

Voluntary sport clubs and the social policy agenda

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Local governments, traditionally an important partner of voluntary sport clubs in the Netherlands, are increasingly influencing clubs into involvement in social projects and activities. Although it is not clear what contribution sports clubs can play in this social policy agenda, or whether this agenda carries dangers of undermining the nature and strengths of these clubs (Coalter, 2007), more and more clubs in the Netherlands try to adapt to these demands. Sport clubs are no simple implementers of local social policy, they need autonomy to translate social activities to the local context and specific characteristics of the club to be successful (Skille, 2008). The aim of this study is to gain insight in the opinions of sport club members towards this upcoming social responsibility.

For this study information on the vitality of the sport clubs and their openness to the social policy agenda was compared with the opinions of the members of the same clubs. Data was collected with questionnaires from the board members of 332 randomly selected voluntary sport clubs in the northern part of the Netherlands over a period of three years. Characteristics of the sport clubs were examined (members, type of sports, accommodation, region), as well as information on policies, (long-term) vision and social responsibility of the club. Members of the same clubs were surveyed through an online questionnaire (n=16.493). Questions about their satisfaction on the quality offered and the social policy of the club. Descriptive statistics were used to understand correlations between various types of sport clubs and their openness to social activities.

The members do encourage clubs to take more social responsibility, especially in social activities close to their core business, for example in projects on sport participation, fair play and respect. Most members do not feel that clubs should participate in health, integration, educational or energy projects. Implications of these findings are discussed in the presentation.

References:

Coalter, F. (2007). Sports clubs, social capital and social regeneration: 'Ill-defined interventions with hard to follow outcomes'?. *Sport in society*, 10(4), 537-559.

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