

Sport and Social Capital in the European Union

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In the Declaration on Sport in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, the Conference called on “the bodies of the EU to listen to sports associations when important questions affecting sport are raised” (EC 1997). This statement was made in the context of an increasing political awareness of sport as an integral part of European society and the role which sport governing bodies play in the European socio-political framework. However, to date there is a low level understanding by public managers of how these associations contribute to society, particularly in terms of their relationships with members and with the ways in which they are entrusted with responsibility to maintain national and European sporting traditions. We also have little understanding of citizens’ relationships with their respective sport governing bodies. What we do know, as outlined in the Special Eurobarometer 213 study of 2004 (EC 2004b), is that Europeans value the dimensions of participation in sport, of increased understanding and cooperation between the European Commission and sport governing bodies, and of support for the recognition of the increasing sector of professionals in sport, both on and off the pitch. In this paper, we seek to outline these important relationships between sport governing bodies (SGBs) and their constituents, by examining the role of social capital and its reproduction in the context of social and sport policy at the European level.

Background²

In the last decade, social capital has become an increasingly popular concept in academia as well as in political debate. It represents a solid example of how social science research can influence policy making (but also vice versa) and of how research findings can inspire future public policies. Furthermore, the debate over social capital in both its academic and political use can be understood as one of the multiple facets of the third sector discussion. In fact, mainstream social capital arguments express the strong commitment of public and corporate actors towards the acknowledgment, in a purely Tocquevillian sense, of the importance of having a strong and active civil society for collective wellbeing. Such an acknowledgment aims at promoting volunteering, civic engagement and those virtuous norms and behaviours that are supposed to originate from them and which are supposed to strengthen social cohesion.

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² In this paper we will use the terms ‘civil society’ and ‘third sector’ synonymously.

The idea underlying social capital is simple and old: social connections or social ties do matter on an individual (micro) as well as on a collective (macro) level. For instance, as Granovetter's (1973) ground-breaking study about the strength of weak ties has shown, any individual able to mobilize a large network of personal contacts has an advantage in securing employment compared to another person who is poorer in social connections. Similarly, a community in which citizens are sympathetic and trustworthy (and in which citizens practice such sympathy and trust by volunteering in civil society associations) will solve its problems and will 'perform' better than a community whose members strongly dislike each other or adopt permanently non-cooperative behaviours.

However, the rise of pro-social capital and pro-third sector arguments is inscribed in those "wider political and ideological changes that have redefined the powers and responsibilities of states, markets and voluntary associations [...]" (Edwards 2004: 11). We can identify several phases of the changes that have affected the relation between state, markets, and civil society. During the initial phase (from 1945 to the mid-1970s), the State was the actor holding the most relevant responsibilities and power in the search for solutions to collective problems and needs. A second phase (from the late 1970s to the 1990) witnessed the primacy of market-based solutions. Finally, a third phase gaining strength throughout the 1990s proposed to overcome social and economic problems through a partnership between the state, the market and the civil society (Edwards 2004). In this latest phase, civil society actors have become central players of the game that we could label "*collectivity management*".

Within this broader redefinition of power and roles between the political, economic and civic spheres and their respective actors, civil society, the third sector, and social capital have for different reasons acquired a central role in the academic debate as well as in the political realm. On the one hand, a well organized and vibrant civil society has been identified as the *conditio sine qua non* for a good democracy as a consequence of both the post-1989 regime changes in Eastern Europe, in which civil society actors have been crucial in favouring the political and social change, and the diffusion of neo-Tocquevillian ideas through seminal studies like Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*. (1993). On the other hand, private non-profit actors have become unavoidable partners in social services provision due to the reduction of public budgets devoted to welfare provisions and to the

diffusion of neo-liberal (but also social democratic 'third way') political ideas and policies. In fact, as empirical evidence shows, civil society associations on a global scale are nowadays key actors in health and other welfare services delivery (Salamon and Anheier 1999; Anheier, Glasius, Kaldor 2001). The number of non-profit actors has increased dramatically and their action in policy implementation as well as in public management has become so central that Lester Salamon has spoken about a "global associational revolution" (1994: 109).

However, the emphasis placed on civil society and on the capital it might produce can be interpreted also as a reaction to the diffusion of citizens' dissatisfaction with their governments. In fact, major cross-national opinion surveys have shown that the last decades have witnessed an increasing frustration and dissatisfaction among citizens of European, North American and some of the Far Eastern countries for their democracies' governing capacities (Pharr and Putnam 2000). As a consequence, a broad call for civil society actors to be included in public decision-making has emerged, and representative democracy has been and continues to be challenged by the adoption of more participatory forms of government where citizens' active involvement is the general rule and not the exception (Bevort 2002).

The European Union does not represent an exception in this panorama. Since the early 2000s, it has started to address the issue of empowering civil society by strengthening social capital as an instrument to overcome socio-economic gaps between its member-States and within them. Moreover, in 2003, the Council of Europe adopted a resolution (203/C 175/02) acknowledging the role that social ties and networks can play in promoting economic development and social cohesion. In particular, this document emphasizes the potentialities residing in the combination between human capital (knowledge, capacity, competence and other attributes of each individual that facilitate personal, social and economic well being) and social capital, in order to find durable solutions to societal problems such as unemployment, the workplace gender gap, equality for disabled persons, educational needs, and the integration of migrants. The European Commission has also shown interest in social capital through the funding of scientific research devoted to this theme, and also through the funding of local development projects based upon the deep involvement of local civil society actors, such as the "Local Social Capital" (LSC) pilot project.

