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# ***Sustainability of the Impact of a Public Health Intervention: Lessons Learned From the Laval Walking Clubs Experience***

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*To inform health promotion practice regarding the sustainability of public health interventions, the authors interviewed the directors of 13 new community-based organizations created through a practitioner-initiated public health intervention designed to promote physical activity at the community level. The purpose of the interviews was to uncover the factors that lead organization directors to become involved in the initiative and to maintain their involvement across an extended period of time. Results showed that there were 3 categories of positive outcomes associated with leading a walking club: maintaining and improving health, personal satisfaction, and group motivation. Difficulties associated with directing the club included high participant turnover rates, isolation of club directors, and lack of support from community organizations. Club directors indicated that sustainability would be enhanced through developing individual competencies, becoming more proficient at leading group dynamics, and developing better rootedness in the community. This information is interpreted in light of the six factors associated with sustainability.*

**Keywords:** *physical activity; community intervention; health promotion practice; sustainability of public health interventions*

The issue of the sustainability of public health interventions has become a central topic in the field of health promotion (Thompson & Winner, 1999). In particular, although health promotion programs may initially be met with much interest and energy, researchers have underscored that maintaining the participation of volunteers “once the initial enthusi-

asm wears off” (Kumpfer, Turner, Hopkins, & Librett, 1993) poses significant challenges. Some authors have noted a “50% decline in participation after the initial simple tasks are completed” (Yates as cited by Kumpfer et al., 1993, p. 372). These patterns of involvement are cause for concern because achieving long-term health outcomes often hinges on maintaining involvement of volunteers and ensuring the survival of structures and programs created through intervention activities.

Although a great deal of research has been completed in an attempt to understand the process of community mobilization that precedes the creation of new community structures and programs (Bracht & Tsouros, 1990), limited research has been conducted to understand the conditions favorable to the maintenance of intervention changes over a longer period of time. As noted by Thompson and Winner (1999), many terms have been used in reference to the idea that health promotion programs survive beyond their initial launching. Nuances exist between the terms *institutionalization* (i.e., continuation of program activities within an existing organization), *incorporation* (i.e., maintenance of specific intervention program types over time, after external funding resources), *sustainability* (i.e., ability of a program to continue delivering activities and benefits after external assistance ends), and *durability* (i.e., maintenance of some degree of activity in an area around which a community was mobilized to take action because of a research project). However, all notions focus on the idea of *continuation* of programs, program activities, and structures beyond initial launching.

Steckler and Goodman (1989) outlined six factors associated with sustainability of programs, namely the presence of a program champion, the existence of a strong subsystem, a good match between programs and organization mission, the availability of direct funding, the maintenance of funding over a substantial amount of time, and the reinforcement of existing programs rather than the creation of new programs. Researchers leading large community-based clinical trials, such as the Minnesota Heart Health Program, the Stanford 5-

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City Program, and the COMMIT trial, have attempted to identify factors associated with maintenance of activities but have identified few generalizable determinants leading other reviewers (e.g., Thompson & Winner, 1999) to conclude that little is known about the determinants of sustainability.

In the current study, we therefore attempted to glean new information on the growth and sustainability of health promotion programs by studying a successful practitioner-initiated health promotion initiative called the Laval Walking Clubs Experience (Nguyen, Gauvin, Martineau, & Grignon, 2002). More specifically, our purposes were to identify factors that lead people to volunteer for the new initiative (i.e., understanding growth of the health promotion initiative) and to maintain their leadership role in the newly created organizations over an extended period of time (i.e., understanding the sustainability of the health promotion initiative).

## ► METHOD

### **Overall Methodological Approach**

The current study was a part of a large project referred to as the Laval Walking Clubs Experience (Nguyen et al., 2002).

In this health promotion initiative, fourteen organizations (i.e., walking clubs) were created between 1994 and 1998 through a public health effort to promote physical activity among sedentary adults living in a suburban area adjacent to a large North American city. By March 1998, the majority of organizations had been in existence for 2 to 3 years. This provided a unique opportunity to document the growth and sustainability of the public health intervention.

In a previous contribution (Nguyen et al., 2002), we showed that the intervention led to the creation of 14 community-based organizations and that club membership resulted in significant health benefits including

significant increases in the volume of weekly physical activity. A deconstruction of the intervention based on a qualitative interview and an examination of archival data showed that the main components of the intervention were (a) mobilization of the community around physical activity, (b) coordination of existing municipal and community organizations, and (c) provision of ongoing support to volunteer club directors. Given the demonstrated initial success of the intervention, we turned our attention to issues of growth and sustainability.

