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1 **What Makes Teenagers Continue? A Salutogenic Approach to**

2 **Understanding Youth Participation in Swedish Club Sports**

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4

5 International studies have revealed that some of the reasons that young people engage
6 in sports are because of friends, the enjoyment of participation, and the ability to feel healthy
7 (MacPhail, Gorely and Kirk 2003; Allender, Cowburen and Foster 2006; Light, Harvey and
8 Memmert 2011). MacPhail et al. (2003) suggested that enjoyment and fun are prominent
9 reasons for young people's participation in club sports, and it is argued that sport should be
10 joyful and provide both recreational and elite investment (Côté and Hay 2002; Siedentop
11 2002; Green 2006; Swedish Sports Confederation 2011aⁱ). To provide a greater understanding
12 of why some young people continue to participate in club sports, MacPhail (2012) suggested
13 that further research should be conducted using qualitative methods to get in-depth insight
14 into individuals' experiences and perceptions of club sports (see also for example, Thomas,
15 Nelson and Silverman 2005). The intention in this article is to let young people's own voices
16 be heard regarding why they participate in sports clubs (see also Light 2008; Wright and
17 Macdonald 2010; O'Sullivan and MacPhail 2010).

18 In Sweden, many children participate in club sports during their childhood or youth,
19 but many drop out in their late teens (Franzén and Peterson 2004; Trondman 2005; Blomdahl
20 and Elofsson 2006; Thedin Jakobsson et al. 2012). Furthermore, few children take up sports
21 after twelve years of age (Thedin Jakobsson et al. 2012). Why do some youngsters stay and
22 what can we learn from that? Rather than concentrating on those who drop out of club sports
23 (see, for example, Franzén and Peterson 2004; Molinero et al. 2006; Light and Lémonie
24 2010), the focus of this article is on those who are non-elite participants but, nevertheless,
25 continue during their teenage years.

Studies about young peoples' sports participation deal with youngsters in their early teens (see, for example, MacPhail et al. 2003; Light and Curry 2009; Light et al. 2011), but few have focused on sports participation by those in their mid- to late teens (15–19 years old) who are not elite sportspeople. By illuminating the experiences of non-elite participants, the overall aim is to study what makes teenagers continue to participate in club sports with a specific focus on what teenagers find meaningful and important when they participate in club sports. The results and their implications are discussed leading to suggestions for how club sports can be organized to make more teenagers participate longer. Instead of asking why teenagers drop out of sports, the focus is on why they participate. This is in line with the research questions that the sociologist Aaron Antonovsky posed and his salutogenic theory (Antonovsky 1979, 1987). Antonovsky's (1979, 1987) salutogenic theory and Sense of Coherence (SOC) model with the components of *comprehensibility*, *manageability*, and especially *meaningfulness* have served as analytic tools in the study.

A salutogenic approach

Instead of asking why people become ill, Antonovsky (1979) used a salutogenic approach and asked 'Why do they stay healthy?' (35). In other words, he concentrated on the resources for health rather than the risks of disease (Antonovsky 1979, 1987). Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence (SOC) model was developed to analyse what these health resources might consist of. He claimed that the ability to comprehend one's situation in life and the capacity to use resources explained why people in stressful situations managed to stay well and, in some cases, could even improve their health. In *Health, Stress and Coping*, Antonovsky (1979) defined SOC as:

... a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external

environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected (184).

The SOC model consists of three components. The first one, comprehensibility, is the extent to which events are perceived as making logical sense, that they are ordered, consistent, and structured. Comprehensibility is experiencing life, the internal and external, as real, tangible, and structured rather than random and inexplicable. Antonovsky (1987) wrote that, 'The stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable' (19). It is through experiences perceived as coherent and structured that comprehensibility is formed.

The second element, manageability, is the extent to which a person feels that he or she can cope. Manageability is 'the resources that are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli' (Antonovsky 1987, 19), meaning that people feel that they have the resources to meet the demands made and the challenges set in the situation they are in. Resources can be artefacts such as physical tools and equipment, but they can also include social and cultural capital, such as social relations, matching skills in the form of motor skills, or mental and cognitive abilities. A good sense of manageability is shaped by a balance between the demands and the resources that the individual has access to.

