

## 'Not playing boules': A case study of the English Petanque Association (EPA)

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### Abstract keywords

Governance, accountability, voluntary sports organisations

### Aim of abstract/paper - research question

This paper explores some of the challenges facing not-for-profit, voluntary sports organisations through an empirical account of the governance of the English Pétanque Association (EPA). The emerging literature on sports governance has tended to focus on sports governing bodies managing professional sports at an international and/or national level, and as such research on organisations which promote and provide sports activity at grassroots level is limited (Skille, 2008). This study was motivated by this apparent gap in the literature, as well as a growing interest from government in ensuring that NGBs are fit for purpose and have an appropriate level of both sport specific expertise and independent representation to be able to meet governance challenges.

### Theoretical background or literature review\*

The sport policy landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade, and in turn the management of the voluntary sport sector has come under increased scrutiny (Robinson and Palmer, 2011). The case study needs to be viewed against a backdrop of the government strengthening its capacity to set strategic direction so that there are now increasingly contractual arrangements, from the DCMS to the Sports Councils, down through the spine of accountability to CSPs, to NGBs, to local authorities (Houlihan and Green, 2009). As one of the key deliverers of government policy, NGBs have subsequently had to grapple with governance issues, sparked by instances of managerial failure, financial difficulties, and increased public funding for sport that together have contributed in the need for greater professionalism (Walters et al. 2010). This has been manifest through a modernisation programme, promoted by UK Sport and Sport England, with the aim of improving NGB governance. The most recent example of this is the introduction of a government-supported *Voluntary Code of Good Governance* by the Sport and Recreation Alliance in 2011.

### Methodology, research design and data analysis

This paper presents an in-depth single case study, an empirical account of the English Pétanque Association (EPA). The NGB is one among hundreds in the UK, and as such the case study makes no claims at generalisation, but seeks to provide some rich insights into the challenges facing a volunteer-run and member-led sports organisation. As part of the study key administrators involved in the sport were interviewed, as well as seeking the views of other stakeholders, including representatives from the home nation organisations, and those responsible for promoting pétanque at a regional/club level\*.

### Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

This research contributes to our understanding of governance in non-profit NGBs. Garnering the views of key administrators responsible for the sport provides some interesting insights into the practical governance challenges facing volunteer-run boards, amidst growing scrutiny of government (despite cuts in funding), as well as managing the expectations of members. The study also provides a timely account of the challenges the EPA have faced with improving their own governance structures, as well as bringing to light some of the nuances associated with this minority sport and a NGB which is still in its infancy. In particular, one of the key themes that emerged from the empirical research is the resource constraints facing voluntary sports organisations, which can make implementing change difficult.

### References – limited to 5

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*\*Please note that these interviews are ongoing. The majority of the data gathering has been completed and I can guarantee that the transcripts and analysis will be finished in good time in preparation for the conference.*