
A SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF LOCAL SPORT PROMOTION NETWORKS: THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL SPORT ADMINISTRATION AND ITS PARTNERS

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

AIM. Despite a growing body of knowledge about inter-organizational partnerships and networks, knowledge about networks in sports is still limited, and the available work is rather fragmented. However, critical community issues, such as the lack of physical activity, are commonly approached by the formation of partnerships, mostly between nonprofit and public organizations (Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel‐Shone, 2005). Moreover, local sports administrations play an important role in the promotion of physical activity and sports, but also schools, sport clubs, youth movement, welfare agencies and other organizations have an important task. Although research showed that local governments establish partnership to promote sports (Van Poppel, 2012), a clear overview of the actors in the local sport promotion network is still missing. Furthermore, the role of the sports administration and its partners is not clearly defined. This study contributes to this gap in literature by providing a complete insight into the whole sport promotion network and tries to answer the following research questions: what is the role of the local sport administration and its partners in the sport promotion network and how does the density of the network contributes to the diversity in sport promotional initiatives.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND. Although sport management literature provides us with several useful theories and applications to address sport management issues, a call to “expand the horizons” of the field arose (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008). Social network analysis (SNA) is recently seen as a promising research approach, which is applicable in different disciplines, including sports and leisure. Not only personal networks are uncovered, also organizational networks were analyzed using SNA (Provan et al., 2005). We believe that SNA can help us answering our research questions by providing insight into the whole the sport promotion network on a local level. Several key

issues of network analysis are already addressed in the literature. First, centrality is an issue. From a network perspective, it is assumed that the actor close to all other actors influences policy the most, and thus acts as policy entrepreneur (Hoeijmakers, De Leeuw, Kenis, & De Vries, 2007). Second, the density of a network is important. The higher the density in a network, the higher the number of actors that is engaging with each other (Hoeijmakers et al., 2007). Furthermore, literature differs between strong and weak ties, with weak ties in a critical role, because too many strong ties may limit newer ties that may offer new information and ideas (Cousens, Barnes, & MacLean, 2012). Based on this knowledge, we formulate 2 hypotheses in our study: 1) the local sport administrator will adopt a central coordinating role in the sport promotion network (Hoeijmakers et al., 2007), and 2) lower network density and weak ties will contribute to more diversity in sport promotion initiatives (Cousens et al., 2012).

METHODS. Data were collected using a questionnaire, based on a modified version of Provan et al.'s (2005) survey. To identify the actors in the sport promotion network, different strategies were used. Existing data from previous studies were used, local sports administrators provided us with names of sport organizations within their municipality and local websites were searched. The questionnaires were distributed by email to all actors in the network. In March 2015 data collection is still ongoing, but detailed network analysis will be conducted in the following months and the definitive results will be available for presentation at the 2015 EASM conference in September.

CONCLUSION. This study wants to contribute to literature on sport promotion with an overview of the sport promotion network. For practitioners, this work can provide a useful support in the implementation of sport policy and for the identification of strong and weak ties in their local sport promotion network.

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