Antonovsky's third element of SOC is meaningfulness: how much one feels that life makes sense and that challenges are worthy of commitment. If a person believes that there is no reason to persist, survive, and confront challenges, if he or she has no sense of meaning, then he or she will have no motivation to comprehend and manage events. Meaningfulness, which Antonovsky also calls the 'motivational component', is, in this sense, the most important component in the SOC context. Meaningfulness constitutes 'these demands' that 'are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement' (Antonovsky 1987, 19). The term is about feeling a positive expectation of life and the future and indicates that situations in life

are challenging, interesting, and worthy of emotional commitment. Antonovsky stresses that SOC is not primarily concerned with the cognitive aspects but, rather, with the experience of being involved, engaged, and dedicated to situations in life (in sports in this study).

Antonovsky's main argument is that salutogenesis depends on experiencing a strong 'sense of coherence'. Furthermore, human resources and the conditions of the living context result from the interaction between an individual and the structures of society (Antonovsky 1979, 1987; Eriksson 2007). Antonovsky's salutogenic theory and the SOC model have been used in research on health and resilience in Sweden as well as in international research (see, for example, McCuaig and Hay 2012; Quennerstedt 2008; Eriksson 2007).

The fact that the study was inspired by Antonovsky means that I have taken the liberty of interpreting and utilizing his concept for the context of this study when posing the research question and analysing the interviews. The focus of this study is on matters related to young people's sense of coherence in sports participation. A starting point is the fact that, if young people consider their participation to be comprehensible (they understand the logic of sports), manageable (they can do what is required and they accept the conditions and rules), and meaningful (they want to be a part of it), it is more likely that they will participate longer.

The study's format and methodology

Sample selection

Purposeful sampling (Patton 2002) was used to select nine girls and nine boys between 15 and 19 years of age from eight different sports (athletics, basketball, equestrian sports, floorball, football, handball, swimming, and ultimate frisbee).ⁱⁱ The selection of sports and sports clubs was made using the Swedish Sports Confederation's database with its 69 individual sports federations (Swedish Sports Confederation 2011b). A targeted sample selection was carried out to find young people who were not among the selected sports' elite. To obtain information-rich cases (Patton 2002), clubs were contacted, and their trainers

provided me with the names of teenagers who were suited to the research aim and questions. The teenagers were then contacted via e-mail and telephone.

Collection of data

In this study, a total of eighteen in-depth interviews were conducted. They were carried out in the spring of 2008 at places close to the teenagers' sports clubs. Each interview lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and was conducted as a private conversation to encourage the respondent to talk openly about his or her experiences and for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions (Kvale 1996; Creswell 2005). After obtaining their approval, all the interviews were recorded. An interview guide was used as an aid, and the questions were semi-structured. The purpose was to combine an exploration of a number of subject areas with a certain amount of freedom in the order and scope of the questions (Patton 2002). The interviews began with questions about how the teenagers would describe themselves. Thereafter, the questions focused on the teenagers' reasons for continuing with sports and the factors that made it easier or harder. All of the interviews were carried out in accordance with ethical guidelines (Kvale 1996).

Transcription and analysis

The purpose of a qualitative interview is usually considered in terms of trying to understand the world as indicated by the interview (Kvale 1996). The question is which world are we talking about. The method used and the questions posed raise theoretical questions about how a certain kind of reality is described when someone (the researcher) is asking someone else (the teenagers) to describe their participation in clubs sports. In light of what the young people talk about during the interview, it is possible to analyse what can be seen as being important for the teenagers in sports participation. Their opinions about their sports, their participation, what they have to manage and comprehend describe something about sports practice, which seems to be meaningful and of importance to continuing club sports. In

125 the analyses of the interviews, the salutogenic theory has been used as a theoretical
126 framework. The SOC components, as described earlier in the article (see also Antonovsky
127 1987), should be seen as analytic tools that are, ‘good to think with’. The SOC components
128 are not separate elements but, rather, intertwined and related to the total situation of the
129 respondents’ sports participation (see also Antonovsky 1979).

