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The institutionalisation of regional public sport policy in the Czech Republic

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This paper deals with the emerging processes of creation and implementation of regional public policies on sport in the Czech Republic since 2001. It analyses the dynamics between the sport voluntary sector and the public administration. The paper captures the major tenets of the regional public policy for sport and explores the barriers undermining its effective functioning. It is argued that the Czech regional public sport policies are limited by two types of constraints; structural and cognitive. Whereas the structural constraints are defined in terms of politicisation, bureaucratisation, lack of evidence in the policy-making process and lack of interaction, the cognitive constraints are related to the lack of knowledge, the lack of information, the low recognition of sport in the context of other policy issues and the negative public image of public administration. Furthermore, a typology of different styles of support for sport and a typology of different strategies employed by sport associations and clubs to obtain funding are identified. The paper, thus, presents five ideal-types of the regional public support of sport: progressive, bureaucratic, political-clientelist, delegated, and marginalised. Moreover, four different strategies adopted by the sport movement are defined: the adaptation strategy; the pragmatic strategy; the strategy of the marginalised; and the strategy of resignation. The study is based on a qualitative methodology, using a combination of techniques such as semi-structured interviews with public administration officers and representatives of the Czech sport movement, secondary analysis of documents and observations.

Keywords: bureaucratisation; cognitive constraints; political clientelism; structural constraints; sport governance

Este estudio trata sobre los procesos de la creación y la implementación de la política del deporte público regional en la república checa desde el 2001. Analiza las dinámicas entre el deporte en el sector del voluntariado y en el del sector de la administración pública. El estudio capta las opiniones principales de la política de deporte público regional y explora las barreras que impiden su capacidad para funcionar efectivamente. Se dice que la política de deportes públicos regionales checa está limitada por dos tipos de restricciones; estructurales y cognitivas. Las restricciones estructurales se definen en términos de la politización, la burocratización, la falta de evidencia en el proceso de la elaboración de las políticas y la falta de interacción, mientras que las restricciones cognitivas están relacionadas con una falta de conocimiento e información junto con un reconocimiento mínimo sobre el deporte en el contexto político y de la imagen negativa que el público tiene de la administración pública. Además, se identifica una tipología de distintos estilos de apoyo hacia el deporte y otra para diferentes estrategias adoptadas por asociaciones y equipos de deporte para conseguir financiación. El estudio presenta 5 tipos ideales

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de apoyo público regional para el deporte: progresivo, burocrático, cliente político, delegado y marginalizado; y a la estrategia de marginalización. El estudio está basado en la metodología cualitativa, utilizando una combinación de técnicas como entrevistas parcialmente estructuradas con oficios de la administración pública y representativos del movimiento de deporte checo, el análisis secundario de documentos y observaciones.

Palabras Claves: Burocratización, restricciones cognitivas, cliente político, restricciones estructurales, autoridad deportiva

本文主要是探討西元2001年後,捷克共和國區域性公共運動政策研擬與實施的過程。分析的重點著眼於運動自願者部門與公共行政部門之間的互動關係。本文整理出區域性公共運動政策的主要原則並且探索造成政策成效不彰的阻礙因素。從研究得知,阻礙捷克共和國區域性公共運動政策推行的兩大因素是屬於結構性及認知性的。結構性的阻礙因素是指政治化、官僚體制化、缺乏互動以及在政策制訂過程中缺乏依據;就認知性的阻礙因素而言,主要包括知識缺乏、資訊不足、缺乏將運動融入到其他政策議題的認知以及公共行政部門給人的負面印象。另外,本研究也確認兩大分類模式:一類是支持運動的各種模式,另一類是運動組織和俱樂部在爭取補助款時,使用的各種策略模式。支持運動的模式主要有五種型態,分別為:革新型、官僚體制型、政治庇護型、授權型以及邊緣型。此外,策略模式有四種型態:修正策略、務實策略、邊緣化策略以及放棄策略。本研究採用質性研究的方法論,並以觀察、文獻分析以及半結構性訪談的方式來進行。訪談的主要對象是捷克共和國政府官員、運動組織及俱樂部的相關人員。

關鍵詞: 官僚體制化;認知性的阻礙;結構性的阻礙;政治庇護;運動治理

本稿は、2001 年以降のチェコ共和国において地域スポーツ政策が策定され、実施される過程に着目し、スポーツのボランタリー・セクターと公的機関が生み出すダイナミックスを分析する。地域のスポーツ政策の主要な見解を示し、効果的な政策展開の妨げとなる制約について理解をする。

チェコの地域スポーツ政策は、構造と認識といった二つの制約により左右されている。つまり、構造的制約とは政治的、官僚的、政策決定過程における証拠の欠如、相互的関係の欠如のことであり、認識的制約とは知識の欠如、情報の欠如、他の政策分野におけるスポーツへの認識の薄さ、公的機関へのネガティブなイメージのことを指している。さらに、スポーツに対する様々なサポートの類型化と、資金を得るためにスポーツ組織やスポーツクラブが適応した様々な政策の類型化を示すことができる。

よって、本稿では、スポーツの地域における公共的サポートの理想的体系を、進歩的、官僚的、政治的クライエンテリスト、代表制、排除主義の五類型で提示することができる。さらに、スポーツ・ムーブメントが適用した 4 つの異なる戦略－適応、実利的、排除的、放棄－についても定義することができる。

本研究は、質的研究の方法論をとり、半構造的インタビューを公的政策関係者、チェコのスポーツ・ムーブメントの代表者に行い、二次的資料の分析と観察を用いている。

キーワード: 官僚主義、認識的制約、政治的クライエンタリズム、構造的制約、スポーツ・ガバナンス

Introduction

In 2000, the Government of the Czech Republic approved Law No. 129/2000 creating new regional divisions in the country. This law not only demarcated the boundaries of 14 new regions in the Czech Republic,[1] it also gave these regions a completely new responsibility – support for sports. Such an obligation, re-confirmed and specified in Law No. 115/2001 on Support for Sports, opened up a process of institutionalisation in the field of sport policy at the level of the regional public administration.