In the current study, we conducted a series of qualitative interviews with the club directors who volunteered to start and maintain the newly created organizations. Furthermore, to complement this information we asked current and former members to spontaneously list the reasons for their maintenance or discontinuance of involvement in the walking clubs.

### **Interviews With Walking Club Directors and the Public Health Official**

From April to June 1998, a total of 13 interviews were conducted with walking club directors and the public health official who piloted the Laval Walking Clubs Experience. It was impossible to conduct an interview with the one remaining Club Director. These interviews were semistructured in that four starting questions were identified along with probes but no systematic series of subquestions, namely (a) Describe the characteristics of the walking clubs, (b) Detail the tasks related to the management of the walking clubs, (c) Outline the advantages and difficulties associated with managing a walking club, and (d) Describe the conditions that allow for the maintenance of the Laval Walking Clubs. These questions were used to establish a direct and personal contact with the interviewees. They also allowed us to make a link between sustainability theory (Steckler & Goodman, 1989; Thompson & Winner, 1999) and the data collected on the field. The first two questions shed light on the management of walking clubs, thus validating Steckler and Goodman's first two factors, namely the presence of a program champion and the existence of a strong subsystem. The third question assessed the availability of human, material, and financial resources and community organizations' support to walking clubs, thus validating Steckler and Goodman's factors 3 through 6, namely a good match between programs and organization mission, the availability of direct funding, the maintenance of funding over a substantial amount of time, and the reinforcement of existing programs rather than the creation of new programs. The last question aimed at capturing the points of view of the participants regarding the difficulties associated with the management and sustainability of walking clubs, thus validating all six factors of Steckler and Goodman's theory. Interviews lasted between 1 hour and 2½ hours. All interviews were tape-recorded. Interviews were tran-

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scribed verbatim to ensure the integrity of the data. These data are the main focus of the current investigation.

### **Survey Data From Walking Club Members**

In addition to qualitative interviews, three telephone surveys (April 1998, October 1998, May 1999) were conducted with 575 current ( $n = 339$ ) and former ( $n = 236$ ) club members. These surveys allowed us to monitor the evolution of physical activity patterns over a 12-month period and to collect data on psychosocial variables that might be associated with club involvement (Nguyên et al., 2002). In the context of the current investigation, we report on the spontaneous reasons offered by current club members for maintaining their participation and on the spontaneous reasons reported by former club members to explain their discontinued involvement in the clubs.

### **Examination of Archival Data**

To better understand perspectives offered by club directors, the following documents were examined: minutes from the monthly meeting of the Association of Walking Club Directors; promotional tools on walking and on walking club creation and administrative kits pertaining to management of walking clubs (e.g., sign-up sheet, grids for monitoring participation in club activities by members). Materials were regrouped according to categories and subcategories developed during data analysis of the narrative interviews.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

Data emerging from the interviews were analyzed according to accepted procedures (Mayer, Ouellet, Saint-Jacques, & Turcotte, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and consisted of the following steps: (a) each transcribed interview was read three times to gain a global understanding of the information and to orient further analyses; (b) materials were regrouped according to the four global themes (i.e., characteristics of the walking clubs, tasks related to their management, advantages and difficulties associated with managing a walking club, and conditions that allow for the maintenance of the walking clubs); (c) materials were subdivided into smaller units by regrouping similar statements and ideas; and (d) analyses were conducted by one person and submitted to respondents for validation and to allow for clarification and nuanceing. Archival data were examined following the thematic analysis and used to further illustrate and clarify the themes. Open-ended responses from the survey respondents were summarized through content analysis following the principles outlined earlier.

## **► RESULTS**

Findings are presented for each of the four questions addressed to the walking club directors. Where appropriate, cross-references to other articles in the series are made. Subsequently, portions of the findings emerging from the telephone survey of walkers are highlighted to address issues of sustainability.

### **Characteristics of Walking Clubs**

Of a total of 13 clubs, 7 have been in existence for about 2 to 3 years, one for more than 10 years and 5 for less than 1 year. The number of club members tends to be 3 to 4 times as large as the number of members who regularly participate in walking sessions. Clubs with 2 years or more in existence tend to have larger number of members (75 vs. 25) and more regular participants in walking sessions (25 vs. 12). Involvement in club activities tends to fluctuate with the ebb and flow of seasons with more members actively involved in the spring and fall (20 to 25) in comparison to the winter (10 to 15). Approximately 60% of the clubs tend to have a single director who ensures the management and functioning of the club.