130 The analysis began with writing field notes immediately after the interviews, listening
131 to the recordings, and then reading the transcripts word for word several times. During the
132 listening and reading, notes were made in the text, especially regarding the question, ‘What
133 does this statement say about participation in club sports?’ Once a whole transcript had been
134 reviewed, the initial notes were transformed into concise phrases that captured the essence of
135 what was reported. These phrases were listed so that the process of grouping them into themes
136 could begin (Patton 2002).

137 In all the interviews, the young people said that they participated in sports because
138 ‘doing sports is fun’. They described their sporting activities as fun and enjoyable, which
139 seemed to be the reason why they were willing to spend time and energy continuing their
140 sports. This is in line with the findings of previous studies (Wankel and Kreisel 1985;
141 MacPhail et al. 2003; Trondman 2005; Light and Lémonie 2010; Light et al. 2011).

142 According to Côté and Hay (2002) and Franzén and Peterson (2004), young people drop out
143 when they no longer experience sports as being fun, although drop out can of course also be
144 resistant or reluctant dropouts (see for example Klint and Weiss 1986). Since my intention
145 was to gain a deeper understanding of ‘what makes teenagers continue participate in sports’
146 and the teenagers said, ‘It is fun’, I explored a corollary question, ‘What makes sports fun?’
147 By using SOC’s analytic tools, several aspects of fun emerged that I consider to be closely
148 related to meaningfulness, which contributes greatly to a sense of coherence in the lives of the
149 teenage participants. More precisely, expressions associated with meaningfulness, such as

participation, involvement, enjoyment, solidarity, interest, motivation, and belief in the future, are utilized in the analysis (Antonovsky 1979, 1987; Hagström, Redemo and Larsson 2000; Cederblad and Hansson 1995). These expressions are also the foundation of the component of meaningfulness (Antonovsky 1987). In this article, I present the following meaningfulness-related themes that emerged in the analysis of the empirical data: *to experience, learn, and develop; to compete—the struggle is challenging; and enjoyment, involvement, and engagement with others.*

To experience, learn, and develop

The interview began by asking the respondent to talk about himself or herself. Almost immediately, he or she talked about the fun and joy of engaging in sports. Anna said the following:

Int: Please introduce yourself.

Ann: Yes, my name is Anna. I'm 15 years old and I paint, draw, and illustrate a lot during my free time.

Int: Paint and draw?

Ann: Mmhm, and also I really like dancing and playing frisbee. It's really great fun.

When Anna was asked to specify what 'great fun' meant and the reasons that she both dances and plays ultimate frisbee, she said that she dances because she likes the challenge of learning and developing new moves, and she plays ultimate frisbee mainly to meet friends (this will be explained more in the third theme). Similar descriptions of what fun is and what gives meaning in doing sports were repeated in all the interviews. Participation in various sports seems to satisfy different needs, but not primarily to compete and train to become the best. Instead, club sports seem to bring joy, meaning, and opportunities for development and

174 learning. Patrik said, 'You play football to have fun; it's the whole point of football'. At the
175 same time, it is about learning and developing something. I asked the following question:

176 Int: Could you describe why you do sports?

177 Patrik: To have fun. You always are dying to play football. . . . You kind
178 of want to develop and learn things.

179 The fun was explained in terms of 'learning something completely new', 'coping with
180 and successfully doing something you have practised for a long time', 'perfecting a particular
181 move', 'increasing your understanding of the game or the logic of the specific sport', and/or
182 'learning to play and train with others'. Several of the teenagers did more than one sport
183 because they wanted to learn new moves and develop different skills. Apparently,
184 participating in one sport is not always enough. They were often involved in sports with
185 various logics and practices, such as individual and team sports; goal sports with a ball, such
186 as handball or football; and aesthetic sports involving music, such as different sorts of
187 dancing. By participating in different sports, they were given opportunities to acquire various
188 forms of physical, cognitive, and social development. Anna said, 'It's fun, you dance, you
189 learn choreography', while Erik, who plays handball, specified the fun and the
190 meaningfulness in playing through developing to become a better player and increasing his
191 understanding of the game:

