Presentation

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The Implementation and Diffusion of Innovative Projects by Regional Sports Federations. The Case of Flanders (Belgium).

INFORMATION

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is two-fold. Firstly, the process is investigated whereby sports federations implement an innovative project for their affiliated clubs. On this basis, this study aims to identify critical determinants that facilitated the implementation process. Secondly, the extent to which innovative projects achieve their predefined goals is explored. Using qualitative analyses, we try to answer which factors successfully influence the diffusion of innovative projects.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Voluntary sports organisations, such as sports federations, are often considered traditional, steadfast and change-resistant (Winand et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the vast majority of scientific research indicates that non-profit sports organisations do innovate (Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2013). Furthermore, it has been evidenced that innovation can help non-profit sports organisations to become future-proof (Wemmer et al., 2016) and compete with the growing commercial sports sector.

Previous research within the non-profit sports sector has focused almost exclusively on the output or outcome of an innovation. However, apart from Hoeber and Hoeber (2012) research into the implementation of a technological innovation in a community sports club, little empirical material is available on the diffusion process of innovative projects by non-profit sports organisations. However, the research by Hoeber and Hoeber (2012) revealed some remarkable findings, in particular, that the success of an innovation is determined at different stages during the process by leadership commitment, pro-innovation characteristics, organisational capacity, simple organizational design, and involved and interested external parties. Building on Hoeber and Hoeber's (2012) study, innovation is identified as any initiative that is new for the relevant sports federation's policy, and the multi-dimensional framework of Damanpour and Schneider (2006) is employed to observe determinants of the implementation and diffusion process at the managerial, organisational and environmental level.

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis:

Sports federations in Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking community of Belgium, form the cases for this study. Since the introduction of cultural autonomy in 1969, the communities have jurisdiction over sports policy in their territory (van Poppel et al., 2018). This meant that sports federations in Flanders were recognised and subsidised by a decree for the promotion of their sports branch and were increasingly involved as partners in sports policy. Today, Flanders has 71 recognized sports federations, of which seven are subsidised multisport federations (which offer multiple sports), 42 are subsidised and 22 are only recognised unisport federations (which offer one sport).

Through the 2016 decree 'regarding the recognition and subsidisation of the organised sports sector', sports federations can qualify for an additional subsidy for the implementation of an innovative project. In 2019, 41 innovative projects were requested by 26 different sports federations for a subsidy. In function of comparability both at the level of the organisation and the project, our sample is respectively based on sport type and project evaluation. Concerning the former, solo sports (e.g. running), duo sports with contact (e.g. judo) or without (e.g. tennis), team sports (e.g. football) and a multiple sports offer were distinguished. For each type of sport, a project was then randomly selected that received government funding on the one hand and no government funding on the other. Finally, five more innovative projects, for which no subsidy was requested, were added.