The regions thus added an extra level of public support for sports, which was simultaneously guaranteed at the local level by municipalities, and at the higher level by the national government, in particular by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. This step was the last important turning point in the relationship between the public sector and the increasingly autonomous sport movement (Chaker 2004, Dvořák 2006) after the downfall of the communist regime in 1989.

Under this new legal framework approved in 2001, the regions of the Czech Republic established specific departments dealing with sport support and initiated various funding programmes. However, the term 'institutionalisation' used in the title of this article signifies more than the creation of organisational arrangements. From a social theory point of view, it represents a system of socio-cultural practices and meanings (see Berger and Luckmann 1966) that are continuously being established through processes of sport policy-making and implementation. Such processes encompass a complex network of actors, such as representatives of the sport movement, politicians and civil servants.

Based on these assumptions, the aim of this study is to answer the following questions: What are the major tenets of the regional public policy for sport? What are the constraints on regional public policy for sport? What types of regional public support for sport can we identify? In addition, from the perspective of the sport associations, what strategies are used by the representatives of the Czech sport movement?

These questions are inspired by several motives. The number of studies on public sports policies is increasing (Chalip 1996, Bergsgard *et al.* 2007, Houlihan and White 2002) and with the publication of a new journal, *International journal of sport policy*, sport policy studies have taken another important step towards leaving the margins of policy analysis scholarship (Houlihan 2005). In this context, notwithstanding the increasing number of studies on sport policy, little attention has been paid to local and regional policies. Moreover, there has been a lack of English-language studies focusing on the area of Central and Eastern Europe and the particularities produced by the transition period, of which the decentralisation of sport governance is symptomatic (Poupaux and Andreff 2007). The objective of this study is to contribute towards filling this gap.

In the following sections, a brief overview of different contemporary concepts focusing on sport policy, Czech local sport policy in particular, will be presented. Following this, I will outline the theoretical framework used for the analysis of regional Czech public policies on sport. Subsequently, the empirical evidence will be presented and interpreted: in the descriptive introduction, the main features of regional sport policies will be sketched out, followed by three more critical and explorative sections. The focus on the constraints on public regional support for sport will be further developed by capturing the typologies of the different types of regional sport policy and of the strategies of the representatives of the Czech sport movement towards public support for sport.

(Regional) sport policy in theory

The majority of recent academic writing dealing with sport policy is undoubtedly very important for analysing national, European or even global trends in sport policy. In these studies (Bergsgard and Rommetvedt 2006, Enjolras and Waldahl 2007, Henry 2001, Houlihan 1997), sport policy is understood in close connection with a particular political ideology and with a complex system of political arrangements and coalitions. However, such conceptualisations might be less fitting for analysing the regional sport policies in the Czech Republic which are less strategic, less institutionally complex, less ideologically anchored and more pragmatic and ad-hoc. Therefore, in order to capture the phenomenon under study, more subtle tools, oriented to policy implementation processes rather than to policy-making and agenda-setting processes, should be used. This is also the reason the term *sport policy* is sometimes substituted by the term *sport support*, mirroring its literal meaning in the Czech language and indicating only one specific dimension of policy-making, in order to underline the limitation and partiality of regional sport policies.

In such an attempt some critical anthropology-based remarks (Wedel *et al.* 2005) and discourse-oriented analyses (Henry *et al.* 2005, Chalip 1996) of sport policy have to be considered. Following these perspectives, this policy analysis focuses on the experiences of social actors, interpretations and negotiation processes. Following a discourse-oriented analysis, these ways of understanding should be embedded in a particular structure defined by a particular political and socio-cultural discourse. In comparison to discourse analysis, however, the nature of the phenomenon under study, being a process of policy-making and implementation at a regional level, does not imply the existence of a particular identifiable discourse which could structure public sport policy. Therefore the notion of cognitive constraints, referring to the policy process as socially constructed and often connected to political power, is used in the analytical part of the paper.

Such an approach could potentially contribute to deconstructing the strategic use of sport policy by local authorities in their attempts to support power positions (Nichols *et al.* 1998) and understanding the role of clientelistic relations between the sport sector and politics (Henry and Nassis 1999). The latter aspect is connected to the role of a social-network oriented approach (Rütten 1993, Wedel *et al.* 2005).

Houlihan and White (2002) highlighted the role of local authorities, in support of partnership, in the UK. They observed that initially the question of sport development was on the margins of administrative and political strategies. However, the importance of sport development gradually increased along with the policies of the New Labour government. Moreover, apart from contributing to the development of the sport system, the local authorities began to perceive and use sport as an important tool for delivering welfare policy objectives. Therefore, the sport policies of local authorities can be understood as an important means of contributing to the achievement of social inclusion and coordinating efforts of other partners.

