

Widening Participation in English Golf Clubs: Barriers to Participation and GolfMark

David Piggott, Gary Leslie & Greg Poller

School of Sport, Coaching and Exercise Science, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK

According to recent large-scale participation surveys, golf remains a highly exclusive sport in England. Indeed, English golfers are typically white, middle-class males in their mid 50s (Active People Survey, 2010). Historical studies of the game go some way towards explaining this situation by outlining various mechanisms of social exclusion in golf clubs - such as nomination processes, interviews and segregation of spaces - that helped to limit participation to those with the requisite economic, social and cultural capital (Vamplew, 2010). The purpose of this study was therefore twofold: first, to determine the extent to which these mechanisms of social exclusion remain prevalent in modern golf clubs; and second, to describe the nature of those mechanisms.

A two-step cluster analysis was performed on data from 850 golf clubs in England (44% of all clubs) in an attempt to identify clusters of clubs that shared similarities in terms of exclusivity (cost, membership demographics, ease of access). Three main clusters were identified - cheap male clubs; typical clubs; exclusive family clubs - from which three case studies were sampled for in-depth ethnographic investigation. Observations were recorded at each of the three clubs before semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of members, coaches and committee members.

The three case studies were compared and data were interpreted using concepts derived from Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1992). The institutional structures, cultural norms and everyday practices of the different golf clubs are discussed in the context of policies designed to widen participation, imposed by golf's governing body.