

The management and organization of sports facilities in Danish municipalities – Preliminary results from a national research project

Authors: Dr. Evald Iversen, Dr. Jens Høyer-Kruse

Institution: Department of Sports Sciences and Clinical Biomechanics, University of Southern Denmark

E-mail: eiversen@health.sdu.dk

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Aim of abstract

The majority of the public spending on sport and leisure activities in Denmark (about 1 mio. EUR per year) goes to financing and subsidizing the operation of sports facilities.

Despite the considerable public expenditure, sport facilities face major challenges in Denmark as well as in other countries in the Western World facing similar challenges. Demographic shifts in the population (more elderly people, urbanization in certain regions and population decrease in others) are very demanding for the transformation of the sports facilities (Høyer-Kruse, 2013). Rapid changes in the population's general sports habits, a soaring number of adult athletes, a growing need in health and prevention perspective to enable and motivate new groups of citizens to do sport and physical activity along with an increased pressure on public expenditure on sports infrastructure, place new demands on the facilities. On that backdrop this research argues that it is imperative to a higher extent to consider how the (public) management of sports facilities can be optimised in order to maximise the performance of sports facilities.

Methodology

There is wide variation between the 98 municipalities in Denmark in relation to the coverage of different facility types, forms of ownership and how the (public) management of the sports facilities is organized. And there is little knowledge about how these differences might influence the performance of sports facilities. Hence there exist almost no basis for comparison between the municipalities and the individual facilities that could help strengthen the (public) management of the sports facilities. To fill this gap, this research project aims at providing a basic knowledge and an illustration of the great diversity in the field of sports facilities and to identify the characteristics of the facilities, which are important for efficient operation and a high utilization. And in future stages also to measure the performance of Danish sports facilities and thereby be able to assess which factors influence the performance of sports facilities. We primarily define the performance of sports facilities as user satisfaction, economic success and high utilization. (Howat, 2004; Taylor and Shibli, 2009; Iversen, 2015).

The theoretical perspective starts from the stream of performance management literature that deals in different ways with measuring performance and using performance information to improve the performance of the public sector (Bruijn, 2007). Performance management is increasingly used throughout the western world (Bruijn, 2007) and the concept of performance management is often used together with the

concepts of management and public management (Van Dooren, Bouckaert, & Halligan, 2010).

Methodology

This research project on that backdrop aims to assess the consequences of different types of management and the performance of publicly subsidized sports facilities.

At EASM the first results from the research project that runs in 2015-2019 will be presented. Based on surveys of 52 of the Danish municipalities and more than 1,000 publicly subsidized sports facilities, some of the presented preliminary results will be presented: What are the municipal and organizational framework and the demands and expectations of the sports facilities? And how are the sports facilities organized and managed? How do they perform based on bookings and available background data? How is the public management of sports facilities when it comes to for example how the subsidies are granted and which policies exist in general for the sports facilities when it comes to for example cancelling timeslots and granting fines? Finally, also characteristics of the subsidies floating to different types of sports facilities will be assessed.

Results and implications

The first results of the study will be presented at EASM 2016. It is expected that the results will have a relevance for both researchers and practitioners/managers of sports facilities as well as bureaucrats/public managers of sports facilities.

The implications of the findings is to suggest how the (public) management of sports facilities could be altered in order to improve the performance of sports facilities.

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