Needless to say, such a picture of sport policy at a local level is in strong contrast with that identified by this study focused in the Czech Republic. The field of sport is understood as autonomous, struggling to create cross-sector links and help in the delivery of social welfare objectives. In one of the few English-language studies focused on regional sport policy in geopolitically close Hungary, Dancs and Gollner (2007) stressed the fact that the underrepresented position of sport amongst the different political policy-making circles and the potential of sport to cope with cross-sector issues has not been sufficiently accepted and understood by experts and politicians in the public sphere. As will be shown

later, the situation is very similar in the case of sport policy in the Czech Republic. It is worth mentioning that most of the studies on this topic have focused on the level of municipalities rather than on the regional level. In these studies, particular attention has been given to the potential utility of the two laws regulating sport and reinforcing the role of municipalities that were passed in 2000 and 2001. On the one hand, in a rather descriptive study (Červenka 2001), written in the style of a policy document, these laws are welcomed as tools which should guarantee new and more suitable conditions for sport financing. On the other hand, through a rather critical lens, the two laws, in general appreciated by the sport voluntary movement, have been considered quite generic and vague (Staněk and Flemr 2008).

Due to the absence of a clearly defined and more specific legislative norm, the implementation of sport policy has been analysed through factors that affect it, including political bias, lack of personal enthusiasm, willingness to take advantage of objective data, professional qualifications or involvement of the voluntary and academic sectors (Eger 2001, Slepičková and Staněk 2008). Furthermore, it has been argued that there is no evaluation of the implementation of municipal sport policies except in relation to formal legal and economic issues (Slepičková and Flemr 2007).

Methods

This study draws mainly on qualitative data, based on semi-structured interviews, and partly on non-participant observations and secondary analysis of documents. The analysis was primarily based on 14 semi-structured interviews with regional civil servants in each of the 14 regions of the Czech Republic who are responsible for sport (nine men and five women). These 14 interviews, which focused exclusively on public sports policy and were carried out in 2007, were accompanied by an interview in February 2008 with the Deputy Minister in charge of sport at the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports.

In order to explore the dynamics between the public sector and the sport movement, and to grasp the understanding of public policy from the side of sport volunteers, 32 interviews were conducted with regional officials from three sport associations: handball (10), football (12) and sailing (10).[2] As part of a larger research project, the main objective of these interviews was to explore sport governance issues, with public sport policy being discussed along with several other topics. However, the scope and flexibility of the interview schedule generated substantial comment on the process of policy development and implementation at the regional level. Furthermore, data derived from participation in several conferences of regional sport governing bodies, as well as incidental encounters with sport practitioners and sports officials during various sports events, enriched the study. These data appear in field notes in terms of observations and interpretations. Finally, to provide a more coherent picture of the phenomenon under study, data collection was completed with a review of sport policies of selected regions, departmental web-pages, funding overviews and other related secondary documents. Secondary evidence of a quantitative nature also provided a more complex insight into the topic.

The collected data (field notes, audio data, interview transcripts or summaries, and documents) were coded and thematically analysed using Atlas.ti software package. An interpretative analysis was simultaneously conducted during the data collection process to strengthen the potential of this inductive qualitative approach. A combination of both a descriptive and a critical approach (Sam 2005) towards sport policy analysis was adopted. This enabled a detail exploration of the new phenomenon emerging and a constant specification of the explored ideal-types. Presented typologies of different styles of support for

sport and strategies employed by sport associations are based on detailed observations of social reality and its simultaneous understanding and interpretation. This approach is inspired by Weber's (1998) methodology of social sciences and his notion of ideal-types. The interview quotes presented in the analysis and discussion in the following sections are examples of the nature of the explored ideal-types. Due to the paper's space limitations, they do not represent an exhaustive enumeration of evidence gathered during the study. Rather they are presented in an illustrative manner, as symptomatic examples.

Regional public sport policy in the Czech Republic

The period of the communist regime was characterised by centralised, ideologically conditioned and state-driven sport policy which was guaranteed by the Czechoslovak Sport Association. The main association's geographically organised structure covered national, regional and district levels of sport governance. The political and socio-cultural changes after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 brought about major changes in the sport governance system. The organisation of sport became independent of governmental policies and was primarily guaranteed by associations whose plurality and autonomy greatly increased. These seismic changes also contributed to the revival, albeit weakened, of traditional associations as Sokol and Orel, which had been banned by the communist regime. In this context, the role of the state and public administration became merely complementary, providing the basic general legislative framework and partially contributing with financial subsidies to the sport sector (Dvořák 2006).

According to the Law on the Support for Sports, No. 115/2001, the regions of the Czech Republic are obliged to foster the development of 'sport for all', support the preparation of sport talent, including that of disabled citizens, guarantee the construction of new sports facilities and their reconstruction and maintenance, support sport activities for citizens and guarantee the financial support for sports. Once the law was ratified, the regions established specialised departments focused on sport, usually as part of a larger unit dealing with education, youth or leisure.

In order to carry out such legislative requirements, 14 new strategies of sport support were established, one for each of the 14 regions, including the re-nomination of one already existing policy in the city of Prague, which had its status changed from municipality to region. Notwithstanding the fact that regional sport policy had to be developed from the very beginning, with almost no previous experience and with minimal expert knowledge, a generally spontaneous process of sport-policy creation has taken place according to various rules and principles. The organisational arrangements were very often designated through so-called 'institutional xerox' mechanisms, by simply copying the structure of the department already existing at the national level, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Therefore, in the majority of regions, sport became a responsibility of units focused more widely on youth, education and leisure. The executive personnel of these regional units had usually been recruited from candidates with a university education, with experience working either in education, in particular physical education, or in sport associations.

