

Does type of management matter?

The case of tennis and swimming facilities in the Netherlands

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Aim

As local authorities in the Netherlands face the challenge of maintaining public sports facilities during the economic crisis, the need arises to analyse how these facilities are being managed and operated, and whether privatisation will influence the daily operation of sport facilities. This research investigates to what extent tennis and swimming facilities in the Netherlands are managed privately (commercially) or by local governments and whether this difference in type of management influences the performance of these facilities.

Theoretical background

Past research into the operation of sports facilities is mainly found in the United Kingdom, in particular due to the presence of the leisure facilities database of Sport England's *National Benchmarking Service*. Most studies focus on organisational issues like performance, efficiency, customer satisfaction and service quality, with limited attention being paid to differences in type of management (Liu, 2008; Liu & Hsu 2010; Ramchandi & Taylor, 2011).

In their study on the performance of sports and swimming centres, Robinson & Taylor (2011) showed that the type, location and size of these centres represent major influences on performance. Liu, Taylor & Shibli (2007) included the variation in type of management in their research and concluded that management has a significant effect on operational efficiency of sports halls and swimming pools. Their results show that non in-house facilities outperform in-house facilities.

Methodology

Tennis and swimming facilities were chosen for three reasons: 1) the availability of a detailed dataset of facilities, 2) the clear distinction between different types of management (private/governmental) and 3) the fact that these types of management co-exist next to each other, making comparative analyses possible.

Data on the management and operation of tennis facilities were retrieved from the Dutch national tennis federation (KNLTB); yearly membership-fees data were collected by desk research. Data of the swimming facilities were retrieved from the dataset of the 'Swimming centres monitor' by the Council of Dutch local governments (VSG). The dataset for this research consisted of two groups of swimming facilities: one with facilities in municipalities with less than 30.000 inhabitants (n=90) and one with facilities in municipalities with more than 40.000 inhabitants (n=90).

The influence of type of management on performance outcomes was analysed through linear regression analyses

and included the following control variables: degree of urbanity, the population of the postal code area and the land price per square meter of the municipality. The analyses of tennis facilities included the amount of tennis courts. In the analyses on swimming facilities the number of water-basins was added, as well as the opening hours and the presence of solitary facilities and covered facilities. The dependent performance variables were: price (entrance fee/yearly membership-fee), major and daily maintenance, availability for specific target groups/associations (number of hours) and the devotion of volunteers.

Results

For tennis four different types of management can be distinguished: local government, foundation, private (commercial) and the tennis club itself. Private ownership of the tennis facility, private daily maintenance of the tennis courts and both private ownership and management of the canteen lead to a higher yearly membership-fee. On the contrary, ownership of the local government of the tennis facility and the canteen as well as major and daily governmental maintenance of the tennis courts by the local government lead to a lower yearly membership-fee.

In swimming, there are three different types of management: local government, foundation and private (commercial). The type of management has not much influence on the organisation of swimming facilities. Noticeable effects appear more in larger municipalities (> 40.000 inhabitants) rather than in the smaller ones (<30.000 inhabitants). In larger municipalities, management by the local government leads to more hours spent on school-swimming, a lower entrance fee for all age groups and more paid employees. In contrast, private management leads to fewer hours spent on target groups, more hours available for swimming associations and a higher entrance fee for children.

Discussion

The discussion will confront the outcomes of this research with the outcomes found in the literature. Furthermore possible explanations for the differences found in tennis and swimming will be presented.

References

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