

Are Sport Federations the Most Preferable Institutions to Organise Sport-For-All?

De Bock, Thomas Marc; Willem, Annick; Scheerder, Jeroen and Theeboom, Marc
Ghent University, Belgium
Thomas.debock@Ugent.be

Aim

Sport federations are urged to assist in reducing non-participation rates in sport by offering Sport-for-All projects (Stenling, 2014). In Flanders, more than 260 Sport-for-All projects are implemented by the Flemish sport federations and their members, the sport clubs. However, three critical notes are necessary. First, the non-participation rates in sport are not decreasing and second, the whole cluster of Sport-for-All projects does not seem to contribute to an increased participation within the Flemish sport clubs. Finally, the Flemish sport federations are more fixated on competition and elite sport and not on Sport-for-All e.g. in the past years more than three-quarters of the budget of the Flemish sport federations went to elite sport (Claes et al., 2017). By considering this threefold criticism, this study addresses the following research question: are sport federations the most preferable institutions to organise Sport-for-All? More precisely, our main assumption is that some traditional institutional characteristics of the sport federations might not match with the institutional values necessary for a successful organisation/implementation of Sport-for-All projects.

Theoretical Background

Institutional theory is applied as the study's overarching theoretical framework. The key assumption of institutional theory is that institutions include institutional logics. Institutional logics can be defined as socially constructed organizing principles for institutionalized practices in social systems, such as perceptions, rules, routines, symbols and procedures. The concept of institutional logics is well-established in the sport management literature. Sport management research on institutional logics quite dominantly focuses on the multiple and contending logics characteristics in sport institutions (Stenling, 2014). Another, less frequently used focus suggests that institutions have to advance over time because of changing values and norms in a society or a community. When institutional logics change, organisations need to adapt and embed these new values to stay accepted by relevant actors or organisational members (Borgers, Pilgaard, Vanreusel, & Scheerder, 2016). Sometimes new values do not match the existing organisational values and subsequently the organisation can resist to the change process e.g. if senior managers are opposed to the transition they will slow down the change process (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004). Other reasons why organisations could block the change process are diverse. Often members of an organization will view the prospect of change as a threat to their subunit and individual interests (Pettigrew, 1987). Or, when power in the organisation is concentrated in the hands of volunteers and not with professional staff members, organisations often lack the capacity to change (Amis et al., 2004). Another explanation could be the absence of normative pressure from the organisational field to complete the change process (Oliver, 1991). In sum, this study uses institutional change to investigate if traditional sport federations are the best-suited institutions to deliver Sport-for-All projects. Or, is a change in institutional logics required (a) for the organisation of effective Sport-for-All projects, and (b) to tackle the non-participation rates in sport?

Methodology

This study incorporates data about all existing Sport-for-All projects organised by the Flemish subsidized sport federations (n= 265). The data are derived from the websites and policy documents of the existing Flemish subsidized unisport (n= 40) and multisport (n= 7) federations. In the second phase of the study this data collection will be supplemented with semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be conducted with representatives of the Flemish sport federations who are responsible for the organisation of the Sport-for-All projects. Clearly, these interviews will target the positions of the representatives towards the organisations of these projects.

Results

Data collection is currently still ongoing. Nevertheless, some of the major insights of this study will be ready for presentation at EASM, next to some suggestions for practice. On the one hand results will focus on the categorisation based on the institutional logics in the organised sport sector of the existing Sport-for-All projects in Flanders. The Sport-for-All projects range from sport development (sport +) to +sport programs and intend to reduce traditional barriers inherent to the organized sport sector, such as financial barriers or age limits. The first results are indicating that the whole cluster of Sport-for-All projects is targeting the traditional participants of sport clubs (e.g. children and adults), and is missing priority groups like e.g. low SES groups, who are underrepresented in the existing cluster. On the other hand, the conducted interviews, with representatives of the Flemish sport federations, will present insights in the institutional characteristics of sport federations. And if these characteristics match with the main characteristics necessary for a successful implementation of Sport-for-All projects.

References

- Amis, J., Slack, T., & Hinings, C. (2004). Strategic change and the role of interests, power, and organizational capacity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 18(2), 158-198.
- Borgers, J., Pilgaard, M., Vanreusel, B., & Scheerder, J. (2016). Can we consider changes in sports participation as institutional change? A conceptual framework. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 1012690216639598.
- Claes, E., Scheerder, J., Meganck, J., Vandermeerschen, H., Vos, S., & Seghers, J. (2017). Barometer van de sportclubs in Vlaanderen. Het Vlaamse Sportclub Panel 3.0 (VSP3. 0): ledenprofiel, mederwerkersprofiel en financiële situatie (deel 3).
- Oliver, C. (1991). Strategic responses to institutional processes. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(1), 145-179.
- Pettigrew, A. M. (1987). Context and action in the transformation of the firm. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24(6), 649-670.
- Stenling, C. (2014). The emergence of a new logic? The theorizing of a new practice in the highly institutionalized context of Swedish voluntary sport. *Sport Management Review*, 17(4), 507-519.