
THE LONDON 2012 COMMUNITY SPORT LEGACY: THE PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Submitting author: Dr Spencer Harris
University of Colorado Colorado Springs, College of Business
Austin Bluffs Parkway, 80918
United States

All authors: Spencer Harris (corresp)

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Abstract

1. Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Community sport in England is characterised as a complex and multi-faceted policy field, partly due to the number of agencies involved (Houlihan & Green, 2009). At the same time it is growing in financial stature and political salience. Between 2012 and 2017 a total of £1 billion of public money will be invested in the community sport legacy (Sport England, 2012). This does not include a similar level of investment into the pre-Games community sport legacy between 2008-2012. With this context in mind the paper aims to evaluate the implementation of community sport policy using Marsh and Smith's (2000) Dialectical Model of Policy Networks as a framework to structure and support analysis of the community sport policy field.

2. Theoretical background or literature review

Marsh & Smith's (2000) Dialectical Model of Policy Networks aims to illuminate the two-way relationship between variables and the way in which one variable might affect the other in a continuing iterative process (Marsh & Smith, 2000). In specific terms the model gives attention to structural context, actors' skill and learning, actors' resources, network structures, network interactions and policy outcomes. In this way it explicitly considers agents as well as analysing the dialectical nature of structure – agency and the way in which this shapes network structures, network interactions and policy outcomes.

3. Methodology, research design and data analysis

Rooted in a critical realist paradigm the study uses a mixed methodology comprising a questionnaire followed by a case study approach utilising documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. Phase one of the study consisted of a questionnaire that was sent to all 49 CSPs and to the 44 NGBs in receipt of whole sport plan funding from Sport England. A

total of 47 CSPs (96%) and 27 NGBs (61%) responded. The results from the questionnaire provided contextual information regarding the structure and strategy of key agents and thus helped with the selection of CSP-based case studies in phase two. A total of three case studies were developed each involving a total of 14 participants: the Chairperson, Director and NGB lead officer of the CSP; representatives from eight NGBs; and representatives from three local authorities. The interview guide was developed to reveal the range of attitudes and perspectives toward the implementation of community sport policy. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the interviewee. The transcripts were analysed using principles from grounded theory. In particular, open coding was used to label and categorize the data and axial coding was used to relate codes to each other through a process of inductive and deductive thinking.

4. Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The findings confirm the hierarchical, top-down nature of the community sport policy process, represented by competing coalitions rather than a joined-up, epistemic community. This fragmentation is largely the result of resource dependency, differing values and beliefs regarding the role of sport, the diverse structures within which agents' operate (Betts, 1982) and, not least, the storylines (Fischer, 2003) that galvanise and reinforce the identity of the policy community. The empirical exercise concludes with an overview summarizing the factors that characterize the policy community, the barriers that prevent effective policy implementation, and recommendations for future community sport policy.

References

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