

# The outsourcing of the sports services in the public swimming pools. Compared analysis of the supply in Catalonia (Spain)

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## Aim of paper and research questions

The present research tries to identify the characteristics of the supply of services in outsourcing sports facilities (specifically indoor swimming pools) and compare these with those offered by facilities managed by the local councils, and how the Catalonian local government regulates the outsourcing contracts. Research questions are:

- How does outsourcing influence the supply of services in Catalan swimming pools?
- What aspects does local government prioritise in the regulation of outsourcing?

## Literature review

The roots of this research are in political and public administration and in sport science.

Spanish public administration is undergoing a process to be able to provide better public services and adapt to the changes brought about by the information era (Castells, 2001; Subirats, 2002; MAP, 2000).

Catalonia (the capital of which is Barcelona), as a powerful economic and political region in the North-East of Spain, with its own language (Catalan), a population of 6,350,000 inhabitants distributed across 944 municipalities, and a high level of development and employment, has always played a very important role in the modernisation of the country.

The bureaucratic model was possible at a time when the state did not provide much services to the citizen; however the crises began when it tried to assume new roles in trying to get more involved in public service especially through the increase in public spending and employees, because of the new requirements to be adhered to through its accession to the European Union. Public Administration now has new guidelines:

1. Accountability;
2. Effectiveness;
3. Efficiency;
4. Responsibility.

Outsourcing, when a third party manages the public service, has been found to be very effective for the modernisation of public administration. It can increase the efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Its interaction with the private sector can help adapt the service for new market requirements, but can also be detrimental to the public interest. (Ramio, 2006; Longo & Ysa, 2008; Mas, 2004).

After the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, outsourcing is increasingly used in the management of local sports services in Catalonia (Puig, Sarasa, Junyent & Oro, 2003; Botella & Moragas, 2002; Sole Tura & Subirats 1994)

If successful this would be a good way of increased the efficiency of public services, introducing competition, improving the supply to citizens with better quality and lower prices. However, this does not always happen. Public Administration needs to change in order to face an unlimited social demand: it is time to put in place standards of performance, to choose the right tools, plan, evaluate and control. (Mas, 2004), but these procedures are rare in Catalan public administration (Ramio, Salvador & Garcia, O., 2007) particularly in sports services.

### **Research design and data analysis**

The results show that the swimming pools managed indirectly (46.7% in Catalonia) are located near Barcelona City (82.9% of them), in bigger towns and in cities with a higher family income (RBDF 104,49 vs 95,89).

These swimming pools have significantly more expensive prices for all kinds of services: single event ticket (36%), periodic fee (65%), and enrolment fee (71%). It is also higher for aquatic activities (13%), but not for any gym activities.

The services of these pools are targeted at particular groups of citizens:

- More discounts (-40.5% vs -27.8%) and more free services to those who pay a monthly fee;
- More complimentary services (4.11 vs 1.7) such as spa, massages, aesthetics, ...;
- More sport activities for adults (62.7 weekly sessions vs 46.1);
- More gymnastic activities.

They promote the types of access which generate more revenue such as membership, gymnastic activities and complimentary health-related services with more people and at a higher cost.

With regards to contract regulations, the local councils do not give much attention to diversity, the use of non-profit organisations or the promotion of sports practice. The criteria of selection depend on efficiency and economic aspects.

Control of outsourcing services has been found to be the following:

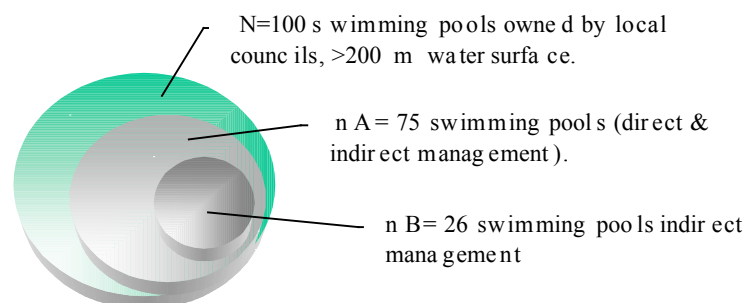
- Great importance is given to economic supervision (70%);
- Only inefficiency and inefficacy is penalised;
- There is no system to ensure quality or equity.

### **Results**

Dimensions and variables of the study:

1. Sport facility and context (features, socioeconomic context);
2. Supply of sport and leisure services (prices of services, number and kind of programs, volume, profitability of activities, customer oriented, attention to specific groups);
3. Outsourcing and evaluation (management, offer requirements as a selection criteria, equity control, economic monitoring).

## Sampling:



Field of Study: Catalonia (Spain).

Fieldwork: May to July 2001.

Data collection instruments:

Phase A) Comparative analysis of the supply:

- Flyers of the swimming pools;
- Self-administered questionnaire to the manager;
- Directories and databases.

Phase B) Outsourcing requirements:

- Terms and legal conditions that regulate the outsourcing.

Analysis and data processing:

- Quantitative content analysis (SPSS). Taxonomy of aquatic activities adapted (Joven, 2001);
- Qualitative content analysis (Nudist vivo). Ad-hoc categories made for this study.

### Discussion and conclusion

The Research gives us a particular point of view regarding the outsourcing phenomenon in sport in Catalonia:

- For the most of the Catalonian sport facilities, outsourcing management raises the price of services. Access to the municipal indoor swimming pools reproduces the inequality present in the practice of sport with regards to age and social class. Indirect management accentuates this inequality, even though there is a great difference in the type and location of the swimming pools managed indirectly;
- Local government prioritise economy and efficiency, but there are only a few requirements for equal opportunity. In addition, we have observed only few actions to promote links with the civil society or voluntary sport organisations.

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