

UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL CONTROL IN SMALL VOLUNTARY SPORT ORGANISATIONS: THE CASE OF COMMUNITY SWIMMING CLUBS

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Abstract

Research on voluntary sport has a growing body of literature but to date there has been minimal comparison between small voluntary sport organisations (VSOs), of different sizes, contexts or organisational structures e.g. National Governing Bodies to advance our understanding (Byers et al, 2007). Broadly, the purpose of this paper is theory verification rather than theory generation, in order to contribute to the understanding of control in small voluntary sport organisations. Specifically we examine the impact of control mechanisms on VSO members in the context of swimming clubs, which we show are a group of organisations that differ from the clubs examined by Byers et al (2007).

At present, the study of organisational control in VSOs is a relatively young area of investigation. Volunteers play a key role in many small sport organisations, taking responsibility for a wide variety of challenging tasks (Seippel, 2004). Understanding the control and coordination of tasks in these organisations is essential given the wider importance of voluntary sport organisations to sport and society.

Without volunteers, community sport would cease to exist and staging a sporting event would simply not be possible (Balduck et al, 2009). VSO volunteering responsibilities cover a broad spectrum of activities that play a vital role and are described as the 'life blood' of sport and clubs (Sport England, 2007). Voluntary sport clubs in England represent a significant population; there are over 150,000 affiliated clubs that have over 10 million members, run by volunteers (SRA, 2011). The voluntary workforce contribution represents 14 percent of the UK adult population (SRA, 2011) and does not take into consideration the thousands of youth volunteers assisting

at sporting events.

Byers et al (2007) provided a snapshot of control in one type of VSO. Rather than the limited view of control as simply a management function, a variety of control mechanisms in small community equestrian clubs were the subject of investigation. Control was depicted as a social, relational occurrence as well as a rational process that may be attempted by managers. Byers et al (2007) produced data of three in-depth cases that has yet to be extended to fully test the findings and propositions developed about the control of small VSOs and the impact of these organisations on its members and community. This work can be used as a foundation to examine other types of VSOs such as swimming clubs. Swimming is a high participation sport, high on government agendas and an accessible sport for a diverse spectrum of age, gender, race, social background and ability, for example. Comparison of findings from both cases investigating effects of various control mechanisms on volunteers would therefore contribute to the preliminary research on control in VSOs.

Qualitative research is employed for this study. Data is currently being gathered from two swimming clubs collecting archival material, engaging direct observations and using semi-structured interviews with 12 club members. A diverse sample of committee members (of age, length of service and committee position) have been selected to yield a range of perspectives from the swimming clubs. Case study research design and methods are employed and Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) will be applied to validate the multiple forms of data enabling triangulation of results.

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