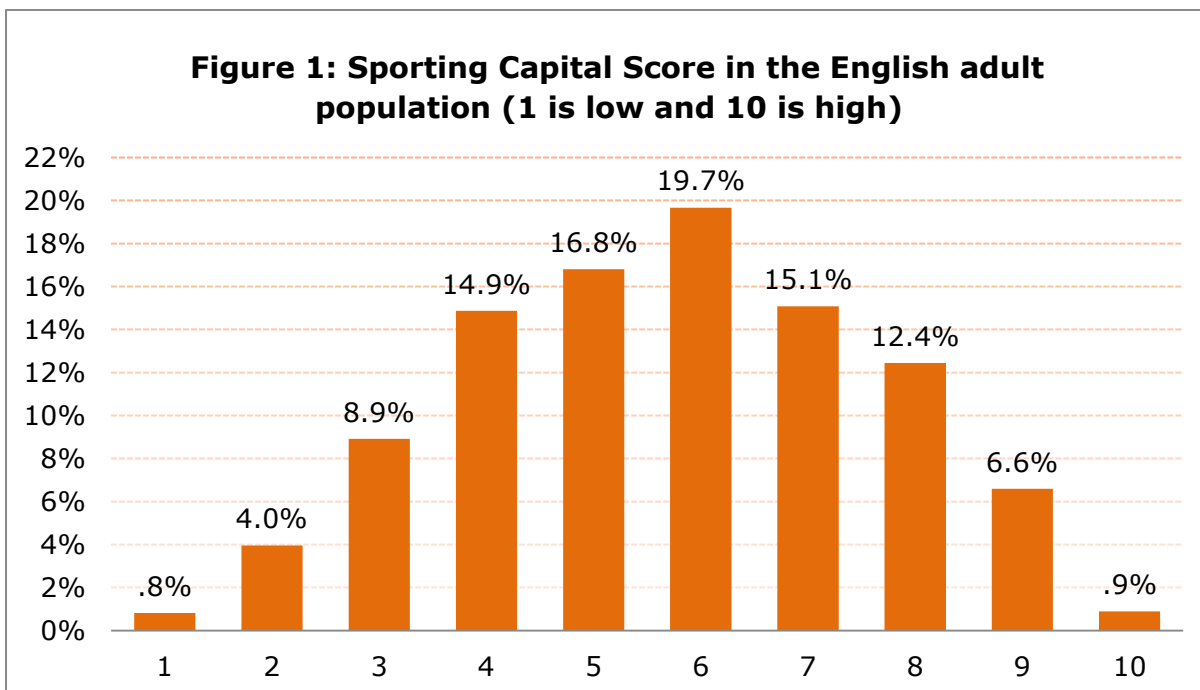
The level of Sporting Capital in the English adult population – how ‘sporty’ is the English nation?

The stock of Sporting Capital, unlike the direct experience of participation, can be built up and stored over time. The theory suggests that this stock has a shelf life and without use (participation) that it will depreciate – the speed, or rate of depreciation without use, varying from individual to individual. However, unlike participation which is transient in nature and subject to short term fluctuations – dropping in, dropping out, a week off here, a month off there – Sporting Capital is more durable. Sporting Capital may be thought of as the ‘locked in potential for participation’ – and to this extent is a better underlying measure of the ‘sportiness’ of a community, group or nation than participation rates per se. The expression or realisation of that locked in potential in terms of actual participation is, however, mediated by the external constraints and barriers that impact on an individual including other competing demands for their time, the accessibility and quality of opportunities available and

¹ This Resource Sheet was prepared by Nick Rowe with analytical support from Oliver Norden at TNS-BMRB. It was commissioned by StreetGames and published in April 2013.

the price at which they can be accessed (see **Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1** for a fuller discussion of the impact of external constraints and opportunities on participation). Sporting Capital was measured using data from the household interview sample of Active People Survey 6 (APS6).² The mean Sporting Capital Index score³ for the adult population aged 16 and over is 5.7. Figure 1 shows how the level of Sporting Capital in England is distributed across the 10 point Index scale. Although the distribution takes the form of a 'normal curve' it is slightly skewed towards the positive end of the scale. So for example there are more people with a Sporting Capital Index score of 9 than a score of 2 and more with a score of 8 than of 3.

