

Unpacking the Challenges of (Public) Management of 'Sport-for-all'-Facilities

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Measuring the Utilisation of Sports for All Facilities

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Aim

Following Iversen and Cuskelly (2015), we argue that utilisation is an important performance target for sports facilities. Using data from 500 Danish sports for all facilities, we investigate the advantages and drawbacks of three ways of measuring utilisation with regards to their potential for facilitating learning, steering and accountability for sports facility managers and policymakers.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Two performance information systems, which include measures of utilisation among other measures, are particularly relevant. The National Benchmarking Service (NBS) has developed a measurement of how much the sports facility is used based on annual visits per square meter of usable space (including offices and corridor space). Such a measure gives an overall impression of how many persons uses the facility taking the size of the sports facility into consideration (Ramchandani and Taylor, 2011). The CERM-PI use number of annual visits per square meter of the sports facility as a measurement for how much the sports facility is used (Howat, 2004). Both the NBS and CERM-PI measurements of how much a sports facility is used have the same weakness as such overall measures of use result in limited information about the extent that the sports facility more precisely is used at different points in time.

To overcome these weaknesses, we focus on what actually take place on the 'field of play' and we differentiate between three measures of utilisation: booking, usage and attendance. Booking is defined as how much the sports facility is booked prior to being used, usage is defined as the actual utilisation of the sports facility and attendance is defined as the ratio between bookings and usage. Further, we use Van Dooren, Bouckaert and Halligans (2015) framework on performance information to discuss advantages and drawbacks for booking, usage and attendance regarding learning, steering and controlling and to give account.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Our collection of performance information on utilisation is based on a method developed by Iversen (2015). Using a survey, we collect information about bookings, usage and attendance in the 500 participating indoor sports halls during one week. They have a similar size and can be used for the same sports. Therefore, their utilisation can be compared. Usage measures whether the 'field of play' is used by one or more persons. In addition, data on the users (e.g.

gender and age) and the activity (e.g. type of sport, number of users and use of field of play) are collected. Data show that in these facilities 83% of the timeslots between 16 and 22 is booked, and 61% of the timeslots is used. This result in an attendance of 75%.

Results and Discussion

The advantage of using booking data is the low cost compared to the other types of registration of utilisation presented in this paper (i.e. usage and attendance). However, the public sector is often heavily involved in subsidising the construction and operations of sports facilities. Therefore, it can be argued, that facilities need to be used to add value for society (Moore, 1995).

The drawback of registering usage is, of course, that the impression you get might be based on one week, rather than on an annual average/aggregate usage. If this is not taken into consideration, it might result in bad managerial decisions.

Even though attendance gives a good understanding of whether timeslots booked is actually used, measuring utilisation based on attendance has its challenges. With imprecise bookings not indicating all the activities planned, the attendance rates will be (too) high. Also, attendance is a less precise performance target for utilisation, when a sports facility has a smaller number of bookings. For example, a sports facility booked in only 30 percent of the time can score an attendance of 100 percent without this being an expression of sufficient utilisation. In terms of public value, this would reflect a case of suboptimal usage of a sports facility.

Conclusion and Implications

Using empirical data this article has shown that measuring the utilisation of sports for all facilities is not as simple as it might sound. A first consideration is the purpose of collecting the performance information. Bookings, usage and attendance can all be used for learning, but if the purpose is to steer and control or to give account, it is recommended to focus on usage as this gives the necessary detail to know what happens in the sports facility.

References

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