192 Erik: Developing, for me, is being able to understand the game; how it's
193 set up for the opposing team's attackers; being able to read it
194 quickly, efficiently;...and getting better individually. Being able to
195 shoot harder and being able to develop and understand the
196 formation and having a great understanding of the game and being
197 a part of the game. That's meaningful and developing, for me.

198 The young people's descriptions reveal the importance of mastering technique,
199 developing motor skills, being physically fit, and having the cognitive ability to understand
200 what sports is about and to be able to do what is necessary. Having fun in a sports
201 performance requires that the young people are resilient and have the patience to train, which,
202 in turn, is a prerequisite for developing more complex motor skills. Understanding how and
203 what one should practise and being able to do whatever is required are a part of
204 comprehensibility and manageability and a necessity for a sense of meaningfulness and the
205 SOC (Antonovsky 1987). Learning and development were described by interviewees as
206 abilities that they should understand and cope with, often expressed in terms of feelings and
207 experiences, such as 'the wonderful feeling when everything is right, correct, a feeling in your
208 body'. Peter said:

209 ... once you get it to work, when you've practised, when everything works,
210 then you've achieved some kind of ultimate frisbee heaven, so to speak. When it
211 feels right, the exercise you've done over and over again.

212 The descriptions included examples, such as the fact that, when they had practised
213 enough for the exercises or activities to have become automatic, they could enjoy, rather than
214 merely perform, the body movements. They were described as pleasurable feelings that were
215 experienced throughout the body, a sense of 'here and now' that was difficult to express in
216 words because it is perceived by the body and is not primarily cognitive. It can be understood
217 in terms of what Csikszentmihalyi (1975) called 'flow'. It is a feeling that makes the
218 experience strong and something they do not want to be without. The SOC is embedded in the
219 body experience and seems to be reinforced by physical activity and participating in sports
220 with others during training and competition. Meaningfulness, in terms of learning and
221 development, seems to be prominent and a very good reason for the investment of time and
222 commitment. Similar results were found by Gonçalves, Carvalho and Light (2011).

223 *To compete—the struggle is challenging*

224 By training hard, the teenagers are disciplined in a specific competitive sporting
225 activity. Club sports provide opportunities to structure one's life, which seems to be of great
226 importance. The respondents often described that engaging in sports made them feel strong,
227 both mentally and physically. However, there was little interest in working out on their own
228 or in groups to simply keep in shape. Sara described non-competitive group trainingⁱⁱⁱ as
229 follows:

230 Sara: But otherwise, Friskis and Svettis [group fitness training] is a good
231 option. I've not . . . I've not given it a try, but it looks really
232 boring.

233 Int: Oh . . . why?

234 Sara: Well, I don't know . . . it feels so pointless when you, well, cos I
235 love to compete, so I've noticed when I've improved. It feels like
236 when you go there [Friskis and Svettis], you run back and forth a
237 bit and so you don't get anything out of it. . . .

238 'Getting something out of it' is the same as having a goal to train for, which may
239 require competing and playing matches. Just working out or physical training for its own sake
240 or the sake of fitness does not play a prominent role for Sara. She needs challenges,
241 excitement, and the struggle of the moment, which she gets when she competes in athletics.
242 Training alone or training to invest in increased physical fitness did not seem to appeal to the
243 teenagers. Instead, training was linked to personal and team improvement. Lisa gave the
244 following answer as to why she trains at a club instead of on her own:

245 Lisa: No, but, to train . . . (laughs), to feel good, you've got to do some
246 cos . . . physical activity . . .

247 Int: Mm.

248 Lisa: And . . . so just going to the gym or running, you get a lot out of it,
249 too, but it's so much more fun to do it for a goal.