It was in these circumstances that the first grant programmes crystallised and the various subsidies were introduced. However, there was no official national sport strategy to guide regional policy-making or to identify priorities for the regions. Responsibility for agenda-setting was, and continues to be, exclusively situated in the regions. According to the Deputy Minister in charge of sport, the regions are autonomous, possessing their own competences and responsibilities. Moreover, central intervention would be difficult, since the political representatives of the regions are likely to perceive such attempts as challenging

their autonomous position. Needless to say, in the initial phase after the creation of the regions by law from 2001, regular meetings were organised between representatives of the regions and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. These meetings contributed to defining the responsibilities and activities of the regional units. However, their impact and frequency successively diminished, due in part to frequent personnel changes in the Ministry. According to the last available data on the sport subsidies from 2006, the public funding of sport (included in the more general category of 'leisure and culture') at a regional level represented 22% of the subsidies directed to the voluntary sector. This means that leisure and culture was the second most supported area after social welfare, which accounted for 68% of the total subsidy available for the regional voluntary sector (CVNS 2008).

Furthermore, the role of municipalities and the state has to be considered in order to complete the picture of the public financial support for sport. According to data from 2006, the major portion of overall public subsidy to the sport voluntary sector came from the state, which contributed 67% (the municipalities contributed 28% and the regions only 5% of overall public subsidies). While the regions contributed 194 million Czech crowns (€6.9 million according to the December 2006 exchange rate), subsidies from the munici-palities totalled 1,266 million crowns (€45.2 million) (Hladká 2007). The relationship between the two autonomous spheres of regional and municipal administration is weak, and as a consequence of the poor communication between them, some sport clubs or regional associations receive funding from both levels. In addition, the municipalities can receive funding from the regional level.

According to the interviews, eight out of the 14 regions define the priorities of the funding in congruence with regional policy documents that are defined without guidance from the national sport strategy. As has been demonstrated by a review of calls for propos-als for funding, the defined fields of support remain general, focused on the following areas: support for youth and children's sport; support for one-off events; support for com-petitive sports that have the potential to represent the region; and the construction and re-construction of sport facilities. The social importance of sport is seldom highlighted and the support of disabled sport remains at the margins, even though there are exceptions, with certain regions providing more systematic and developed tools for supporting sport.

According to the majority of the civil servants interviewed, the process of selecting projects to fund has become formalised over time and the mechanisms of control have been reinforced. However, a more detailed data analysis shows that they remain anchored in the legal and accountancy discourse and less attention is given to the real impact and outcomes of the funded activities. This can be illustrated by the following two quotes, the first from a civil servant, the second from a sports volunteer:[3]

> We obviously check the proposals from sport clubs and further implementation of the projects that get funding. Every recipient of subsidies is obliged to provide us with bookkeeping accounts by the end of the relevant period. As part of the selection procedures, we also check whether the entity is registered as an NGO at the Ministry of Interior.

> I am convinced that the basic control mechanisms work well. I have no doubt that if someone from accountancy asks, everything will be ok, nobody will find any mistakes and everything will be legislatively correct. But how do they check whether the money is really invested in youth, as a funding programme claims, for example?

Similar issues were addressed by an expert study analysing public subsidies to the voluntary sector, which pointed out the necessity of ensuring the maximum transparency

of the funding programmes and the effectiveness of spent resources (CVNS 2008). However, assessing effectiveness can be difficult as, for example in one of the regions observed, the decision was made to keep the sport policy document secret.

The interviews conducted demonstrated that, apart from funding region-specific programmes, other activities usually carried out by the regional units responsible for sport include the co-ordination of the Olympics for Children and Youth, where representatives from all regions compete in Olympic disciplines. Encounters during the co-ordination of Olympics for Children and Youth have replaced the former meetings organised by the Ministry and become a platform for sport-related knowledge-sharing. Furthermore, other public relations activities, such as the regional annual sports awards, make up a part of the agenda of most regions. These events and their mass-media representation might eventually reinforce the emerging, though rather weak, sense of the regional identity. The role of the regions in sport support is to provide information, but this varies a great deal from one region to another. Such an informative function is based on the creation of platforms for information exchange supported by communication with regional umbrella federations. Hence, some of the regions provide their citizens with a list of sport facilities or sport clubs, major sport events and associations in the region.

To sum up, this section described the general aspects of the Czech regional public sport policy. The study has shown that the regional public support for sport does not always meet the emerging needs articulated by the representatives of the sport voluntary sector. The next sections analyse in more detail the reasons for such a lack of effectiveness by exploring the constraints that limit regional public sport policy.

Constraints on regional public sport policy

In exploring regional public sport policy two different types of constraints on policy development can be distinguished: structural and cognitive. Structural constraints refer to the organisational arrangements, the networks established between different actors and the factors influencing these organisational structures; cognitive constraints refer to knowledge and communication, in particular, to the process of the symbolic construction of meaning and its product (see Berger and Luckmann 1966) or to the volume of transmitted information. The multi-faceted nature of the study resulted in the identification of a wide range of constraints. However, these constraints cannot be generalised across the whole of the Czech Republic. In other words, each of the constraints is not automatically present in every region. The aim of the two following sections is to explore different types of constraints instead of attributing a specific constraint to a particular region.

Structural constraints on regional public sport policy

The most striking structural barrier perceived both by the civil servants and sport movement representatives is without doubt the *politicisation* of regional public sport policy. This phenomenon is well-illustrated by the following comment by the president of a regional sailing association:

> The sailors in the region, I know, applied for three or four grants. And no grant has been received, since it is about politics and about personal lobbying, as it works everywhere, simply. If someone succeeds in achieving some development, it is always connected to personal ties. . . . Unfortunately, it happens at the expense of real necessity . . .Who can judge, today, if you need a changing room for the football players from the 'Nowhereshire', or a changing room for the sailors from the 'Somewhereshire' more? If a deputy frequents the

football matches, then the 'Nowhereshire' is going to get it. If he had a dinghy, then the sailors would get it.[4]

A frequent absence of expertise and objective criteria to decide funding allocations, together with weak accountancy and control mechanisms, opens the way for other factors to influence the decision-making process, namely those linked with politics. The following quotation made by a civil servant is salient in this regard:

> When the hetman [the president of the region] decides, it has to be like this. And at this point, the rules, which are otherwise standard, suddenly are not valid anymore. Somehow, they do not function.