### **Tasks Associated With the Management of Walking Clubs**

Tasks associated with the management of walking clubs are threefold: (a) management of walking sessions, (b) organizations of walking excursions outside of the club neighborhood, and (c) completion of administrative tasks.

*Management of walking sessions.* Most clubs organize two to three walking sessions per week either in the morning, in the evening, or some combination of the two time periods. Walking sessions usually unfold on neighborhood streets, in parks, or wooded areas. Only two of the clubs hold their activities in indoor shopping malls.

Managing the walking sessions involves three activities: (a) establishing walking routes, (b) welcoming walkers to each walking session, and (c) ensuring the safety and security of walkers according to their walking speed. The perspectives of club directors on each of these activities are highlighted later.

With respect to establishing walking routes, eight clubs have between one and three walking routes available to members. Other clubs change their walking routes every month or every other month. All walking routes are created by the club directors: "Yes, it was indeed me who measured the routes. . . . I was the one who walked the routes with my son and a prospecting wheel to allow for the determination of mileage."

In regard to welcoming walkers to each walking sessions, some clubs maintain an attendance sheet that is

filled out by walkers. This procedure is used mainly to encourage walkers to maintain their walking habit and to stimulate conversation between members of the club:

When I stopped asking people to fill out the infamous sheet . . . well I noticed that people kept pretty much to themselves . . . no communication was happening; then, when I would invite them to come up to the hood of my car and sign in, well then they would say: "Now what's your name?" While checking off their name . . . this created a link and that's so important.

In addition, in most clubs, walking sessions commenced and ended by a series of fitness exercises led by the club directors.

Ensuring the safety and security of walkers according to their respective walking speed often resulted in the creation of subgroups of walkers who would walk faster and slower:

At some point, little islands get created: a little group out front, a small group in the middle, and a little group tagging along at the end. Then a little later, you have two people here, two people there . . . because even within the subgroups you have people walking faster and slower . . . so at some point you eventually get something that looks like a mass of bees that stretches and stretches until you finally get to the end with only 2 people.

Maintaining the safety and security of the different subgroups becomes critical when walking sessions occur at night or when some walkers experience discomfort. This issue becomes even more critical because when people walk in groups they tend to forget or ignore safety: "We can't control everything you know; they often end up two by two of three by three . . . they take room in the street and it's no fun when 2 cars go by at the same time." As a result, to ensure the safety of walkers of all speeds, there must be 3 people present: one that walks with the fast walkers, one that stays with the moderately fast walkers, and one that remains with the slow walkers, especially for evening walks.

*Organization of walking excursions outside the club neighborhood.* More than one half of the walking clubs organize excursions outside the club neighborhood at least once a month. Tasks associated with these outings include (a) club directors must visit excursion sites prior to the actual outing to verify walking routes, parking suitability, rest areas, and restrooms; (b) they must arrange for car pooling; (c) they coordinate publicity and invitations for the event; and (d) they ensure the safety of participants.

*Completion of administrative tasks.* There are four administrative tasks ensured by club directors: (a) organizing recruitment campaigns to attract new members, (b) welcoming new members, (c) organizing club meetings, and (d) motivating club members to attend walk-

ing sessions. The views of club directors on the tasks are illustrated later.

With respect to the organizations of recruitment campaigns to attract new members, more than two thirds of clubs organize such campaigns at least once a year while approximately one half of clubs organize three to four recruitment campaigns per year. They use the following means during campaigns: (a) newspaper articles, newspaper ads, announcements in church newsletters; (b) posters, placards, or pamphlets (placed in neighborhood banks, supermarkets, shopping malls, pharmacies, medical offices); (c) publicity flyers or business cards distributed during walking sessions or to the homes of former walkers or neighborhood residents; and (d) sponsored brunches or conferences (dealing with walking shoes, walking injuries, etc.). Despite the widespread use of these more "technical" methods, the club directors believe that they are, for the most part, ineffective. They believe that the best publicity is word of mouth exemplified by dropping off business cards at neighborhood residences.

