

## WHERE IS THE IMPLEMENTATION IN SPORT POLICY AND PROGRAMME ANALYSIS?

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### Abstract

Although there is an abundance of research into sports programmes and policies that inherently discuss implementation, with the exception of Skille (2008), most fail to explicitly address this phenomenon, nor do they consider theories and concepts associated with implementation evident in social and political sciences. This paper contends that to ignore such a vital process may limit or constrain knowledge of not only how and why sport policies and programmes have been implemented, but also how we come to make assumptions and propositions as to their impacts and relative successes or failures. As such, this paper has a number of objectives. First, to encourage the incorporation, generation and innovation of existing implementation theories, concepts and models into the sport policy analysis lexicon. It is hoped that this will not only generally broaden the sport policy analysis research agenda, but specifically generate and develop a theoretically informed literature on the practice of sport policy and programme implementation to enhance sport policy students, academics and policymaker’s knowledge of the implementation process. Second, and to this end, the paper critiques the existing developments in theory building regarding implementation evident in the literature. Concurring with several leading implementation theorists (De Leon and De Leon 2002; O’Toole 2004), this paper contends that there is a problematic relationship regarding the search for a generalized theory of policy implementation that can be applied to all policies (De Leon and De Leon 2002), and the capacity of proponents of different theories to argue past one another (O’Toole 2004) which has reached an intellectual dead end. Indeed, given the paucity of sport policy implementation literature generally, and the lack of application of relevant implementation theories and concepts, following De Leon and De Leon (2002, p. 489), it is advisable to focus on understanding particular issues and processes in relation to specific policies and programmes rather than embarking on a futile search for a generic ‘meta-theory’ applicable to all sports policies. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers analysing sport policy implementation or analysing policies in which implementation is an inherent aspect, single or

comparative case studies are more conducive to increasing our understanding of sport policy implementation and generating a literary base that aids our understanding. Third, and in this connection, following a rejection of dichotomous top-down/bottom-up and synthesized models, this paper thoroughly considers Matland’s (1995) model of conflict and ambiguity as a potential fruitful model to aid the understanding of the implementation of one particular sport policy. Drawing on qualitative empirical data from an analysis of the English Football Association’s Charter Standard, Matland’s (1995) model is applied to analyse the processes and outcomes of implementation. However, although Matland’s categories provide a useful analytical typology in this illustrative example, they fail to adequately account for processes of communication, bargaining and the use of power expressed in terms of either coercion or negotiated agreements (Schofield 2004, p. 290). The paper concludes by suggesting such gaps in analytical capacity could potentially be complemented by the policy networks literature (Marsh and Smith 2001), particularly given that such frameworks allow analysis to move away from the inhibitive characteristic of policy implementation research identifying, confirming or refuting generalistic variables. To this end, the paper revisits the original data to propose an integrated framework of policy networks and Matland’s categories in generating a more reality congruent framework with which to analyse the implementation of one specific sports policy. Furthermore, drawing on this case specific example, calls for more in depth, theoretically informed analyses of specific sports programme and policy implementation are called for.

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