Given the lack of comparative data with other countries - any classification would have to be a relative measure - it is not possible to say whether or not this level of Sporting Capital would classify England as a 'sporting nation'. There is no doubt that England does have a rich history and tradition of sport – factors that culturally would dispose it towards relatively high levels of Sporting Capital compared with many other countries in the world. However, although the evidence on Sporting Capital is not available – it would be reasonable to assume that countries like Sweden, Norway and Finland that have higher rates of participation in sport than we find in England also have higher levels of Sporting Capital and or fewer constraints and barriers that make participation more difficult. It would be interesting to obtain empirical evidence to explore this further.



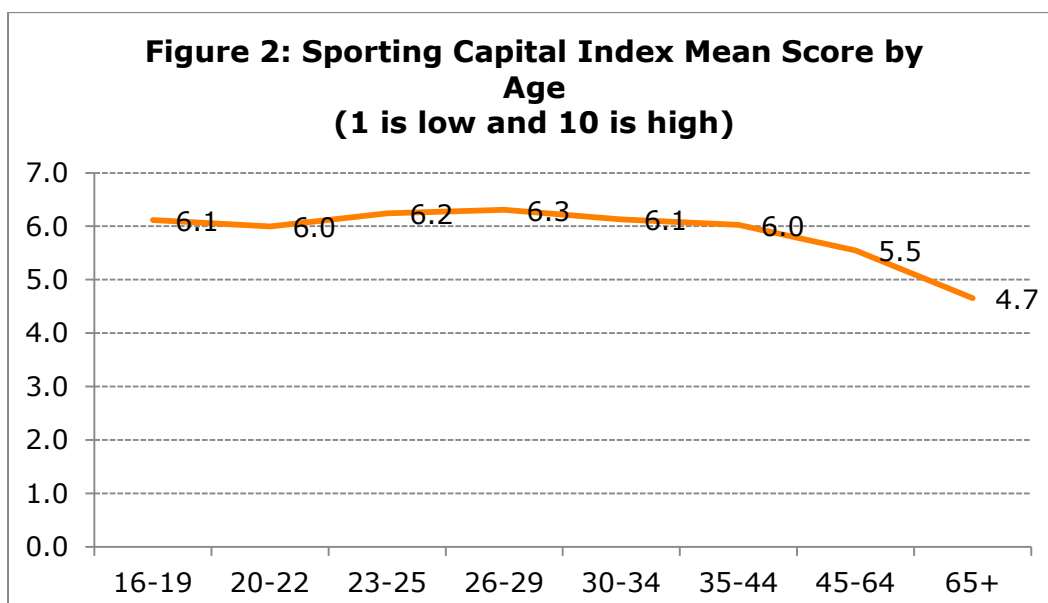
² Data was used from Sport England’s Active People Survey. The analysis in this report is carried out on the household survey sample collected in APS6 (October 2011 to October 2012) of the APS6 survey period. The sample size used in this analysis was 4,527 cases. For more information about the Active People Survey see: http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx

³ See **Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 2** for more information on the Sporting Capital Index

The impact of age, gender and social class on levels of Sporting Capital

The levels of participation in sport in England are structured socially and economically with men historically participating at higher rates than women, the young participating more than the old and those in the higher social class groups having higher rates of participation than those in the lower groups. Given the strong relationship between participation in sport and Sporting Capital (see **Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 2**) it is to be expected that Index Scores will vary by age, gender and social class in similar ways. However, as discussed above, *Sporting Capital is not a measure of participation* – it is a measure of “*the stock of physical, social and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time.*” To this extent it cannot be assumed that the profile of Sporting Capital across different social groups and associated inequalities will match the profile of participation.