In regard to welcoming new members, a majority of clubs developed a "walker's kit" that they give to new members of clubs. The kit includes a sign-up sheet, a medical screening questionnaire, a schedule of walking sessions, a sample of walking routes, and a list of recommended fitness exercises.

In addition, most club directors hold either an annual, trimestrial, or monthly club meeting. The purposes of these meetings include evaluating the club's program of activities, planning the upcoming year's activities, and outlining the financial status of the clubs. To hold these meetings, they must therefore write a letter of invitation, make copies of the letter of invitations, ensure the distribution of the letters, and organize the logistics of the meetings (location, snacks).

To motivate club members to regularly attend walking sessions, club directors implement a variety of strategies: (a) distributing gifts to members (e.g., agendas, T-shirts, booklets to record walking performances); (b) photocopy and distribute relevant newspaper articles and distribute them to members; and (c) organize social events to facilitate social contact between members (e.g., parties at Christmas, New Year's, Easter, club anniversaries).

### ***Advantages Associated With Directing a Walking Club***

As shown in Table 1, club directors identified numerous benefits associated with their directing a walking club. Their perspectives are listed and captured as follows: (a) positive outcomes for health, endurance, and well-being; (b) personal satisfaction from helping others improve their health and well-being; (c) group motivation; (d) a stimulating environment within the group; (e) the development of friendships, relationships wherein one can confide, the ability to actively listen to others, and support groups; and

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary Table of Advantages and Difficulties Associated With Directing a Walking Club and Conditions Facilitating the Maintenance of Walking Clubs**

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
Advantages associated with directing a walking club	Positive outcomes for health Personal satisfaction from helping others improve their health and well-being Group motivation Stimulating environment within the group Development of friendships, relationships wherein one can confide, the ability of actively listening to others, and support groups Discovering pleasant places to walk, nature environment in the neighborhood thanks to the help of the group
Difficulties associated with directing a walking club	Lack of involvement of club members in organized activities and in insuring the safety of walkers in different subgroups during walking sessions High turnover rate of club participants due to: Lack of motivation for physical activity Lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of walking Low cost of the activity and limited consequences of abandoning the walking clubs for their finances Absence of effective tools for directors in motivating members to remain within the walking clubs Isolation of club directors Lack of support from community organizations, municipal directors, and religious leaders
Conditions facilitating the maintenance of walking clubs	Development of individual competencies Development of competencies pertaining to group processes for the following objectives: Forming club director support groups Learning from the experience of others Developing collective solutions to difficulties encountered Pooling energies together, more specifically with regard to the organizations of walking excursions existing in other clubs Developing better rootedness in the community in order: To obtain sponsors To organize effective recruitment campaigns

(f) discovering pleasant places to walk, nature environment in the neighborhood thanks to the help of the group.

***Difficulties Associated With Directing a Walking Club***

Walking club directors identified several difficulties inherent to the job of directing a walking club. These include (a) the lack of involvement of the walkers in the activities of the club, (b) the high turnover rate of club participants, (c) the isolation of club directors, and (d) the lack of support in managing the club by community organizations.

*Lack of involvement of the walkers in the activities of the club.* Club directors noted that they single-handedly assumed all responsibilities associated with directing the club and that this was very demanding. In addition, they do not get any help from club members:

People want . . . to come walking . . . period, this is what they said . . . they want to walk . . . but because

in their jobs they are always being asked to do just a little more, they get fed up about being asked to do more . . . so they come to the club activities to walk and I ask them for help . . . so I was told . . . that they weren't interested in helping out."

A club director who performed all management alone summarized the situation as follows: "It's me, I'm the general, I'm the soldier, the janitor, I do everything in the club right now."

Furthermore, most club directors have to be present at each and every walking session and ensure the safety of walkers in the different subgroups. They therefore slow down their own pace to accompany slow or new walkers. When the club directors include more than one person, they divide the task, however in some clubs where directors assume their responsibilities alone, some express exasperation: "I got fed up with always walking at a pace that was inferior to my capabilities because I had to stay with the slowest members. This isn't easy."

*High turnover rate of club participants.* Most walking clubs have a high turnover rate of participants. Club

directors find this difficult to deal with: (a) regarding the lack of motivation for physical activity: "They really give in to their need to be lazy you know. That's it. Of course, some people really don't have the time, they are always hurried, I agree. But some do have the time but any excuse is good to avoid coming to walk"; (b) regarding the lack of knowledge about the benefits of walking: "I think they don't take it seriously enough. It's almost as if it was an 'old folks' sport"; (c) regarding the low cost of the activity and therefore the limited consequences of abandoning the walking clubs for their finances: "It only costs about \$10 per year, so it's not serious. They can pay lots and lots of money to enroll in an expensive fitness club, that's serious because it's expensive, but who cares about \$10?"