250 Int: Mm.

251 Lisa And together with others.

252 Int: Mm.

253 Lisa; To, yes, compete and it . . . it's a totally different thing if you're in
254 a club.

255 Tournaments and match situations are predicated on the logic that one must compete
256 to beat others. One of the teenagers highlighted this as important and meaningful, while others
257 described their own or their teams' task-oriented performance as important. The focus is on
258 the struggle of the moment. It is not primarily the competition and the match with its logic of
259 ranking, winning, and losing that the teenagers find meaningful even though they are all
260 educated in these principles. Instead, meaningfulness and fun are experienced in terms of the
261 challenge in the actual struggle itself. The excitement is to have a goal to look forward to,
262 where one can test oneself together with others. Lotta described it as follows:

263 Lotta: It's to see how far you can push yourself, how fast you can run,
264 how far you can jump, and so on.

265 The challenge has to be on 'equal' terms. For Lotta in this study it is not enjoyable if the
266 games are too one-sided. Lotta continued:

267 In floorball, it's the case that our best result is when we won ten-
268 nil, but perhaps it was cos the other team was rubbish, not cos we
269 were good.

270 The challenge is not primarily to compete to win even if it is the dominant practice in
271 club sports, but more the challenge itself as a game (see Engström 2008). Patrik believes that

272 to continue participating in a sport where the main goal is winning, one must understand and
273 be capable of playing the sport:

274 Patrik: Sometimes, you're shattered and you don't want to go . . . but then
275 . . . if you don't go and practise and train, then they won't let you
276 play matches. And you want to play matches, so that's why you go
277 anyway. . . . Something where you've got to fight, where you've
278 got to make an effort, you must fight but not just win, so here . . .
279 you will have to fight to win, but, at the same time, it's not "the
280 winning" that is important.

281 The competition is both motivating and enjoyable, but the emphasis is more on the
282 challenge than becoming the winner. Young people described the competition and games as a
283 motivating factor in developing their own sporting ability and a common goal to unite the
284 team or training groups. However, they do not have sporting ambitions that are defined by
285 success in elite sports.

286 The teenagers often return to the importance of knowing that they have mastered the
287 sports and competition. As they grow older, greater demands are placed on them in terms of
288 having sufficient physical and mental skills to handle competitive elements. The competition
289 is a part of the sport's logic that is emphasized to a greater extent after the age of 12 (Côté and
290 Hay 2002; Swedish Sports Confederation 2011a). Even though most of the teenagers said that
291 it is fun and meaningful to compete, not all of them appreciate it. For Lotta, who was quoted
292 earlier, it is meaningful to participate in club sports to improve and be a part of a training
293 group, but she prefers not to compete. The actual racing is not meaningful or motivating, but
294 she realizes that she must do it to be able to continue at the sports club.

295 Lotta: For me, competing is not important, but I got to compete. Sure, it's
296 nice to see if you've improved and so, but it's still this . . . you still

297 have to compete to be in the club, if you say. . . . You still have to
298 compete to remain . . . to be able to still be a part of their [the
299 club's] activities.

300 The dominating practices in club sports, which are usually implicit, seem to require
301 the teenager to compete and specialize if he or she wants to continue in the training group.
302 Young people must, therefore, understand that the purpose is to compete, be able to handle
303 competitive situations, and be willing to be a part of the contest.

