

IS THERE AN EFFECTIVE FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT POLICY NETWORK IN ENGLAND? A CASE STUDY OF THE FA'S CHARTER STANDARD SCHEME

Jimmy O'Gorman & Mike Weed, Institute of Sport & Leisure Policy, Loughborough University, UK

Context

Within the broader political context of New Labour in which collaborative ventures across public, private and voluntary sectors are viewed as efficient and beneficial, and an ever-increasing focus on policies targeted at youth sport, the 1999 DCMS document *A Sporting Future for All* encouraged national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) to take more ownership and responsibility for the development of their own sport from grassroots to elite level. Projects are deemed worthwhile in any sport that adheres to the principles of pooling resources, knowledge and expertise, and are recognised as proponents of good practice being rewarded through support in the form of public grants. The Football Association's Charter Standard scheme was conceived as part of its Charter for Quality, and was to be implemented at the grassroots level of football in England. The 'kitemark' scheme was launched for schools in 1999 and clubs in 2001 and is currently to be re-launched after review in 2006. Such initiatives are based around the FA's National Game Division's mission statement, which includes striving to have the best football club structures in the world, with development opportunities and clear pathways for lifelong participation in football for all. The CS scheme is essentially quality assurance, specifically aimed at the participation level of youth football in acknowledging and rewarding good practice in coaching, administration and child protection in schools, youth and junior football clubs. Such schemes have become more prevalent in sport in the last decade due to increased political awareness and sensitivity to child protection issues in society and sport, and promoted as exemplifying safety and quality provision.

This paper will discuss how far there is an effective policy network for football development in England that can support the implementation of football development policies, focusing on the Charter Standard as an example. To this end, a policy network typology originally proposed by Marsh and Rhodes in 1992 and further developed by Marsh and Smith (2001) was used. Policy Networks are a meso-level concept, indicative of a new form of governance at the macro-level described by Rhodes (2000) as self organising, inter-organisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state. A policy network is conceptualised as existing along a continuum ranging from a policy community to an issue network, differentiated according to several key dimensions including membership, integration, resources and power. At one end, the policy community is a type of policy network characterised by limited and restricted membership, a high degree of integration (i.e. frequent interaction) between members, a fairly even distribution of resources within the network, and accordingly a fairly even balance of power between members. By contrast, an issue network is a type of policy network characterised by more open membership, a looser, less integrated structure, more varied distribution of resources within the network, and therefore an unequal balance of power between members. To avoid a mere structural description of the football development policy network, attention is paid to the dialectical approach developed by Marsh and Smith (2001), which attempted to move beyond pure description by taking account of the context in which the network is involved (i.e. wider social processes), the outcomes produced by the network (i.e. how the Standard is implemented) and between structure and agency. This paper adopts a critical realist methodology to policy networks in that such social structures that are not observable, can nevertheless be said to be real since they impact on observable human behaviour.

Method

While the successful implementation of schemes like 'Football in the Community' suggests a football development policy network exists, this paper is concerned with how far a football development policy network provides adequate and effective support for the FA's Charter Standard scheme. A football development policy network can be conceived as operating at three distinct yet overlapping levels. The national level comprises the FA, professional clubs, DCMS, Sport England and the

Football Foundation. At the regional level, County FAs, Local Education Authorities, Sport Development Departments, amateur semi-professional clubs and the Football Workforce are involved. Finally, the local level comprises amateur, youth and junior football clubs, primary and secondary schools, and local sports facility providers. Each organisation, at any level, has some degree of influence on the implementation of the CS which requires partnerships across public, private and voluntary sectors. The extent of the football development policy network's effectiveness in implementing the Charter Standard is investigated using a range of case studies of individual counties. County Football Development Officers, teachers and volunteers such as club secretaries and coaches from all levels of the policy network were selected to take part in semi-structured interviews, as part of a series of network analyses through tracer studies (Hornby & Symon, 1994) of the 'reach' and effectiveness of such networks. The data aimed to identify the dynamics of the network in each County, focusing on the experiences, issues and problems encountered by those responsible for implementation, and so adopts an inductive 'bottom up' research strategy (cf. Weed, 2003).

Results

This paper will present preliminary results from one Case Study county from interviews conducted in 2005. Issues such as actors in the network working in partnership across public, private and voluntary sectors and the impact this has for the implementation of the scheme will be discussed. Further, the structure of the policy network will be identified and how far actors perceive they are facilitated or constrained by such structures. This will lead to a discussion of the impact the structure and dynamics of the policy network has on the implementation of the CS scheme.

Discussion and Implications

The evidence for the existence of a football development policy network is the fact that clubs and schools have reached the pinnacle of Charter Standard status, which stipulates that they must work in partnership to develop school-club links and assist others with development plans. How far a football development policy network can provide sustainable effective support for the Charter Standard scheme across all sectors and at all levels, and ensure the quality management (cf de Knop et al, 2004) of youth and junior football development in clubs and schools is a question for empirical investigation. A multitude of policies in football and sport in general that actors within the football development policy network are responsible for implementing will be a key issue, and thus a factor in future initiatives for football development.

References

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Contact: j.ogorman@lboro.c.uk