*Isolation of club directors.* Club directors hold monthly meetings at their Association of Walking Clubs Directors. However, they are usually very tied up in their day-to-day management of the walking clubs and underline their isolation and their lack of support from other walking clubs: "Everybody does his or her own thing, I noticed this . . . everybody organizes his or her excursions, his or her own activities," This isolation causes work overloads, and their efforts do not always yield great successes. For example, some walking sessions get cancelled because of a lack of participants. Others gave up on organizing activities designed to stimulate participation of members and promotion of walking.

*Lack of support from community organizations.* Club directors receive support mainly from two sources: a public health official at the Public Health Directorate (Nguyễn et al., 2002) and the employees of the municipal leisure office. Indeed, here are some of the ways in which the public health official aided club directors: (a) production of promotional tools (guides for the creation of walking clubs, attendance sheet, brochures on walking routes in Laval); (b) development of recruitment campaigns; (c) recruitment of new club directors to replace directors wanting to step down; (d) offering advice; and (e) providing social support. With respect to municipal leisure office personnel, club directors mentioned their support for office tasks (photocopying, production of promotional posters) and their logistic support (organization of special events, rental of meeting rooms).

Interestingly though, club directors feel that they do not receive the required support from other community organizations. They often get turned down very categorically by other community organizations when trying to organize recruitment campaigns:

But it's so complicated today you know . . . you almost have to beg to get permission to put up a poster somewhere. And I hate this kind of work so much, it's incredible. I do it because I want to recruit but it's a real hardship. You never get a nice response

with these groups, you never get a pleasant response (from the community organizations).

### ***Conditions Facilitating the Maintenance of Walking Clubs***

Club directors underscore several conditions that might facilitate the sustainability of walking clubs in the community: (a) the development of individual competencies, (b) the development of competencies in working with groups, and (c) developing better rootedness in the community.

*Development of individual competencies.* It should be noted that interested volunteers are provided with a training sessions through the public health official and the municipal leisure offices. These persons also help organize a kick-off session for the new club (Nguyễn et al., 2002). The club directors believe that this support is essential to allow clubs to emerge.

However, when clubs get under way, walking club directors would appreciate being better equipped to manage the clubs: "For my part . . . what stops me from going further, is precisely that I don't feel supported . . . to feel supported is very important in all respects, in terms of advice and all sorts of things." Club directors seem to point to the need for continuing education.

*Development of competencies pertaining to group processes.* As indicated previously, club directors feel isolated in their management of the day-to-day operations of the club. They indicated that they would need more opportunities to focus on the following objectives: (a) forming club director support groups: "When you realize that everyone experiences the same thing, you put it all together, the successes and the difficulties, well it's useful, you feel supported"; (b) learning from the experience of others; (c) developing collective solutions to difficulties encountered: "When we have meetings, I want to discuss my problems, I want to go to a meeting to learn from others and for people to learn from me, so that we can talk about 'how-to'"; and (d) pooling energies together, and more specifically with regard to the organizations of walking excursions outside the neighborhood. Some club directors would like to have a bank of excursions existing in other clubs; these excursions would be detailed and could eventually constitute a catalogue that would be available to all. Others suggest that excursions might be organized simultaneously by different clubs to create cohesion between directors and members.

*Rootedness in the community.* As mentioned previously, club directors feel that they do not received adequate support from local organizations. Their "wish list" for better links includes the following: (a) how to obtain sponsors for items such as numbered vests, gifts for members: "So if you go and meet with a company

that manufactures numbered vests, you don't even know how much it costs . . . all this to ensure that it doesn't cost us anything. . . . Is this 'doable'? I don't know. Sponsors are really hard to get"; (b) how to organize effective recruitment campaigns because club directors are convinced that they are running very local and ineffective campaigns. They believe in the need for regional and especially ongoing campaigns.

**Perspectives About Sustainability Gleaned From the Telephone Survey With Walkers**

In an effort to glean further validation of the club directors' perspectives, we content analyzed responses of telephone survey respondents to two questions. First, persons who were still members of a walking club during the time of the initial survey were asked to spontaneously list the reasons that impelled them to adhere to the walking club. Second, those who were no longer members of the clubs were asked to spontaneously enumerate the reasons leading to their discontinuing involvement in the club. We regrouped reasons according to the same procedures adopted to categorize responses from club directors.