304 ***Enjoyment, involvement, and engagement with others***

305 In the interviews, the last theme to emerge regarding what is perceived as fun and
306 meaningful in club sports is sharing experiences with others. All the young people returned to
307 the enjoyment of having training peers and the importance of feeling solidarity with both
308 participants and coaches. Other studies have shown similar results (Wankel and Kreisel 1985;
309 Coakley and White 1992; MacPhail et al. 2003; Allander et al. 2006). A common reason for
310 dropping out of sports, particularly among those of younger ages, is because friends do (Côté
311 and Hay 2002; Franzén and Peterson 2004). All the respondents said they began to play sports
312 because their classmates and friends had started at a club, but they had continued despite the
313 fact that their friends had stopped. Emma explained that she took up her current sport because
314 she wanted to make new friends and get into the class's 'girl gang':

315 Emma: I was ten years old, so uh, so I started with basketball cos it was a
316 way to make more friends.

317 Int: Mm.

318 Emma: And, uh, I was not so close to the girls in my class.

319 Int. Nah.

320 Emma: Cos I was more like a tomboy.

321 Int: Okay.

322 Emma: But it was a way to, uh, make more contact with the girls in the
323 class.

324 For Emma, participating in sports became her ticket to fellowship. Later in the interview, she
325 said, ‘You learn to socialize through sports’. She described it as ‘sisterhood’, a communion
326 with the girls in the team. She gave the example of a situation where the team was, at one
327 moment, training very seriously and hard, and the next, they were laughing and joking
328 together. Sisterhood came as a result of the players’ doing something together that involved
329 the entire body and the fact that the training was a mixture of laughter and seriousness. Emma
330 said that it differs from other forms of leisure-time social interaction where one hangs out or
331 is at home with someone or in a virtual meeting place on the Web. The variation between
332 having a specific task to solve, the game and the workout, combined with being able to switch
333 between ‘seriousness’ and ‘light-heartedness’ and sharing it with others, makes sports a
334 special phenomenon, which is perceived as the fun and meaningfulness of sports.

335 Several of the interviewees emphasized that training peers and coaches were the ones
336 who motivated them to go to practice when life felt frustrating, both because it was fun to
337 meet peers and because it was expected that everyone should participate. In some of the
338 interviews, it was evident that team spirit had sometimes been overshadowed by competition
339 and individuality, and this had led to several of the respondents’ giving up a sport and either
340 going to a new club for the same sport or taking up a different sport. Ellen stopped doing
341 gymnastics when she felt that the club’s activities had become increasingly competitive. The
342 rivalry intensified in both the club and against other clubs, with emphasized and increased
343 competition, combined with increasingly hard and unbalanced exercise programmes. The
344 following question was asked:

345 Int: Can you explain why you are now playing floorball?

346 Ellen: Gymnastics was a little more stressful and I thought I would do
347 something more social and, in that case, it became floorball.
348 Gymnastics isn't so much "we".

349 For Ellen, meaningfulness decreased as competition became more intense. Several of the
350 young people described similar situations. Asked why he had not continued with judo, Peter
351 answered as follows:

352 Peter: In judo, it was the case that I was treated as a bit of an outcast by
353 the group. They were the ones who competed and the ones the club
354 focused on. They looked down on those who had lower belts. So,
355 in the end, I couldn't stand it any longer cos I saw no point in
356 having a particular coloured belt. I was just there to have fun.

357 Peter quit because he did not value the ranking, although he understood the purpose of
358 ranking system shown by coloured belts, he did not appreciate its effects. Furthermore, he
359 could not bear the harassment in the training group.

360 Despite encountering difficulties within some sports clubs, sports seemed to be very
361 important, meaningful, and appealing to the respondents. Therefore, they looked for either a
362 new club or a different sport to continue. When Ellen, who was quoted earlier, was asked why
363 she continued with floorball, she gave the following answer:

364 Ellen: It's fun and so . . . you feel good working out and then you've
365 something to fight for and meeting friends, and so you're not
366 passive. Cos when you don't train, you then become pretty lazy.

367 Int: But you could meet friends in the café or sing in a choir or
368 something like that? Why sports?

369 Ellen: Oh . . . then you've something to do and you don't have to talk . . .
370 like, you hang out [together] anyway.

For Ellen, the solution was to find a new sport to experience fellowship and joy with others, one that she could do and quickly understand how to play. The teenagers find club sports activities sufficiently appealing and meaningful to continue in a new sport when they give up another. They also have enough sporting skills so they can understand and try a new sport. Sports give an opportunity to socialize and feel a team spirit without needing to talk, as Ellen expressed in the above quote. The participants are physically close and do exercises during the same training session. Here, there is closeness without the need for everything to be expressed or discussed in words.

