
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SPORT POLICIES AND GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT IN THE CAPACITY BUILDING OF SPORT FEDERATIONS

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

Aim

According to the Sport for All ideology most welfare states aim for creating active leisure-time sport opportunities. Since the 70s governments developed a sport structure through which they established their grassroots sport policy system. Hallman & Petry (2013) emphasize both the differences and similarities among sport systems in Europe, as well as the importance of obtaining comparative insights into the different sport systems. Aiming for high sport participation rates in Europe cannot be disconnected from the sport systems that are in place. Each of these systems has similarities in the kind of actors involved, but large differences in the role of these actors and the emphasis that is put on grassroots versus elite sports appear. The aim of the present study is to discover how sport policies and sport systems result in developing different kinds of capacity on different levels in the sport system, and in sport federations in particular.

Theoretical background

Several authors have discussed the development of (organizational) capacity of community sports organizations, sport clubs and other nonprofit sport organizations, in order to be able to fulfill their role concerning sport development goals (Green, 2008). Capacity refers to the organizations' abilities to acquire the necessary means, such as financial and/or human resources, to accomplish their mission. Literature on capacity in sport organizations is grounded in the nonprofit literature on organizational effectiveness (Misener and Doherty, 2009).

Governmental sport administrations can apply different instruments to implement their sport policies (Green, 2008). First, they can coerce and

regulate sport federations, based on their hierarchical position. Second, subsidizing the intended behavior of sport organizations can be used. Third, governments can collaborate with sport organizations to implement their public policy. Each of these approaches can be directed towards intermediate or non-governmental actors at the national, regional, but also local level. The development of sport organizations' capacity is influenced by the structure of the sport system on the one hand, and by the way sport policy is implemented on the other (Houlihan, 2002). So far, research has mainly focused on how sport clubs' capacity for sport development is influenced by sport policy. Here, the focus is on how public sport policy influences the capacity of sport federations.

Methodology

In a comparative study of eleven European and two non-European countries data were collected through documents and in-depth interviews with experts from the respective countries. Data revealed (i) key characteristics of the country's sport policy, (ii) what kind of support sport federations received, (iii) how these sport policies effected the structure and working of sport federations and intermediary sport organizations, and (iv) which actors were involved in the public policy process. An intra-case analysis per country allowed to obtaining insight into what kind of capacities of which actors were supported through sport policy and by the actions of the governmental sport administration. Inter-case analysis, comparing the sport systems of the different countries, enabled to discover how different ways of implementing sport policy influenced the sport federations. Contextual factors were also considered, such as the extent to which a Sport for All culture existed.

Results

We identified large differences in the existence of regulations applying to sport federations and other sport organizations. However, the impact of the mere presence of these specific regulations on the difference between the countries in working of the federations was not that large. Another more important difference was found in the presence and especially the role of intermediary actors and umbrella sport federations in implementing public sport policy. Most countries use a mix of coercion, subsidies and collaboration, but there are significant differences in importance with regard to each of these instruments. The emphasis in most countries is on developing the financial resources of the sport federations, although some policy systems are also supportive in developing managerial and/or innovative capacity of sport federations.

Conclusion

Although there is a relationship between sport policy and the capacity development of sport federations, the relationship is not that straightforward. Different systems seem to result in comparable capacity building, while similar systems had different effects on sport federations. Our findings parallel with Henry's (2013) framework on four types of sport systems. The study extends the contributions of existing comparative studies on sport systems, by taking a perspective of capacity building of sport federations and especially by focusing on the effect of different governmental actions and policies on the sport federations in the context of developing grassroots sport.

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