As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, reasons for adhering to walking clubs include improving and maintaining physical and mental health, enjoying the activity of walking in a group, and enjoying the social aspects of group activity. These results mirror those provided by club directors. Persons having discontinued participation indicated that they drop out mainly for reasons related to health problems or conflicts with work schedules. In addition, a mismatch between walking club schedules and personal responsibilities was often associated with leaving the club. Several reasons related to club functioning were also highlighted. More interesting, these data support the club directors' perceptions that the walking clubs experience significant turnover that might not be due to mainly club factors.

► **DISCUSSION**

The purposes of this investigation were to identify factors that lead people to volunteer for the new initiative (i.e., understanding growth of the health promotion initiative) and to maintain their leadership role in the newly created organizations over an extended period of time (i.e., understanding the sustainability of the health promotion initiative). Findings provide several leads into the issue of sustainability of public health interven-

**TABLE 2**  
**Reasons for Adhering to Walking Club Activities**

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Reasons linked to physical health ( <i>n</i> = 86)	
Doing physical activity	33
Getting physically fit	22
Maintaining health	12
Improving health problems	11
Other reasons related to health	8
Reasons linked to mental health and well-being ( <i>n</i> = 18)	
Staying busy, having an activity	6
For the love of walking	6
Getting out of the house	3
To have fun	3
Overcome depression	1
Reasons linked to walking clubs ( <i>n</i> = 18)	
Outdoor activities	4
Accessibility	4
Walker role models	3
Regular involvement	2
The walking routes	2
The discipline	1
The cost	1
The indoor walks	1
Reasons linked with club members ( <i>n</i> = 132)	
Encouragement from family and friends	40
Being in a group	26
Group motivation	24
Participation of friends and family	11
Meeting people	9
Security provided by the group	8
Other reasons related to groups	14
Combined reasons ( <i>n</i> = 60)	
Physical and mental health	11
Physical health and walking clubs	10
Physical health and club members	8
Physical health, mental health, and club members	2
Mental health and club members	7
The walking club and its members	12
No responses ( <i>n</i> = 21)	21

tions, in general, and for facilitating the maintenance of walking clubs in Laval, in particular.

In an effort to move toward a more synthetic perspective on sustainability of this public health intervention, we constructed the results of our investigation around the six factors associated with sustainability proposed by Steckler and Goodman (1989)—the presence of a program champion, the existence of a strong subsystem, a good match between programs and organization mission, the availability of direct funding, the maintenance of funding over a substantial amount of time, and the reinforcement of existing programs rather than the creation of new programs.

First, our data clearly show that volunteers agree to become involved because they anticipate several positive personal outcomes. In the current case, they expect health and well-being improvements as well as the

**TABLE 3**  
**Reasons for Discontinuing Involvement in Walking Clubs**

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>
Reasons linked to personal issues	
Conflicts with other responsibilities ( <i>n</i> = 41)	
Other activities	29
Work	12
Health problems	37
Distance from walking clubs, transfer out of the neighborhood	12
Prefer other activities	7
Prefer walking alone, with friends, or elsewhere	7
Life change (e.g., death in the family, marriage, etc.)	6
Lack of motivation	5
Friends dropped out	3
Didn't like the experience	3
Combined reasons	6
Reasons linked to the walking clubs	
Schedules ( <i>n</i> = 34)	
Not convenient	29
Not flexible or too flexible	5
Organization ( <i>n</i> = 21)	
No service	10
No atmosphere	4
Costs involved to participate	4
Clubs not well-known enough	2
There's no discipline	1
Walking sessions	
Walking routes do not meet my needs	9
Walking pace is too fast or too slow	4
Inadequate monitoring	1
Too much variability of participants' ages	3
Combined reasons	6
Reasons linked to bad weather ( <i>n</i> = 11)	11
Combined reasons ( <i>n</i> = 15)	
Personal and club reasons	11
Personal and weather reasons	2
Club and weather reasons	2

opportunity to engage in pleasant social interactions. The importance of group dynamics in the context of walking clubs has previously been underscored in the literature (Duncan, Travis, & McAuley, 1994). Hence, programs promoting walking clubs should indeed highlight that participants and eventual club directors can reasonably expect to achieve these outcomes.