All the interviewees felt that the team and/or the training group were an important reason, and for some, the most important factor in continuing. At the same time, they indicated that they would continue to play sports even if their clubs closed down or their coaches left because they believed they could acquire new sporting peers and playing sports was too important to them to quit. Some saw not having time for their non-sporty friends as a problem that generally made their lives less manageable. Being unable to spend time with friends or saying no to other activities was perceived as stressful sometimes. Sporting peers and coaches were regarded as sources of social pressure because, even though it felt hard sometimes, they went to practice anyway, mainly because they wanted to experience the team spirit, be loyal, and not let their coaches or teammates down.

What was perceived as meaningful and of importance for the teenagers was the ability to learn sporting skills, experience development, challenges, and social intercourse through mutual tasks. Club sports participation seemed to be an arena where they experienced a sense of coherence.

Discussion

The overall aim of this interview study was to investigate ‘what makes teenagers participate’ with a specific focus on what teenagers find meaningful and important when they

participate in club sports. The discussion of the results is mainly inspired by Antonovsky's salutogenic framework where the SOC components serve as 'analytic tools' for the interpretation of the interviews to provide a deeper understanding of teenagers' participation in club sports. These aspects will now be discussed in terms of suggestions for how to organize club sports to make them attractive to people in their late teens. The latter is particularly noteworthy in light of recent efforts by Western societies to increase physical activity among children and adolescents (Malina 2001; WHO 2002; Kirk 2005; SOU 2008:59).

It became apparent that the study presented in this article concerns a specific group of teenagers, namely young people who trained and competed in one or more sports several days a week. A large part of the activity involved contests and competition. They all started at an early age, often encouraged by their parents. This meant they had been doing club sports for more than half their lives, and they have all tried different kinds of sports in various sports clubs. Club sports can, thus, be said to constitute a very large proportion of the young people's lives, and they seem to have a strong predilection for performance and competitive club sports (see, for example, Trondman 2005; Larsson 2008; Thedin Jakobsson et al. 2012).

In the salutogenic-inspired analysis of the teenagers' descriptions of their participation as being fun and enjoyable, the meaningfulness emerges, first and foremost, in terms of learning and development. Moreover, they also feel the sport itself provides structure to their lives and gives them a meaningful and enjoyable context at that moment. This is something that they do not want to be without. Winning and striving for competitive success were not aspects that the teenagers stressed. They take part in sport within elite contexts but do not appear to have elite ambitions for the sport about which they were interviewed. This is in some way surprising given the teenagers' ages and heavy involvement in club sports. According to Côte and Hay (2002) one would have expected them to be more ambitious to

become the best (see also Kirk 2005). One interpretation is that there are few opportunities at this age to do club sports that are not elite-focused. Another interpretation is that they are very competent young people who can cope with hard training and competition alongside lots of schoolwork. One might have thought that they took up sports to become top sports participants, but instead, they seek sufficiently difficult challenges where they can learn and develop. Competition is something that they have to cope with and that provides a challenge. Success in competition is like confirmation of development. Those who remain in sports have developed skills to master and find it natural to engage in an activity that includes competition, even if they themselves often emphasize the importance of social interaction and the development of abilities. Gonçalves et al. (2011) reached similar findings in a retrospective study of female athletes.

All the teenagers have other friends outside sports, but they appreciate the very special experience of sharing sporting activities with a common goal that contributes to a sense of coherence. Although all have stopped doing one sport, they have continued with another since the meaningfulness of continuing has been strong enough and they are also sufficiently athletically skilled to join a new club or take up a different sport. In other words, they can manage and have special resources that Antonovsky (1979, 1987) includes in what he called General Resistance Resources (GRR).

