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Searching for evidence: A case analysis of the impact of policy on the management of a community sport organisation

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Background:

Since 2000 there has been increased government interest and involvement in sport within the U.K. As part of a modernising agenda funding agencies have required recipients to provide evidence to ensure goal achievement (Coalter, 2007). This has resulted in increased governmentality, evident in tools such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E) being encouraged to ensure accountability and that the collected evidence justifies the funds provided (Rose, 1999; Skinner et al, 2008). As part of a larger study into community sport this paper presents preliminary findings on the impact of macro level policy requirements on the meso-level management of a community sport organisation that caters to marginalised groups within the south-east England area.

Objectives:

- To examine the impact of policy agendas on the cultural identity of a community sport organisation and its members (staff, volunteers and external partners).
- To explore the nature and extent to which the organisation modifies their customer operations in light of internal and external pressures.

Literature Review:

Studies on sport organisations have revealed that both the external and internal environments have an impact on the organisation (Smith and Shilbury, 2004; Slack et al, 1994). Previous studies have examined the impact of government agendas on organisational procedures in Canadian sport (cf. Slack et al, 1994), and the reform of government quangos in the U.K. (Houlihan and Green, 2008) However within the U.K. minimal empirical evidence exists on the impact of these policies on the management of sporting organisations (cf. Green and Houlihan, 2005; Grix 2009) particularly at grass roots level. Grix (2009) recently examined the impact of these policies on the governance of British athletics where it was found that the professionals developing these policies were out of touch with the practitioners within the sport. As yet little research has considered the impact of these macro-level policies on the management and cultural identity of grassroots community sport. This paper draws on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus,

field, capital and practice in seeking to inform further analysis of how community sport organisations deal with the impacts of modernisation and maintain their uniqueness.

Research design and data analysis:

Skinner and Edwards (2005) highlight the suitability of ethnographic approaches to the study of sport management. Since May 2008 data has been collected through a combination of active-member observations (Adler and Adler, 1987) and semi-structured interviews with the organisation's staff and partners. Misener and Doherty (2009) found that active-member roles are beneficial in community sport management research. The data was analysed using an interpretive phenomenological approach (Maso, 2001) allowing the generation of relevant themes on the management of culture and change.

Discussion of progress:

The preliminary discussion focuses on two themes generated from an analysis of group identities; distinctiveness, and change leading to conflict. As a grassroots organisation they enjoy certain freedoms and distinctive cultural differences than more formal sports. Both internal and external group members placed emphasis on the modification of sporting opportunities that cater for inclusion rather than through formal governing body regulations (Nixon, 2007). Dramatic change caused by significant increases in funding is manifested through a number of factors, with the most obvious being the restructuring and creation of new hierarchies. The sport used innovative methods that have allowed the external presentation of its values to remain intact. Nevertheless there is still a resistance for formalising M&E activities into programme sessions.

This research is in its early stages and as a result the preliminary findings have not been used to implement actions within the organisation.

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