Second, the club directors participated in a training session to learn how to create and manage their walking club. This training occurred early on in their involvement and was perceived as very instrumental to the success of their involvement. However, 2 or 3 years into the existence of the club, they expressed the need for additional knowledge and other tools that might aid in the management of the clubs. Hence, the data point to the need for project initiators to develop individual competencies, not only at the onset of a project but also during latter phases of the project as this might promote sustainability: "The selection of competent leaders and

the development of their skills and abilities should be a prime consideration of community coalition prevention programs" (Butterfoos, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1996, p. 75).

Third, club directors express the need to have greater opportunities to be informed, to exchange ideas, and to help each other out. Indeed, it appears that the possibility of working through a network would give them a sentiment of being supported, would promote their feelings of empowerment, and would promote the sustainability of new projects in the community (Bracht & Kingsbury, 1990; Steckler et al., 1995; Wallerstein, 1992). As mentioned by Lindsay and Edwards (1988): "Health-related coalitions should learn from the successes and failures of sister coalitions in other states and communities. This cross-fertilization generates new and better coalition activities. Success stories of similar groups help maintain commitment to the cause" (p. 36).

Fourth, club directors expressed the need to establish more direct and closer ties with community organizations. These organizations withhold decisional powers. They thus have the power to influence social and political actions in the community and to act on the determinants of health (Wallerstein, 1992). These organizations also have human and material resources that they can share with the club directors. Partnering with these organizations would not only reduce the costs of operation of the walking clubs but would also ensure that the new organizations would become better rooted in the community (Florin, Mitchell, & Stevenson, 1993; Freudenberg et al., 1995). As mentioned by Butterfoos, Goodman, and Wandersman (1993): "[Citizen groups] . . . that endured tended to have strong linkages with local community organizers and with other neighborhood associations" (p. 326).

Fifth, the reasons mentioned by Laval walking club members for adhering to, or discontinuing involvement in walking clubs are similar to the barriers and facilitators mentioned in many well-designed studies conducted in physical activity participation (Dishman, 1990; Dishman & Sallis, 1994; Trost, Owen, Bauman, Sallis, & Brown, 2002). These reasons can be grouped in three factors, according to the classification suggested by Trost et al. (2002): (a) reasons linked to physical health, mental health, and well-being, shown in Tables 2 and 3, can be classified within Trost et al.'s second group of factors, namely psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors; (b) reasons linked to club members can be classified within Trost et al.'s fourth group of factors, namely social cultural factors; (c) reasons linked to walking clubs, can be classified within Trost et al.'s fifth

group of factors, namely physical environment factors. Our data, similar to most of those existing with respect to individual-level facilitators and barriers to adherence to physical activity, are cross-sectional and need to be replicated by longitudinal studies for the causal relationship between the hypothesized factors and participation in walking clubs activities.

According to our data, the positive personal outcomes experienced by club directors feed into the continuation of walking club activities. However, the presence of a program champion seems to influence sustainability only if that person feels empowered in the management of the clubs, that is, has the opportunity to get additional knowledge and tools, and the possibility of exchanging ideas and working through a network with other walking club directors. The isolation reported by club directors, added to heavy management tasks and lack of involvement of club members, are organizational factors that apparently undermine the potential longevity of walking clubs.

In the current study, club directors also clearly stated that there was a need for the clubs to become more rooted in the community. Funding, although available for the creation of the walking clubs, has not been maintained over time. Club directors operate them with the members' annual \$10 fees. They can reduce costs of operation of their clubs by sharing human and material resources with these community organizations. Partnering would create optimal community conditions.

Finally, we notice that there is no explicit role played by users of health promotion programs and services among the factors associated with sustainability proposed by Steckler and Goodman (1989). In the current data set, it is clear that club directors were sensitive to the expressed needs and critiques formulated by club walkers and that these served to enhance and undermine their motivation. If further data replicate our finding that users of programs and services can influence sustainability, then we believe that Steckler and Goodman's six factors may require some amendments to include determinants and new pathways of influence on sustainability.

In conclusion, the current study shows support for the notion that sustainability is undermined by lack of community support and challenges within the organizational setting. However, adequacy of program design and implementation can surmount some of these barriers and lead to sustainability of an intervention across time. In future conceptualizations of the problem of sustainability, the role of users of programs and services should be integrated.

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