The results in this study indicate that young people seem unlikely to continue with a sport, enjoy it, and feel its meaningfulness if they do not start early and are willing to practice and compete frequently. Competitive sports at a senior level seem to be the prevailing logic of sports for teenagers. One interpretation of the teenagers' statements is that a prerequisite for enjoying and having a sense of meaningfulness in club sports is that one is raised within a club sports environment and can handle an elite-oriented practice even if one does not have elite ambitions. Those young people who do not have these dimensions are, if not

446 automatically excluded, either choosing exclusion or being excluded from long-term
447 engagement with sports (see, for example, Collins 2012; Macdonald et al. 2012; Thedin
448 Jakobsson et al. 2012). The results indicate that club sports seem to include teenagers who
449 appreciate and can handle and understand competitive elite-level sports (see also, for
450 example, Green 2006; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008). Continuing with club sports at an
451 intermediate and recreational level without competitive challenges does not seem possible,
452 and maybe that is why so few take up sports and why so many drop out in their teens.

453 The conclusion is that doing sports seems to be manageable for and comprehensible
454 and meaningful to the teenagers in this study but what is meaningful seems to differ in some
455 aspects. Antonovsky's concepts were, in this case, useful in investigating club sports
456 participation with the analysis question, 'What makes sports fun?' It seems as if doing sports
457 is a social space where the teenagers can experience meaningfulness based on learning,
458 developing physical ability, experiencing a feeling of belonging, and being challenged. In this
459 way, club sports fill an important function in young people's lives by making it possible for
460 them to have a sporting lifestyle and a sense of coherence in sporting activities. The teenagers
461 have been active members of sports clubs for many years of their relatively short lives. They
462 do not know what a life without sports is. Such a life seems, if not meaningless, at least less
463 meaningful.

464 Previous studies have suggested that children's sports (ages 6-12) should involve
465 increasing deliberate play and emphasize development, fun, and enjoyment (Côté and Hay
466 2002; Sidentop 2002; Côté, Coakley and Bruner 2012). Is this something that should be
467 emphasised also for teenagers to encourage more of them to continue longer? The teenagers
468 in this study participate and appreciate sports, especially for the opportunity of learning and
469 developing together with others. I believe this suggests that sports clubs should try to organize
470 activities emphasizing development with numerous opportunities and challenges for motor

and social learning, instead of competitions as the only focal point. Furthermore it is conceivable that club sports as well as physical education could make use of a salutogenic approach where learning processes are the focus (see also Quennerstedt 2008).

If the findings correspond with young people's willingness to learn and develop, it is important for both sports clubs and schools to be attentive to all pupils regardless of age and ambitions, to give them opportunities to learn physical activities and motor skills, and to become physically competent. A wise and well-conducted sport practise can create resources that underpin both the manageability and comprehensibility in order to increase the opportunities to participate in physical activity and sport. By employing an approach in which questions are asked about what teenagers need to understand, manage, and experience as meaningful in sports, more young people can be given opportunities to become involved and, it is hoped, to participate longer. One way could also be to ask the teenagers how they want to elaborate their own sports practice.

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ⁱ The Swedish Sports Confederation (RF) is the country's largest popular and non-profit movement with around 22,000 sports clubs and 600,000 voluntary leaders with many teenage participants (www.rf.se). Although the Confederation is an independent non-governmental organisation, it is dependent on public financial support. It has been a part of the development of the welfare state and Swedish welfare policy since the beginning of the 20th century (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010). Today, the sport movement's role is emphasised as an important factor that benefits democracy, equality, and public health (SOU 2008:59). One of the core values in the policy document of RF is *enjoyment and community* (Swedish Sports Confederation 2011a).

ⁱⁱ Statistics of participation in different sports federations were used to select sports to obtain a variation in the number of clubs and participants in each sport, such as most participants aged between 7 and 12 (football, equestrian sports, and swimming); most participants aged between 13 and 16 (athletics, basketball, floorball, and handball); and most participants aged between 17 and 20 (ultimate frisbee).

ⁱⁱⁱ Group fitness classes based on Ling gymnastics.