

DIFFICULTIES OF SPORT ORGANISATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY – A CASE STUDY OF THE UK AND JAPAN

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Abstract

Aims:

The aim of this study is to identify the main difficulties for athletes with intellectual disability (ID) sports organisations, under the difficult situation which International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has banned ID sport about for a decade. In order to identify the characteristics of the Japanese situation, this study employs the case study in the UK which is one of the advanced nations in the area of disability sports.

Backgrounds:

The IPC assembly held in November 2009 agreed to the reinclusion of athletes with ID from the 2012 London Paralympic Games. A decision will have considerable significance for the management of sport organisations for athletes with ID.

There are two reasons why this study focuses on competitive sport for people with ID. First, sport associations for people with ID globally tend to collaborate with mainstream governing bodies and World Championships are organised by the mainstream bodies. Second, ID sports were excluded from the Paralympic Games between 2001 and 2009 until the issue of the regulation of eligibility was resolved satisfactorily in 2009. As a result, in many countries, national sports organisations for people with ID, especially for elite sports, have faced difficulties in obtaining money from their governments.

There is a difference in the political structure of disability sport organisation, between the UK and Japan. In the UK, disability sports are governed by the Department of the Culture, Media and Sports which supervised both able bodied and the disabled. Conversely, in Japan, the Ministry of Welfare is governing disability sports (the mainstream sport is governed by the different Ministry).

Methodology:

To achieve the aim of this study, this study conducts a comparative study between UK (mainly England) and Japan and focuses on the UK Sport Association for People with LD (UKSAPLD) for England and on the Japan Basketball Federation for Players with ID (JBF-FID) for Japan, employing meta-analysis, case study and semi-structure interview methods.

Results and discussion:

This study finds three crucial points to understand the situation of ID sport organisations.

First, both organisations face the same difficulties because sport for/ of people with ID has been excluded from IPC sanctioned events for 10 years. Indeed, the impact of being a “non-Paralympic sport” severely damaged their administration, in particular in finding sponsorship and fundraising. The bankruptcy of the English Sport Association for People with Learning Disability in 2004 is a typical example. Actors from both countries had felt frustrated that ID sport had not clearly shown behaviours to make decisions to solve the problems of ID sport organisations, although ID sport organisations in both countries have reported to the governments or the quangos to change their difficult situation.

The second conclusion is that policy actors in both UKSAPLD and JBF-FID believed that although both organisations have recognised that for NGBs, disability (elite) sports are not core agendas, it was crucial to work with mainstream sports national governing bodies for the development of sport for people with ID. Both UKSAPLD and JBF-FID worked closely with mainstream NGB(s) when they organised national coaching camps, athlete selection, national championships and so on which relate to athletes development.

Third, ID is not physically apparent, particularly. With regards to people whose disability level is at a mild or minimal level. These people are sometimes regarded as able bodied and often live in mainstream society. However, due to the nature of their disability, people with ID tend to receive less government welfare support and public attention. Moreover, their disability creates a difficult situation, in particular JBF-FID, in trying to find a sponsorship or obtain subsidies from the government.

These findings led to recognition of an important point. In both countries, NGBs have provided supports to athletes with ID. However, ID sports have not been the core agendas of them. More importantly, although both countries have policies which state that the disabled have also sports rights, organisations have felt ‘frustration’ with the situation because the governments have not shown behaviours or made some decisions to change the difficult situations. These findings would be explained following the discussion of Lukes’s (2005) the third dimensional power that the political issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices.

References:

Lukes Steven (2005) *Power – A Radical View*, 2nd edition,
Hampshire: Palgrave.