Figure 2 shows how mean levels of Sporting Capital change with age. It is interesting to note that there is little change in the levels between the ages of 16 and 44 years and yet we know that participation rates in sport decline significantly over the same ages – by about 40%. How can this be the case? These results suggest that while the locked in potential to participate – i.e. the stock of Sporting Capital – is maintained until the mid 40’s the external barriers and constraints that make participation more difficult increase. These barriers include, for example, the pressures of work, the demands of raising a family, other competing demands for time including other leisure choices, a lack of suitable places to play or at least an awareness of the opportunities available and financial pressures that impact on affordability.



After the age of 44 there is a significant decline in mean Sporting Capital scores which inevitably is associated with continued declines in participation. Many in this age group will look back to their younger selves and will see their Sporting Capital as a thing of the past that was enjoyed at the time but is not to be regained or even aspired to now they are older. Yet the theory would suggest that it is never too late to re-build Sporting Capital levels although the longer someone has been away from participating the more difficult this becomes.

Figure 3 shows how mean levels of Sporting Capital vary by gender. On average men have a Sporting Capital level that is almost one point higher than that found for women. This may not seem to be significant – but as we have seen in [Resource Sheet 2](#) the difference in the probability of participating between those on a Score of 5 and those on a score of 6 is considerable – from 15.7% to 30% respectively.

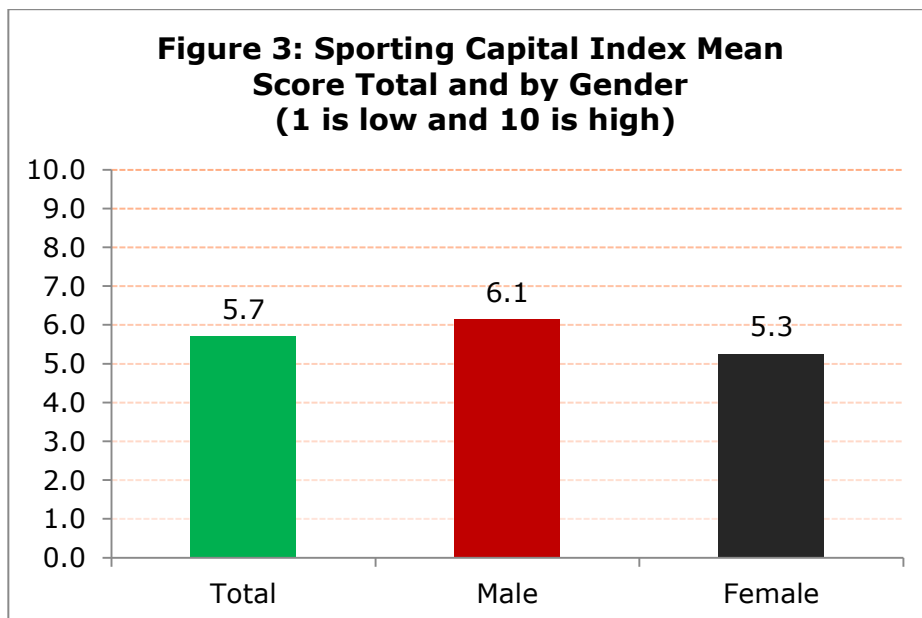
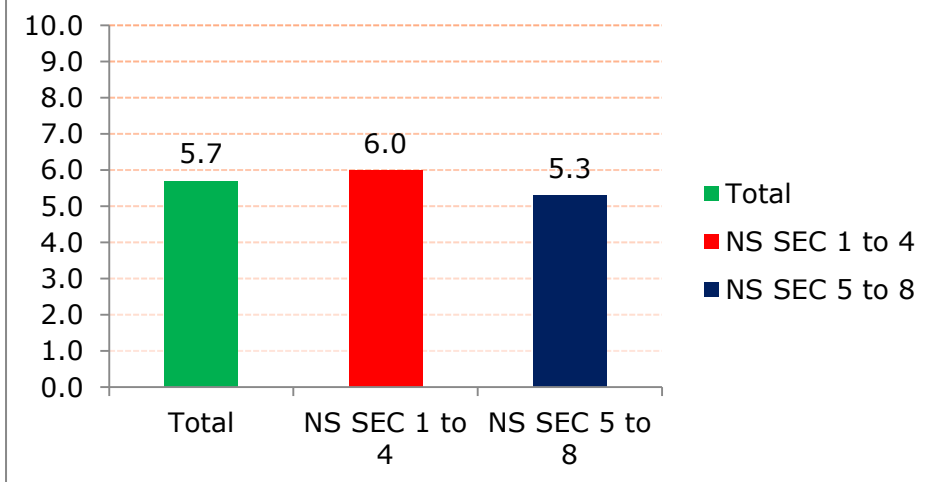