This commonly mentioned issue verifies the conclusions already discussed in a number of other studies dealing with sport policy processes, where it has been argued that the way in which local authorities allocate resources contributes to their strategic objectives, despite the fact that the allocation might be inconsistent with a more objective assessment of need (Johnson 1982, Nichols *et al.* 1998). Similarly, Bourdieu (1978) stressed the importance of sport in guaranteeing the satisfaction of the working population through the building of stadiums and facilities. Needless to say, public support for sport is not understood only as a matter of containing the working population as proposed by Bourdieu. Political interest in sport also affects other social classes; it is connected with late-modern consumerism (the construction of modern multifunctional sports arenas) and is often understood as a symbolic source of local identity and pride.[5]

   This is just one side of the *politicisation* coin: supporting sport brings media visibility, popularity (see Burstein 2003) and support from the electorate. However, there is another side: not only can support for sport be used to further non-sport interests, the representatives of the sport movement also must build social networks in order to obtain funding, as illustrated by a wide range of interviews and some observations (Field notes, e.g., observations during regional handball associations annual conferences, 13 March 2007, 27 March 2007). Again, this is a process that excludes certain sport entities from public funding. That it is worth being connected to such networks was stressed by a regional sport governing body official:

> In the Czech Republic, lobbying is a new thing, but it is set up perfectly. Indeed it makes you marvel how such a thing, which has been in existence for such a short period of time, has such robust unwritten rules!

The so-called All Sport Advisory Board (Všesportovní kolegium) plays a particular role in lobbying for sport. This group is a somewhat informal coalition with no legal personality, founded at the national level in 1994 by the representatives of 11 major sport umbrella associations. Its main objective, embedded in its lobbying activities, is to unify the opinions and needs of these associations and to articulate them to the executive and legislative powers. In the majority of regions, regional branches of the All Sport Advisory Board are active in social networking and lobbying to increase the amount of funding allocated to sports.

   Politics seem to be an inherent part of the public policy for sport. As Kay observes sport policy-making is an 'inescapably political activity into which the perceptions and interests of individual actors enter at all stages' (Kay 1996, p. 243). The allocation of funding sometimes depends on small networks of members of the political elite, which make decisions without regard to the opinions of citizens (Smith and Ingham 2003). As some interviews carried out with both sport movement representatives and civil servants

demonstrated, in the case of Czech regional sports, this process for the allocation of funding is often evident when subsidies are assigned to big football or ice-hockey clubs. The amount of money assigned to these clubs, mostly financed on a commercial basis, in some regions means that an arguably disproportionate share of the total budget is dedicated to elite sports. These subsidies are not approved through the usual decision-making processes, as is other public funding for sport, and it is not unusual for the civil servants responsible for sport to be unaware of them. (Field notes, e.g., comments from interviews with civil servants, 17 April 2007, 27 September 2007). This happens because support for elite sport is usually covered by other budgetary resources controlled directly by politicians.

The issue of politicisation is very often linked to another structural barrier: sport *policy* – and at this point it is more precise to speak about sport *support* – sometimes occurs without any systematically elaborated policy documents describing the situation and providing strategic plans for the future. This results in a rather ad-hoc provision of regional level support for sport. Under these conditions, funding mechanisms are routinised and applied according to established schemes, without any flexibility or ability to cope with the real needs articulated within the sport environment.

Also, the absence of a strategic approach to resource allocation based on an analysis of need is partly explained by the unwillingness of the public servants to use policy documents, which in some cases, although at the disposal of the public administration office, remained locked away. This reluctance to use policy documents is usually for two reasons. The first is that there is an ambivalence towards expert knowledge among civil servants, who point to its fragility (see Stehr 2001). They sometimes undermine the research on which the policy documents are based by pointing to the amount of money which they consider has not been invested properly and by highlighting the misuse of expert credibility by the research institutes which promote such policies (Field notes, e.g., informal conversation with civil servants, 27 September 2007, 14 November 2007).

A second reason for non evidence-based decision-making is that some civil servants simply refuse to read documents, which they find long, complex, and abstract, containing too much data with no direct link to the realm of praxis. Therefore, in some cases the decision-making process proceeds with no support from policy documents. This is illustrated in the following statement, made by a civil servant:

> Not all the regions have their own policies and I do not think that we need [them] in our region. If it works, why create some papers, some documents . . .? Maybe it did not work in some of the regions and they needed to approve a policy in order to get regular financial support.

The reasoning demonstrated in this quote is partly linked with another structural constraint – *bureaucratisation*. Use of the word *bureaucratisation* here is not the same as the everyday usage of the term, denoting the complicated and time-consuming system of procedures and formalities that one has to pass in order to apply for funding, or to obtain it. Rather, it is based on the Weberian notion of *bureaucracy* as a system of codified rules and specified, hierarchically organised positions which are respected (Weber 1997). Every individual in a bureaucratic system has strictly defined competences. From this point of view, public support of sport is understood by civil servants as a task which needs to be accomplished by a strict adherence to rules. Anything that remains outside of this frame is difficult to achieve when bureaucratic thinking dominates the system. This attitude, devoid of personal motivation and enthusiasm for sport, was sometimes, albeit rarely, encountered during interviews with civil servants who refrained from taking any action unless required to do so by internal rules or by a higher authority. This mentality is demonstrated by the following quote:

> Of course, if there was any initiative from the part of the highest representatives of the region, I mean the Regional Council or the Regional Parliament, if they wanted to elaborate such a strategic document, then, I think, our Department would prepare one.

