

VITALITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF VOLUNTARY SPORT CLUBS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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SUMMARY

The vitality of voluntary sport clubs in the northern region of the Netherlands was studied by interviews with board members of 236 sport clubs and a survey under their members (n=11.668). The right to exist, orientation on the future and social responsibility were taken into account to examine the vitality of these clubs.

AIM

Traditionally, in the Netherlands, voluntary sport clubs are the most popular organizations to participate in sports. The 25.000 voluntary sport clubs have approximately 3,9 million (=33% of the residents between 6-79) members (Tiessen-Raaphorst, 2015). Over the last two decades other types of participative sports gained popularity, for example commercial fitness companies (18%), self- or informal-organized sports (38%) and solo or non-organized sports (50%). Despite the growing competition in the participative sports market, the total members of voluntary sport clubs remains stable. But for the board of the sport clubs it has become more difficult to keep the clubs alive, because of competition, financial problems, difficulties finding volunteers and complexity of legislation. A recent development is that local governments, traditionally an important partner of voluntary sport clubs, pressure clubs into taking more social responsibility and getting more involved in social projects and activities. The aim of this research is to gain more insight in the vitality of voluntary sport clubs in the northern part of the Netherlands, where their vitality was based on the right to exist, orientation on the future and social responsibility.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A voluntary sport club is characterized as a non-profit organization, founded by members to participate in sports together, in which democratic decision making and voluntarism make sports possible (Ibsen, 2010). According to Anheier (2000) the leadership of these voluntary, private, self-steering, non-profit organizations is often misunderstood and based on the wrong assumptions. Many sport clubs are shifting more from a mutual support organization towards a service delivery

organization (Handy, 1988) because dominant theories and models used in companies and governments are implemented in sport clubs without taking enough notice of the specific context. A vital sport club has the ability to offer their sport, now and in the future, in a sustainable and socially responsible way to (potential) members. Voluntary sport clubs need enough members, volunteers and financial resources, a competent board and a strong culture to remain vital in the long run (Anheier, 2000). Sport clubs are no simple implementers of local social policy, sport clubs need autonomy to translate social activities to the local context and specific characteristics of the club to be successful (Skille, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

Information was gathered from the board members of 236 (2013: n=94; 2014: n=142) randomly selected voluntary sport clubs in the northern part of the Netherlands, the only requirement was a minimum of 30 members. Characteristics of the sport clubs were examined (members, type of sports, accommodation, region), as well as information about the policies, (long-term) vision and social responsibility of the club. Members of the same clubs were surveyed through an online questionnaire (2013: n=4810; 2014: n=6858). Questions about their satisfaction on the quality of the offer, trainers/coaches, accommodation, organizational culture, functioning of the board and the clubs policy were used to gain more insight in the right to exist, orientation on the future and social responsibility of the club. Descriptive statistics were used to understand correlations between various types of sport clubs, vitality of the sport club, satisfaction of sport club members and the social responsibility taken by the sport club. Eventually the surveyed sport clubs were classified in four different categories: vulnerable clubs, sustainable clubs, future-orientated clubs and vital clubs.

RESULTS

The results of this study show that almost all clubs have enough right to exist on short term. Vitality in the long run is more problematic for almost half the surveyed clubs. The sport clubs are highly valued by their members: accommodation, trainers/coaches, offer and culture are evaluated positively. The members are more critical towards the quality of the board and the used policy. There are little differences found in the satisfaction of members in vulnerable, sustainable, future-orientated or vital sport clubs. Smaller clubs score higher on strong culture and have less problems with finding volunteers than larger clubs. The members do encourage clubs to take more social responsibility, but are often (75%) not willing to help in these activities. Members encourage clubs especially in social activities close to their core business, for example in projects on fair play and respect. Most members do not feel that clubs should participate in health, integration, educational or energy projects.

DISCUSSION

In contradiction with the pressure on voluntary sport clubs to become more focused on service delivery and social responsibility, the members do not fully support these directions. Implications of these findings are discussed in the presentation.

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