

Evaluation of sport promotional initiatives in Flanders. Development and testing of a specific instrument

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Introduction

It is commonly believed that sport promotion has a positive impact on the sport participation level of people. Although the effects of a sport promotion policy are difficult to measure as a variety of factors might influence the sport participation level, it remains important to evaluate the efforts that are made. According to van Sprundel (1999), a sport organisation should regularly evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness. It was indicated that one of the key issues in quality care is the determination of the customers' needs on a regular basis and the development of products and services that correspond to these needs (Bounds et al., 1994; Jammernegg & Reiner, 1997). However despite a growing awareness of quality care in sport, to date, sport promotional initiatives have rarely been evaluated in a systematic way. Evaluations are often only quantitative in nature, with no attention to the customers' satisfaction or impact on their sporting behaviour. The occasional evaluations that do occur are often unstructured and not systematic. A number of reasons have been described for the fact that sport promotion initiatives have rarely been evaluated. Many organisers indicated that there is a lack of time to evaluate their initiatives as well as of personnel, as was confirmed by the literature (Hoogerwerf & Zoutendijk, 1990; van der Poel, 1999). Furthermore, Hoogerwerf and Zoutendijk (1990) stated that some evaluations can take a long time and as a result lose their relevance. Van der Poel (1999) even indicated that sport policy makers have very little interest in the actual effects of initiatives. In most cases, the number of participants is more important, whereas no attention is paid to the degree of customers' satisfaction and the impact on their sporting behaviour. Bramham (1998) stated that there are many ways in which the results of an evaluation can be used in policy processes. For example, evaluation results are often used selectively if they confirm an existing policy or certain preferences of policy makers. Or more negative results can be overlooked as they are regarded as 'just another report' (Bramham, 1998).

Method

Through a study, which was conducted by order of the sport governmental body of Flanders (Blos), an instrument was developed to evaluate the efficiency and the effectiveness of sports promotional campaigns and sports events and to determine their impact on specific target groups. The starting point of the instrument was Weese's approach model (1997), which exists of four elements, namely the goals approach, the systems resource approach, the process approach and the multiple constituency approach. Table 1 provides an overview of some of the questions of the instrument in relation to the different approaches of the conceptual framework. Considering the (dis)advantages of each technique in determining customers' needs and the quality of an organisation, a written semi-structured questionnaire was used (Bounds et al., 1994). For each group that is internally (organizers, partners, sponsors...) or externally (users) involved with the organisation, a different questionnaire was developed. These questionnaires contain items such as the goals of the organisation, co-operation with different partners (schools, clubs...), financial management, human resource management etc. The instrument was tested on 28 different sports activities promoting sport for all through several techniques by independent examiners revealing its strengths and weaknesses. These tests were conducted individually as well as in group and with or without guidance of independent examiners. For the evaluation among the users, the most successful and practical method proved to be the semi-guided group method as more users could be questioned at the same period. For the internal evaluation, it was recommended to use the questionnaires without guidance from examiners. In addition, a 'ready to hand' manual was set up in order to use the instrument correctly and was spread among the sport policy makers and sport promoters in Flanders. Additionally, 279 sport policy makers and sport promoters in Flanders of national, provincial and local sport authorities were questioned about the importance of quality care within their sport promotional

activities. Next to it, they were asked to indicate whether and to what extent the current instrument was useful and meaningful.

Approach	Items	Example questions	Target group
Goals approach	Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you pursue mostly with the initiative? - What actions have you taken to reach these goals? - Why did you participate in this initiative? - Have you reached your goals by participating in this initiative? Why not? 	Organisers Organisers Participants Participants
System resource approach	Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was the initiative financially attainable? - How could this be reached? 	Organisers Organisers
Process approach	Internal processes Internal communication External communication Preparation Cooperation Evaluation SWOT-analysis Results Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there enough expertise among the organisers? - Is there enough expertise among the instructors? - Is the communication among the personnel efficient? Why? - Which promotion material has been used? Why? - Are you satisfied with the promotion material? - What has been previously taken into consideration (accommodation,...)? - To what extent has the cooperation changed? - Has the initiative been evaluated? - What are the weaknesses of the initiative? - What are the most important results? - For whom was the initiative a satisfying experience? How do you know? - Has this initiative had an effect on your future sport participation? 	Organisers and others (sponsors...) Organisers and participants Organisers Organisers Participants Organisers Others (sponsors...) Organisers Organisers, others (sponsors...) and participants Organisers and others (sponsors...) Organisers and others (sponsors...) Participants
Multiple-consistency approach	Target group Customers' satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What has been previously taken into consideration concerning the target group (age, attainableness, socio-economic status,...)? - Are you satisfied with the safety procedures? 	Organisers Participants

Table 1: conceptual framework of the instrument, based on Weese's four approaches (1997).

Results and Discussion

Results indicated among other things that many organisations are more occupied with the planning, preparation and actual organisation of their activities, while they often neglect the evaluation and follow-up. Many organisers involved in the tests (82.8%) indicated to be willing to use this instrument in their future activities. All the other persons involved (such as sponsors,...) indicated the importance and the usefulness of this evaluation system. Almost all adult participants that were involved in the test cases (98.0%) appreciated that the evaluation was done so that they could give feedback to the organisation. Next to supporting sport policy makers and organisers with the evaluation of their future sport promotional initiatives, this instrument also aims at making organisers more aware of the importance of evaluations. Many organisers that participated in the test cases mentioned that the instrument could provide new ideas and insights about the organisation.

At this stage the instrument has left out some target groups, such as sport instructors and non-participants. This instrument might also be adapted to evaluate other kind of sport initiatives (such as elite sport events). It will then be important to look at specific aspects in relation to elite sport, such as coaching, mental training, facilities... It might even be interesting to develop a specific questionnaire for spectators as well. Another application might also be to evaluate the general functioning of organisations themselves (such as municipal sport service). This includes that, next to the organisation of sport initiatives, other tasks (such as administration and exploitation of sport infrastructure, cooperation with others,...) must be looked at as well. Our initial belief was confirmed by the test results that many organisations are more occupied with the planning, preparation and execution of their activities, while they often neglect the evaluation and the follow-up of these activities. According to Hoogerwerf and Zoutendijk (1990), legal obligations for evaluations on a regular basis could be a possible solution to encourage organisers to actually do so.

The instrument that was described in the present paper might be regarded as a support for sport policy makers and local organisers in determining the efficiency of their sport promotional initiatives and the participants' satisfaction. As was mentioned before, it is very difficult to measure the effects of an initiative, particularly when the initiative aims at a changed behaviour (e.g., an increased sport participation level). The instrument within this study was oriented towards the developing process and as such focuses on the efficiency in the way an initiative is organised. However, this does not imply that effect evaluation is less important.

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