Conversely, activity may also be blocked by the unwillingness of the higher authorities (e.g. a Head of the Department, or politicians, e.g., a vice-hetman or a hetman) to cooperate. Thus, the notion of the *lack of interaction* is introduced. One aspect of this missing interaction is seen in the following complaint by another, more pro-active civil servant:

> I know that our role should consist of creating conditions, building programmes, supporting the people, to motivate them and I even know how to do it . . . But unfortunately, I am the lowest clerk. There is the Head of the Department, another Head and his director above me. Communication is not easy.

This example shows an internal lack of interaction, which we observe in the bureaucratic structure of the public office. In a similar way, we may talk about an external lack of interaction related to the missing ties with other public administration entities, or between the public administration office and the sport movement. Regarding the latter, because of the decentralised and autonomous nature of the regional offices, all the civil servants responsible for sport lack more intensive and frequent collaboration with the central government ministerial department responsible for sport. The vertical lack of communication, sometimes justified as a consequence of recent frequent political personnel changes at the ministerial level, is in strong contrast to the frequent and fruitful horizontal interaction among public servants of similar rank across the regions (Field notes, e.g., comments on interviews with civil servants, 22 May 2007, 16 October 2007, 14 November 2007). An additional barrier to external ties is sometimes noted by representatives of the Czech sport movement. They occasionally feel that civil servants at the regional level are unwilling to listen to the needs of the sport practitioners and members of the sport association (Field notes, e.g., observations during handball associations annual conferences, 23 March 2007, 26 March 2007), a trend that is common even at a European level (EC 2004).

To conclude, politicisation, bureaucratisation, unwillingness to use evidence in the policy-making process and lack of interaction are the key structural constraints undermining the public support of sport. They are not ubiquitous, however, and in different Czech regions they occur with different levels of frequency and intensity.

Cognitive constraints on regional public policy for sport

The last remark in the previous section, about different types and intensity of the occurrence of structural constraints, may also be made about cognitive constraints. Analysis of the data collected shed light on four particular cognitive constraints; *lack of knowledge*, *lack of information*, *low recognition of sport* in the context of other policy issues, and a *negative public image of public administration*.

First, when considering *lack of knowledge*, civil servants referred to a lack of competence both among civil servants and among the representatives of the Czech sport movement. In some of the regions analysed, even the civil servants themselves complained about having no methodology or directions (Field notes, comments on interviews with civil servants 17 April 2007, 7 September 2007). Therefore, they are limited by the learning-by-doing method and by an ad-hoc, unsystematic approach, working with no long-term strategy in mind. The absence of knowledge transfer may be seen as a consequence

of a lack of cooperation with the ministry responsible for sport; also in a lack of cooperation with research institutes. Some of the civil servants interviewed would appreciate more intensive collaboration with the academic sphere. It is not only among civil servants that a lack of knowledge presents a problem. Lack of knowledge is sometimes also expressed by potential recipients of the funding, the representatives of sport clubs and associations who lack the skills to apply and to search for information, as illustrated by the following comment by a civil servant:

> In the clubs there are people who do not know how to proceed. Should they address the ČSTV [the largest umbrella association in the Czech Republic] which is supposed to help them, or the Sokol [the first and traditional sports association in the Czech Republic], or should they turn to the Mayor of their municipality . . .? They would like to, but some of them just do not know how, I think, where, to start?

This *lack of knowledge* is linked to a second cognitive constraint, *the lack of information*, also based in missing interactions. This includes both lack of information about funding among its potential recipients and the lack of information among civil servants about wider frames in which their activities could be anchored. For example, according to a representative survey carried out in one of the regions, in the over-15 population, 56% of those interviewed do not have any information about the volume of regional subsidies devoted to sport, and around 11% were not even interested in learning about such subsidies (Olomoucký kraj 2007).

Third, *sport is not recognised as a relevant issue.* Rather sport is perceived as a less important and urgent sector in comparison to other regional policy issues, such as education, health and transportation. One of the interviewees concisely commented that sport, which often remains at the margin of public administration policy, is viewed as 'a topic which could be set about once the more important issues have been resolved'. Such comments are indicative of a lack of awareness that sport could possibly contribute to cross-sector aims and is not limited to a closed sport system.

A regional sport policy is more likely to be characterised as being *sports development*-focused, rather than oriented toward *development through sport* (see Houlihan and White 2002). This could be explained by several factors, two of which are anchored in the communist legacy. First, the transition period after the downfall of communism brought to the fore other, higher priority issues for sport governing bodies, such as property ownership and legislative issues such as the legal status of sports organisations. Essentially, there were concerns for economic survival of the voluntary sector which, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, lost a significant portion of the support of the state. In this respect, public subsidies were crucial to meet the revenue needs of clubs in two-thirds of the cases (Novotný 2001), and according to some estimations even in 90% of cases (Hobza 2006 cited in Hladká 2007) partly because property lay in the hands of sport clubs as a result of historical developments. This level of ownership is much higher than in other European states. Second, the collective memory of misuse of sport for propaganda aims (Girginov 2004, Riordan 2007, Roubal 2003) and the omnipresent social engineering efforts of the past further weaken willingness to use sport as a social tool.

