

## Management strategies of non-profit community sport facilities in an era of austerity

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### Aim

This research explored the implications of austerity driven policy measures on the strategies and operations of non-profit community sport facilities in England. At present, there is limited empirical research on the impact of the economic downturn and resultant era of austerity, on non-profit community sport facilities, including the issues, challenges and barriers that they have faced and/or overcome.

### Literature review

In the United Kingdom there has been an ongoing reduction in public spending since 2010 (through to 2015), which many refer to as an era of austerity (Blyth, 2013). This has influenced the delivery and accessibility to community facilities, which has some have suggested may negatively impact sports participation (Parnell, Millward, Spracklen, 2014). The Prime Minister David Cameron stated that there was a need for "a leaner, more efficient state" in which "we need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently" (quoted in Krugman, 2015: 1). As we enter what has been termed a period of 'super' (continued) austerity, it was important to explore how this had impacted upon the management strategies of non-profit community sport facilities. In doing so, this research draws on the concept of organisational capacity as well as Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) (Wicker and Breuer, 2011).

### Methodology

Data collection involved in-depth qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews with senior stakeholders (i.e., facility managers; funders) (N=24) and secondary data analysis of annual documents (i.e., monitoring reports) from N=202 community sport facilities (n=22 large; n=52 medium; n=133 small), which were funded by a national intervention across England. The facilities included large facilities such as artificial grass pitch centres through to multi-use games area and skateparks. Data from both were thematic analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### Results/discussion

The research highlighted challenges including, (i) reduced local authority services, such as maintenance repairs, ongoing up-keep and reduced parks and leisure teams, which affected facility management and put some at risk of closure and (ii)

increased facility operating costs, as a result of increased utility, rent and human resource expenditure. Facilities navigated austerity and maintained capacity through (i) strong governance processes, (ii) flexible pricing strategies, (iii) strategic and operational network development (specifically when associated with a professional sports clubs charity) and (iv) resource diversification, such as the addition of a café or licensed social club.

### Implications

The empirical outcomes of the research provides an insight into the organisational strategies adopted by community sport facilities during an era of austerity. Findings add to the research on organisational capacity, and provide policy makers, commissioners and managers with considerations to help navigate an era of austerity.

### References

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