Figure 4 shows the differences in mean Sporting Capital levels between different social class groups with the highest social class group having significantly higher levels than the lowest group. These differences are very similar to those we see for gender and have same scale of impact on the probability of participating.

**Figure 4: Sporting Capital Index mean score
Total and by Social Class
(1 is low and 10 is high)**



The implications for public policy and practice

We may consider England to be a 'sporting nation' with a mean Sporting Capital Score of 5.7 and over a third of the population (35%) with a mean Sporting Capital Index Score of 7 and above. However we should also recognise that nearly three in 10 of the adult population (29%) have a Sporting Capital score of 4 or less. The evidence also shows that there are structural inequalities in the levels of Sporting Capital related to age, gender and social class. We continue to have public policy aspirations to increase the levels of participation in sport and to reduce these inequalities. There are two ways that this can be done. One is to increase the overall levels of Sporting Capital in the population and to reduce the social inequalities in how it is distributed. The other is to increase the opportunities available and to decrease the constraints and barriers that prevent people from expressing their sporting preferences in a tangible way. These two public policy approaches and their relationship to each other are explored more fully in **Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 9: Sporting Capital - why it is important to public policy – a strategic perspective**

ⁱ This Sheet is the third in a series of eleven 'Sporting Capital Resource Sheets'. The Resource Sheets are organised in way that move from the general to the more detailed and specific. The common thread is the theoretical concept of Sporting Capital and its application to public policy and practice.

Each individual Sheet has been designed to be freestanding and to make sense in its own right – the series of Sheets has been designed to provide a logical progression that builds knowledge and understanding about Sporting Capital, its characteristics, the relationship it has to participation in sport, its distribution in the population, its variation across different social groups and its potential to influence and shape future sports policy and practice.

The Sheets have been purposefully designed to be succinct and selective rather than long and comprehensive. Each should leave the reader with an interest to think further about Sporting Capital as an idea and what it may mean for their work in sports development whether at the higher strategic levels of policy making or delivering localised programmes on the ground.

All the analysis in the Sheets draws from empirical data collected by Sport England's Active People Survey (6). The analysis in these Resource Sheets is carried out on the household survey sample collected in APS6 (October 2011 to October 2012) of the APS6 survey period. The sample size used in this analysis was 4,527 cases. For more information about the methodology see the full Technical report available from StreetGames.

These Sheets build on earlier thinking and analysis in work carried out for StreetGames and available in the following publications:

Sporting Capital – a new theory of sport participation determinants and its application to 'Doorstep Sport' Nick Rowe, Sport Research Consultant, September 2012, A report commissioned by StreetGames

Part 1. What is Sporting Capital and how can its principles be applied to create a new generation of sustained sports participants?

Part 2. The Sporting Capital Index – exploring the levels of Sporting Capital in the English population and its variation across different social groups.

The following Sheets are available in this series:

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1: Sporting Capital – what is it and why is it important to sports policy and practice?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 2: What is the relationship between Sporting Capital and participation in sport and why does it matter?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 3: Are we a sporting nation – what are the levels of Sporting Capital in England?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 4: Sporting capital and gender – mind the gap

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 5: Sporting capital and inequality – does social class make a difference?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 6: To what extent do levels of Sporting Capital impact on the frequency of participation and vary by the type of sport people play?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 7: Sporting Capital and ethnicity

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 8: Sporting Capital amongst the young – a focus on 16 to 25 year olds

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 9: Sporting Capital - why it is important to public policy – a strategic perspective

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 10: Doorstep Sport - building Sporting Capital to increase participation in sport – applying the theory to practice

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 11: Sporting Capital – testing and applying the theory - future research requirements.