In addition, public support for sport is sometimes limited *by the negative image of public administration.* This is evident in the form of criticism of the bureaucratic nature of the regions (and here the adjective *bureaucratic* is akin to the everyday usage of the term), and of the incompetence of the civil servants. This latter meaning can be seen in the following, quite radical opinion of a sailing club representative:

> The clerks get their jobs after having not found anything else. This is clear in their attitude to citizens. Sometimes, if I need their help, it seems as if they ask me: 'How could you even afford to ask us to do something?'

The perception of civil servants' limited competence and the lack of expertise is held not only among the sport movement representatives, but also by some of the more reflective civil servants. However, questions still remain as to what extent this image is a product of a publicly shared negative stereotype of public administration, and to what extent this image mirrors reality. At this juncture, it is worth noting that the majority of the civil servants interviewed had extensive familiarity with sport governance, either from having past experience in sport clubs or associations, or having obtained their university degree in sport studies.

To summarise, the process of institutionalisation of regional public policy for sport in the Czech Republic faces various constraints. Not only do the organisational arrangements represent a constraint, but also various cognitive aspects may jeopardise the process. The low importance given to sports in the context of other policy areas, the negative image of civil servants and public administration, the lack of information and the lack of knowledge, skills and competencies are all cognitively based constraints which were identified during the study.

The types of public support for sport

It has been argued that the Czech regional sport policies are diversified and that the institutionalisation process has resulted in a different approach to sport support. Building upon this observation, different ideal-types of sport support have been identified based on the analysis of interviews, field notes and documents. In a sense, these are typologies that reflect the extent to which different actors are affected by the above-mentioned constraints, and the extent to which they are able to cope with them.

The first type of support for sport might be labelled as progressive. The *progressive type* of sport support is knowledge and evidence-based and aims to incorporate cross-sectional topics such as social issues or health into sport policy. It is characterised by a 'sport for all' orientation and is based on strong mutual communication with the sport sector.

Second, we might talk about a *bureaucratic type* of sport support. This includes less pro-active communication with the sport sector and the activities of such support are limited to the necessary operations. The approach of civil servants is based on the bureaucratic mentality: the routine, unreflective following of prescribed rules and copied schemes of sport support, with no adoption of innovations or even cross-sector cooperation.

Third, we can talk about a *political-clientelist type* of sport support. As the term suggests, this category is inspired by studies of political clientelism, which is understood as a symbiotic alliance between two persons, or group of persons, of unequal status, resources or power. The deliberate creation of these strategic alliances, often based on informal relations in a bureaucratised context (Keller 2005), provides benefits for both parties. Political support, commitment and loyalty are rewarded with access to public resources that otherwise would not be readily available (Henry and Nassis 1999, Stokes 2007). This type of sport support favours those representatives of the sport movement who enjoy close social ties with the political representatives. Sport is seen as a tool of public relations, rendering politicians visible and reinforcing their power. Usually, such support is developed together with a lack of accounting mechanisms.

Fourth, we can speak of a *delegated type* of sport support, when the responsibility for sport support is delegated to an umbrella association or to a coalition of umbrella associations, as the example of the All Sport Advisory Board has shown. In such a case, the sport movement has a very strong negotiating position and is able to define the criteria for funding redistribution. This most probably blocks any potential to use sport as a tool for cross-sectional cooperation according to the logic of the sport environment. Last but not least, we can talk about the *marginalised support of sport.* Here, sport remains at the margins of the public administration interests and the funding process is able to satisfy only a minimum of applications. The existence of a sport department is merely a response to the legal necessity and both human and financial resources assigned to them are reduced to a minimum. Hand in hand with limited resources, this type of support is characterised by the lack of knowledge and information exchange.

To summarise, these typologies represent ideal-types in Weber's (1998) sense; it is difficult to find their pure equivalent in social reality, corresponding absolutely with a particular phenomenon under observation. They are not categories in a pure logic sense. While some of them are mutually exclusive – for example, the *political-clientelist* and the *progressive* type – others can overlap or can be even complementary, such as the *bureaucratic* and the *marginalised* type.

The strategies of the sport movement

As the different types of sport support have been institutionalised, so have the strategies of the actors from the sport movement applying for funding. Four different ideal-typical strategies of the sport movement have been identified by analysing different standpoints and opinions. First, there is the *strategy of adaptation.* Sport clubs representatives and regional sport associations have simply become familiar with the system of sport support and they have developed the necessary competencies to apply for and obtain funding (e.g., correct completion of documents, communication with the public administration office, active searching for funding opportunities, understanding of key policy priorities, or active involvement in the policy-making process by attendance at expert committees and council meetings). Not only do the representatives of the sport movement tend to adapt their behaviour, but they also try to maximise their gains, adopting a *pragmatic strategy.* This strategy implies a more active approach in comparison with the previous one. Sport movement actors not only become passively acquainted with an external public sector system, but they also try to act pragmatically. For example, some of them deliberately change the title of their function to increase their credibility to public sector, as in the case of certain 'secretaries' of regional football associations who start to officially present themselves as 'managers' although being hired as secretaries according to the football association's charter. Some the regional sport associations have changed their legal status in order to be more eligible for funding. In a more active manner, some of the sport representatives seek to establish stronger links with politicians, or even try to intervene in policy creation or the policy implementation processes.

