
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF A SPORT MANAGEMENT TOOL: THE CASE OF THE FRENCH RUGBY FEDERATION SPORT POLICY

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Synopsis:

In this research, a management science framework is suggested that analyses the concept of sport policy, applied to French Rugby Federation. Based on previous research outside sport management, federal sport policy is considered a management tool.

Abstract:

1. AIM / RESEARCH QUESTION

In this research, a management science framework is suggested that analyses the concept of sport policy, applied to national sport associations. Based on previous research outside sport management, national sport policy is considered a management tool, and thus is the consequence of a conceptual triptych, consisting of: a formal substrate, a managing philosophy and a simplified representation of the actors' role (Hatchuel & Weil, 1992). The focus of this research is on the social construction of a national association sport policy by the actors located both at the headquarters of a national sport association and the regional committees that affiliate to it. The aim is to understand the dynamics and the roles of the different actors in the co-construction process of a national association sport policy.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Literature on the use of management tools is now well documented (Drevetton, 2011; Oiry, 2012). However, the social construction of management tools does not appear to have received as much attention. Drevetton (2011) and Oiry (2012) rely on Actor-Network Theory to analyse the design process of such tools. The use of this framework will allow us to highlight that each actor will have his own "translation" of the tool. Drevetton (2011) indicates that the construction process of a management tool requires four successive phases,

consistent with the actor-network theory: problematisation, incentive, recruitment and mobilisation of allies. These four phases are linked together by actors' "translations" (Oiry, 2012). Indeed, each actor may develop 1) his own definition of the objectives of the tool, 2) the role that he envisages to play, and finally 3) the roles that he perceives for the other actors in the co-construction process of the tool.

Following Oiry (2012), the concept of "prescriptive relationship" is proposed, to take into account the power and knowledge relations in organisations. Indeed, because of their different status and functions, the actors are not equal.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

A qualitative methodology was designed within the French Rugby Federation (FFR) as follows: firstly, a documentary study was used to gather some formal information about the organisation. Secondly, 44 semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to understand the context of the social constructs that are apparent in the FFR, its affiliates and the actors' point of view (King, 1994). Respondents were selected because of their influence and the important roles they may play in relation to the national association sport policy. Interviews were conducted with both federal and regional actors with various statutes (16 board members, 16 sport technicians and 12 administrative managers).

The semi-structured questionnaire included six groups of questions covering the following topical areas: 1) the link between the actors' activities and the federal sport policy, (2) the objectives they associate with this tool, 3) the roles they perceive for themselves and the others actors, 4) the content they feel should be included in the federal sport policy, 5) the perceived benefits and disadvantages embedded in the policy, and finally 6) the strengths and weaknesses of the policy as perceived by the actors.

A thematic analysis was performed, by transcription of each interview and categorisation of data, according to the frequencies and redundancies of answers (Guest, 2012).

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Four themes were identified through the process of coding: pre-existing organisational dynamics, representations and perceptions on the definition of the sport policy, performance elements related to this sport policy, and the dynamics of the relationships between the actors.

The analysis of the interviews on the basis of these four themes shows both agreements and controversies. Different perceptions of the picture established by different actors regarding the organisation and its environment were evident. These points of view have influenced the initial actors' "translations". The main agreements are based on the difficulties encountered, firstly from an organisational point of view, both in the headquarters of the FFR and throughout the network of organisations affiliated to it. The actors agree that there are difficulties when attempting to define what exactly is the sport policy being developed. Finally, it was agreed that they are opportunities for

improving the decision-making process.

Controversies were evident for each element of our conceptual triptych: they concern the content, the purpose of the FFR sport policy and the role that each actor should play within the network.

In conclusion, the case study emphasises the need to organise successive translations to go beyond the controversies. It will lead to the transformation of the FFR sport policy by determining the actors' involvement in the process. In addition, the actors in the network will establish "prescriptive relationships" in order to integrate their own translation in the management tool.

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