



EXAM COMMISSION

Prof. dr. Jo Van Hoecke (chair)
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Koen Lombaerts
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Lieve Bradt
Universiteit Gent

Prof. dr. Mark Griffiths
University of Birmingham

PROMOTORS

Prof. dr. Marc Theeboom
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Kristine De Martelaer
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Prof. dr. Jikkemien Vertonghen
Vrije Universiteit Brussel

**WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO THE PUBLIC DEFENCE
OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION IN FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND MOVEMENT SCIENCES.**

OF MISS: EVI BUELENS

**EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENTAL ROLE OF
VOLUNTEERING IN SPORT FOR YOUNGSTERS
IN SOCIALLY VULNERABLE SITUATIONS**

PROMOTORS:

Prof. dr. Marc Theeboom, Prof. dr. Kristine De Martelaer, Prof. dr. Jikkemien Vertonghen

Prof. dr. E. Kerckhofs

Dean of the Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy

Wednesday September 28 at 19:00.

**In the promotion room D2.01 on the campus of Etterbeek.
Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Brussel - Tel. 02 629 27 28 - E-mail: facik@vub.ac.be**

The following reception will start at 21:00.

Please confirm your presence by September 21 to evi.buelens@vub.ac.be

PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION

There is a growing belief that volunteering in sport has a distinct human capital developmental potential for youth in socially vulnerable situations. In this respect, it is amongst others believed that development at individual level can even lead to changes at a wider societal level. However, at present, conclusive empirical evidence is lacking regarding the developmental potential of volunteering in sport for youths in vulnerable situations. In addition, there is little understanding of the mechanisms through which volunteering in sport is supposed to foster youth human capital development. More specifically, insight is lacking in necessary (i.e., attracting and retaining youngsters in vulnerable situations in sport) and sufficient conditions (i.e., working towards broader human capital outcomes). In order to gain more insight, this PhD study, by means of different qualitative research methods, investigated three sport contexts in Flanders where youngsters in vulnerable situations are volunteering on a regular basis (i.e., youth work, community sport and sport clubs).

Among other things, it was concluded that a generalization of necessary and sufficient conditions can be made for the different practices within the investigated sport contexts. For the necessary conditions, this related to:

- Youngsters' intrinsic motivation
- Optimal accessibility
- Club functioning/program design
- Active volunteer involvement
- Professional support

For the sufficient conditions, this primarily related to the provision of experiential learn-

ing opportunities, thereby emphasizing the central role of a reinforcing environment. Three subcategories were identified here:

- Valuing and recognition of youngsters
- Making youngsters feel good and creating a sense of belonging
- Providing opportunities of equality regarding their relation to others (e.g., with coaches, professionals or peers).

Furthermore, it is concluded that while the investigated practices show potential in dealing with sufficient conditions, in most cases complying with necessary conditions is already too demanding to go any further. The minority of the practices that were (capable of) focussing on development and supplying sufficient conditions in a systematic way, were heavily relying on specific expertise and knowledge situated within youth work. In addition, the study illustrated that practices utilizing a critical educational approach provided more developmental opportunities for participating youth.

With regard to the perceived human capital developmental potential, it is concluded that when necessary and sufficient conditions are met, youngsters in vulnerable situations can develop their human capital. A variety of human capital outcomes on personal (e.g., taking more initiative and feeling responsible) and interpersonal level (e.g., taking up social responsibility) were reported by the young volunteers and confirmed by professionals. In addition, youngsters indicated to behave differently in their daily lives as a result of an increased self-awareness and acquiring insights into their own (inter) personal competences, attitudes, behaviour and development. This PhD study illustrated

that within a critical educational perspective, young people can be encouraged, to a certain extent, to critically take part in the transformation of (their own experiences within) society. However, improving the vulnerable situation of youths is no individual responsibility and for a more radical transformation of their position changes at the institutional level are needed.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Evi Buelens was born on April 28th 1988 in Mechelen (Belgium). In 2010 she graduated as a master in Physical Education and Movement Sciences (option Sports Management) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. In 2010 she started her research career at the University of Antwerp as a researcher at the Faculty of Applied Economics, department management. Since January 2012, Evi started her PhD-study at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel as a member of the research group Sport & Society. Within this study Evi conducted research toward the developmental potential of volunteering in sport for youngsters living in socially vulnerable situations. She has a number of international and national publications in (peer reviewed) journals and books and presentations at international and national scientific conferences. Since 2015, Evi is a member of the executive board of the Doctoral School of Human Sciences of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