Thirdly, some actors remain on the periphery, in particular those who do not succeed in gaining funding due to their lack of skills and information or deficient social ties within the sphere of politics. Hence, the notion of the (unsuccessful) *strategy of the marginalised* is introduced. Finally, some of the representatives of the Czech sport movement, notwithstanding their skills and competencies, simply refuse to apply for funding, complaining about the blocked, politicised decision-making system based on closed friendship ties or about the rigidity of the bureaucratic machinery. Such social action may be referred to as a *resignation strategy.*

To summarise, the newly emerging types of public support for sport, and the strategies of the representatives of the sport movements listed above, might be understood as products of the process of institutionalisation of the new field of policy. Only subtle differences exist in the relationships between the representatives of various sports, such as football, handball and sailing, and the regional administrations. In general, associations have become more active in their approach since 2001. However, the interest and ability to communicate with regional administrations depends primarily on the individual approach and competence of sport officials, rather than on different styles of governance and sport cultures. Some regional handball or sailing representatives have been able to gain funding. Their strategies might be characterised in terms of adaptive or pragmatic strategies. On the other hand, in other areas this active approach is rather neglected and a resignation strategy or a strategy of the marginalised prevails. A certain hegemony of football as the most popular sport can be recognised in funding gaining, but it is more of a tendency than a rule.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the areas which have remained more or less intentionally bracketed in the short tradition of academic studies of sport policy. It focused on the mechanisms affecting the implementation of sport policies. The paper therefore poses a question by substituting a less formal notion of *support* for an established term *policy*, thus touching on the policy implementation issue: 'How does the support for sport work in practice?'

The validity of this question is two-fold. Firstly, the subject of the study, regional public policy on sports in the Czech Republic, is still underdeveloped and crystallising due to the seismic changes following the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Secondly, using qualitative methodology, this study aimed at understanding the patterns of regional sport policy by analysing the explanations and interpretations of the actors involved, situating them in a wider structural context. Adopting such a perspective allowed us to maintain an analytical balance by understanding the dynamics that evolved between agency and the social structure (see Giddens 1986), often omitted from an epistemological repertoire applied in sport policy analysis (Houlihan 2005).

From a descriptive point of view, public support for sport at the regional level might be characterised as relatively new and diversified. The study showed that Czech regional sport policy does not exclusively work in favour of sport, but at the same time contributes to serving other non-sport purposes linked to political or personal interests. This approach to sport policy is facilitated by an absence of control mechanisms, by policy documents that are either too general, not transparent, not clear enough or missing entirely. Furthermore, this approach reinforces the significance of externalities. Moreover, it has been argued that Czech regional public support for sport rarely serves to deliver social welfare objectives as is currently common in other countries.

These findings are in contrast with other studies describing sport policy and substantiating the importance of partnership at a local level (Henry 2001, Houlihan and White 2002). That is, in the Czech case, regional sport policies are rarely tied in with cross-sector initiatives due to their *de jure* autonomous status. If a type of partnership appears, it is not due to a stimulus originating in the public administration, but rather to an individual or body in the sport movement whose application for funding has been approved.

It has been argued that the effectiveness of Czech regional public sport policies is limited by two types of constraints: structural and cognitive. Analytically, the study thus

offered a systematic approach to the constraints on public sport policy in the Czech Republic which has to date been absent. In addition to constraints already explored (see e.g., Eger 2001, Slepičková and Staněk 2008, Slepičková and Flemr 2007, Staněk and Flemr 2008), the contemporary explorations of the topic were expanded by unexplored constraints as low recognition of sport, the negative image of public administration or the lack of information regarding sport public policy-making and implementation as a socially constructed process.

From a theoretical view, these cognitive constraints should not be understood as separate from structural constraints, since the process of social construction of meaning also dialectically affects the nature of some of the structural constraints. Subsequently, politicisation and bureaucratisation should be understood as institutionalised, and there-fore legitimate and unproblematised ways of social action adopted in the policy process. This study contributes to deconstructing these public policy shortcomings by providing a critical approach towards policy analysis (see Chalip 1996, Sam 2005).

These were some analytical and theoretical considerations of the principal observations of the emerging field of regional sport policy in the Czech Republic. Developments in the near future will certainly open up new horizons for research. As the situation in the Czech Republic and the recent European developments suggest, we will most probably witness less activity associated with healing the legacy of the past and more activity dealing with newly emerging topics, such as cross-sector partnerships and strong involvement of expert knowledge dealing with sport policy. However, the threat of politicisation and its unintended consequences will still have to be considered. Last but not least, the candidature of Prague for the Olympic Games in 2020 might cause another important shift in the contemporary configurations.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. According to demographic data from 2006, the population of the Czech Republic was around 10.3 million. More than one million inhabitants live in four of the regions. The smallest region has around 304,000 inhabitants, and the number of inhabitants in the majority of regions varies between 500,000 and 640,000 (ČSÚ 2007).
2. The selection of three sport disciplines was primarily driven by the aims of a larger project 'Sport and Social Capital in the European Union'. This project focused on sport governance and its social impact in four countries of the European Union (Denmark, France, Italy and the Czech Republic) and encompassed this partial study. The choice of three sport associations with a different membership base, economic budget, sporting culture, level of professionalisation and international successes provided the qualitative inquiry with a rich and diverse data.
3. This and all the following quotations are translated from Czech by the author, with the aim being to retain their colloquial style and authenticity.
4. The notions of the 'Nowhereshire' and the 'Somewhereshire' represent a literal translation of the Czech colloquial expression which is used to denote small and insignificant villages.
5. The most active sports volunteers frequently criticised these steps arguing that such large and symbolic steps made by politicians in order to gain electoral support underestimate the real util-ity of such stadiums, that they do not take into account the costs for maintenance, and mainly, that the outflow of financial resources for these activities could otherwise have been invested in

the support for regular volunteers' activities and in youth development (Field notes, e.g., comments on interviews with sailing and handball clubs representatives 7 November 2007, 17 October 2007, 22 May 2007).

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