

Partnerships Between Local Governments And Japan Professional Football League Clubs: Analysis Of Local Sport Promotion Plans

Kusaka, Tomoaki

University of Tsukuba, Japan

E-mail: tmksk298@yahoo.co.jp

Background and aim of research

Partnerships across different sectors has become important in sport policy. In particular, the concern over the partnerships between local governments and local professional sport teams has risen and building the relationships is a challenging subject for both municipalities and local professional sport teams. In Japan, however, there has been little research of what partnerships are established between municipalities and local professional sport teams. Considering the deficit of the understanding on the partnerships in Japan, this study sought to explore the partnerships, in particular the relationships between local governments and Japan Professional Football League (J.League) clubs that can be seen as a precedent example of the partnerships between local governments and professional sport teams in Japan. The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between municipalities and J.League clubs, focusing on the purposes of the partnerships and the motives from municipal standpoint.

Theoretical background and literature review

While some authors reported the purposes of the municipal subsidy or investment in sport facilities for local professional sport teams (Galily, Yuval & Bar-Eli, 2012; Siegfried & Zimbalist, 2000; Stevens & Wootton, 1997), these are only partial explanations of the relationships between municipalities and the local teams. In addition, few studies have focused on what a causal relationship is designed between partnership activities and desired outcomes. To address these issues, this study began by analysing the Local Sport Promotion Plans issued by local governments that can be considered as one of the basic official documents expressing the municipalities' sport policy (the number of plans analysed is 61). This study uses programme theory evaluation to explore the purposes and motives of the partnerships. The programme theory evaluation is useful to explicate a causal relationship between ends and means of a programme and ascertain whether the causal linkages are designed explicitly. In this research, applying the method of program theory evaluation and logic model (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004), this study sought to clarify causal linkages of the partnerships between municipalities and J.League clubs from inputs, activities, initial outcomes, intermediate outcomes to longer-term outcomes.

Results and discussion

The purposes of the partnerships aimed to be accomplished are classified into two broad groups according to its orientation. The first group is characterized as 'for' sport issues, which are relevant to the development and promotion of sport itself. This group includes: enhancement of the top-level (including professional) sport; promotion of sport activities in line with the life stages; and encouragement of watching sport. The second group can be termed as 'through' sport (not-for-sport) issues, which are characterized as the one aiming at fulfil non-sport purposes through sport-related programmes/projects. This group includes: regional revitalization through sport; and promotion of exchanges through sport at the civic and city level. While some municipalities seek to fulfil either one group, others recognise the partnerships to be useful for accomplish both types of outcomes. This means that municipalities expect the partnership with the clubs to make contributions to multi-field policies. However, the causal linkages between partnership activities and outcomes differ according to cases. In fact, some municipalities target for participation in sport through the project to utilize sport coaches of clubs, others aim at promotion of interaction. This suggests that the value of the partnerships with the clubs differ among the municipalities.

The main motive of the municipalities in establishing the partnerships is to acquire resources like human, sport games and sport expertise that municipalities cannot offer. The resources one partner does not have are complemented by others and the scarcity of resources is the inducement to enter into the relationships. In addition, some municipalities are supportive to provide sport facilities with clubs. By investing in the sport facilities, those municipalities endeavour to attract the clubs and create the sustained relationship so that they can reap benefits from the partnership with the clubs.

References

Rossi, P., Lipsey, M. & Freeman, H. (2004). *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach* (7th ed.). California: Sage.