



THE CASE OF ICELANDIC SPORTS

From national health to international success

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Lifestyle > Health & Families

Iceland knows how to stop teen substance abuse but the rest of the world isn't listening

In Iceland, teenage smoking, drinking and drug use have been radically cut in the past 20 years. Emma Young finds out how they did it, and why other countries won't follow suit

Emma Young | Tuesday 17 January 2017 | [1 comment](#)

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ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

SPORT IN ICELAND

How Small Nations Achieve International Success

Vidar Halldorsson





Iceland invested in youth sport...not elite sport!



“In Iceland there are..., no high-tech laboratories..., no systematic doping schemes..., no hidden technological innovations..., hardly any systematic talent identification programs..., no genetic searches for favorable biological traits..., and there is little emphasis on sport specialization in early childhood“

Halldorsson, 2017, p.96

The Community Sport Clubs



- Almost all kids participate (at some time) in the sport clubs
- Multi-sport, non-profit clubs - Open to everybody
- Public funding (facilities, coaches, subsidizing participation fees)
- Qualified and paid coaches do all coaching
- Parents are heavily involved
- The sport clubs are unique in the sense that they both emphasize: **human development through sport** and **sport achievement** – at the same time
 - There are no professional sport clubs/teams in Iceland
- This social organization of Icelandic youth sports is the underlying reason for the success of Icelandic teams at the elite level



Goða pylsur



N1

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7

VADN

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HAGKAUP

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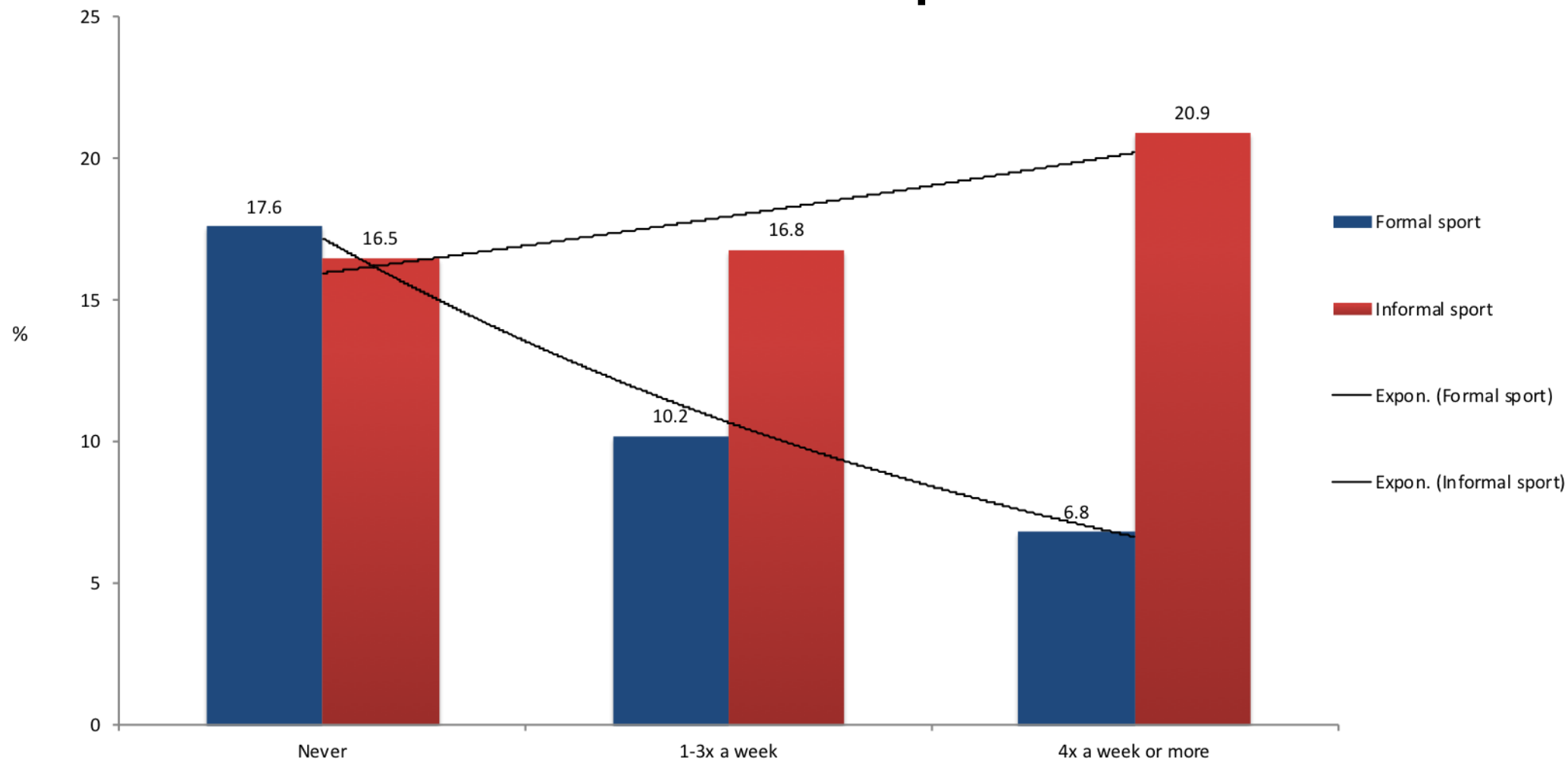
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ASARI



Alcohol consumption





Iceland provides a contrast to “THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF PLAY” of youth sports which:

- Are highly organized and serious
- Are intended to produce elite athletes
- Are focused on the individual
- Over-emphasize winning
- Emphasize early sport specialization
- Move sports from *Play* to *Work*



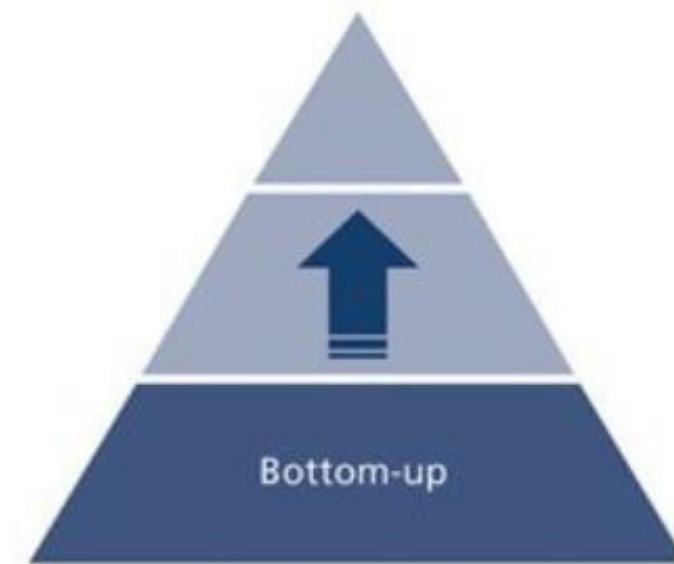


**Sports are *Play*
– with friends –
within formal
settings**



A Bottom-Up Approach

- Increased participation in sports – more players
- Healthier youth – physically, mentally and socially
- More productive values through sport – stronger characters
- Better balanced sport system
- More support from society – interest and resources
- Leads to even more investment in sport – at all levels
- And leads to success at all levels – everybody





Key lessons from Iceland:

- Build the foundation first: Bottom-up
- Work at the community level
- Educate the coaches
- Involve the parents
- Emphasize healthy and constructive values
- Highlight good role models
- Make sport fun!





Don't take the *play* out of *playing*

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