

Towards a multilevel performance assessment model For sport facility partnerships

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Theoretical background and aims

Sport service departments in local governments have a long history of partnering with other public and non-profit sector organisations to provide an array of recreation opportunities. Several studies (e.g. Frisby et al., 2004) show that these local government departments have undergone a strategic shift in pursuing partnerships.

Frisby et al. (2004) state that a local government is no longer the sole stakeholder in delivering sports programs. Rather than working from a silo model, where public service organisations operate as autonomous units, partnerships are said to create new opportunities through resource bundling. Several studies address the lack of a thorough assessment framework for the performance of such partnerships or networks (Hood, 1991, Voets et al., 2008, Frisby et al., 2004, Kenis and Provan, 2009).

The purpose of our study is to establish a theoretical framework for assessing the performance of sport facility partnerships. The paper starts from the "New Public Management" theory that interprets performance of public service departments, such municipal sports departments, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. However, this theory needs to be extended for the assessment of sport facility partnerships on a municipal level. All types and varieties of partnerships are considered in this study: public/public, private/public, formalized/non-formalized, long term/project based, etc.

Research design

In the area of New Public Management (NPM) Voets et al. (2008) deal with the question how to assess policy network performance and suggest a multidimensional approach. Based on this model and a broader literature review, we suggest the possible other dimensions that need to be considered, next to the production dimension (which focuses on managerial indicators and scorecards).

Towards a sport specific multilevel theoretical framework

Based on the framework of Voets et al. (2008), we argue that on a first level an assessment of the *production performance* of the sport facility partnership is necessary. This dimension follows the NPM interpretation of

performance where goal attainment is a key criterion. The performance goals on this level are to be based on target groups, participation levels and cost effectiveness. A second dimension of performance of sport facility partnerships is related to its democratic quality, which is basically ingrained in the *process performance* of the partnership rather than in the services it delivers. According to Skelcher et al. (2008) we suggest that the democratic performance consists of three components: legitimacy, accountability and accordance of the partnership. On a third level our model considers the *regime performance* of the sport facility partnership, which reflects the robustness and resilience of this partnership. We suggest that this can be assessed by three components: membership, partnership institutionalization and quality of relationships.

Finally, based on the exogenous theory on public network performance of Kenis and Provan (2009), we suggest that the *type of inception (mandated or voluntary)* and the *developmental stage* of the partnership also need to be considered in the assessment of the performance of the sport facility partnership.

Conclusion and future research

In this study we try to gain a first insight in the performance of sport facilities partnerships on a municipal level in Flanders. We believe that this insight can deliver better conceived and managed sport facilities with a higher and broader democratic performance for city, area or neighborhood.

In this paper, based on a literature review, we propose a first theoretical multilevel assessment framework, which serves as a first phase, and will be followed by an empirical study in which we will try to define partnership typology clusters of municipal sport facilities in Flanders. Finally, we will fine-tune this theoretical model for each typology cluster.

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