Participation versus performance: Managing (dis)ability, gender and cultural diversity in junior sport
Research Objectives

- Identify how diversity is understood, experienced and managed in junior sport, including identifying good practice in this domain;
- Discover how different axes of diversity intersect, and conflict with each other, in junior sports club settings;
- Assess the effectiveness of existing policy frameworks and strategies in nurturing diversity in junior sport in practice;
- Develop guidelines that junior sports organisations can use to inform their decision making and practices around managing diversity.
What did the research involve?

The project used a mixed-methods approach that involved four integrated phases conducted over a three-year period:

- **Phase 1**: In-depth interviews with junior sports participants (committee members, coaches, volunteers, parents and players) in metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.
- **Phase 2**: Survey and social network analysis (SNA) (of individual clubs).
- **Phase 3**: Observations at a sub-sample of junior sports clubs.
- **Phase 4**: Policy analysis (government, peak-body and club policy documents).
Club Members’ Understanding and Commitment

- Benefits of diversity
- Clubs understand diversity in many different ways
- Focus on single aspects of diversity
- Individual champions
The findings show a pattern of more positive and less negative social relationships at the clubs.

Figure 1: Friendship ties at Kangaroos Soccer Club

Figure 2: Differences of opinions at Kangaroos Soccer Club
Club Members’ Attitudes and Perceptions

- Female club members generally reported stronger positive attitudes towards inclusive participation and were more accepting of diverse groups participating within the club.

- High-performing players were more likely to be considered culture setters, friends and trusted people. They were also seen as key drivers towards upholding greater diversity in club culture.
Club Culture and Ways of (Not) Doing Diversity

- Clubs that supported a participation ethos (‘sport for all’) were more supportive of diversity
- How junior sports clubs are organised and structured can devalue certain forms of diversity (esp. gender and disability)
- NSO/SSOs’ diversity initiatives and resources ↔ actual use at the club level
- Perceived priority and ability to engage with diversity
- Experienced tensions between the promotion of diversity and a focus on performance
Policy Recommendations

- Let’s talk
- One size does not fit all
- Making it relevant
- Being flexible in the promotion of diversity to and within community sports clubs
Developing and Managing Diversity Champions

- Valuing and supporting diversity champions within clubs
- Getting ‘best players’ onside
- Engaging coaches as key actors in diversity practice
Club Culture

- Diversifying club leadership structures
- Critically examining club culture and norms
- Addressing tension between participation and performance
Sharing Good Practice

- Sharing local knowledge and experience
- Celebrate success
Further Information

Professor Ramón Spaaij
Institute of Health and Sport
Victoria University
Email: ramon.spaaij@vu.edu.au

cmy.net.au/publications/participation-versus-performance

playbytherules.net.au/resources/articles/practical-steps-to-support-diversity-in-sport