By stressing the importance of paying attention to social capital, public institutions such as the EU recognize the role played by social ties, trust and civic participation for the wellbeing of society. They also recognize the 'political' role that society itself has to fulfil in order to make democracy work. Such an attitude presupposes a strong belief about the absolute positive contributions that social capital and civil society can give to the functioning of society as a whole.

However, in the social capital debate, as well in the civil society one, there are critical voices that invite caution while considering the "positive virtues" contained in the whole civil society sector. Critics of social capital argue that its' innate value resides on an unequal distribution of a social resource (social ties) that privileges some persons instead of others: if everybody had the same 'capital' of ties and bonds, there would be no personal advantages to derive from them. Hence, social capital results from inequalities and it produces inequalities (Field 2003). Or, as argued by Portes (2000), some aspects of social capital, like the possibility for using personal ties to attain a certain goal and thereby bypass regulations binding on others, shows that there might be a conflict between social capital at the individual level and social capital at the collective level. Similarly, in the civil society debate there are critical views which emphasize that civil society mirrors the diversity and the conflicts of society as a whole. There are bright and dark aspects in civil society/social capital which mirror those in society as a whole (Walzer 2002, Chambers 2002). Moreover, there is growing criticism about the transformation in the nature of third sector associations and their deepening involvement in social services provision. Their mixed activity as public provider but also commercial seller of products-services can lead to a hybridization of volunteer associations. Doubtless, this is an aspect that will see much more interest from the academic community in the coming years.

Until today, such criticism seems to have remained confined in the academic community. In fact, when we analyze the official position expressed by the EU towards social capital or civil society, as will be discussed later in this paper, the positive assumption which prevails on the interpretation of social capital calls for caution. In sum, there is a gap between research, even that commissioned by the EU, and policy development in the consideration of the potentialities of civil society for socio-economic development of the European space. In fact, we believe that public institutions such as the EU have a role to play in

reducing the 'dark sides' existing in civil society in which social capital is used for illegal or anti-social activities, or the inequalities fostered by different endowments of social capital. However, this role of the institutions can be fulfilled only after their conscious acknowledgement of the existence of such darkness and inequalities.

Sport is the area of civil society in which we intend to focus our analysis through our current research. In fact, the unique dimensions of sport (60% of all EU citizens declared being involved in some sport activity in 2004 and 70 million were sport club members (EC2005)) are the domain of civil society holding the highest potentialities for social capital development. Consequently, the EU's plans to invest intellectual and financial energy on sport follow the argument introduced above: civil society has an important role to play in providing solutions to major European challenges to social cohesion and social inclusion. From this perspective, sport represents a reservoir of social capital that can be mobilized for creating answers to current social policy concerns. However, as argued in some of the academic literature that has investigated the connection between sport and social capital, certain aspects of contemporary sport (strong competition, heavy economic resources, etc..) can foster the development of dark sides of social capital (Dyreson 2001, Frey and Eitzen 1991, Wilson 2001). Political institutions, at both European and national levels, but also sport (and other types of) governing bodies have to be aware of this risk. Moreover, they can play a significant role to turn dark sides into positive resources for European societies.

The next section of this paper will discuss how sport and social capital are addressed by the EU. Then, the paper continues with an analysis of the processes of policy creation and policy application concerning sport and social capital. And, the final paragraph will present the research about sport and social capital in the EU, the authors of this paper are jointly working in.

The European Union: Perspectives on Sport

That sport has a central position in the life of the majority of the European population is unquestionable. For many of us, sport influences the way we live our lives and the time we spend on different activities. Sport potentially influences our health, our social relations, the extent to which we either are or feel included or excluded, and how we experience feelings of happiness or defeat. Sport influences and is influenced by the social

institutions in our societies as well as by local and national policy production, specifically within its own sphere through its position as an important market force and actor in the civil society, for example, the 2012 Olympics in London has a budget which exceeds £2 billion, will be visited by tens of thousands, and watched by millions. The sport arena on an individual level produces and enhances social capital from and of a so-called bonding-effect is, we would argue, undeniable, although whether sport also has a bridging-effect is so far relatively un-researched (see Seippel 2006).

That sport is widely popular, practiced by millions of people in the European Union, and brings health benefits as well as an economic and social impact has been overtly recognised by the EU. The European Court of Justice ruled in 1974³ that, already twenty-one years before the Bosman judgment⁴, sport is subject to Community law to the extent that it constitutes an economic activity. The following year, the Conference of European Ministers responsible for sport defined a European Sport for All Charter (Council of Europe 1975). The first substantial comment on sport in an EU document came ten years later in the so-called Adonnino Report of 1985 (EC 1985), in which the Committee, in the context of a European identity, talks about the 'encouragement of sporting activities within the Community and the use of Community emblems in such events' (EC 1985: 7).

The EU has emphasised on several occasions since 1985 the importance of sport as a social function, as a market force to take into consideration, and also its more problematic side connected to illegalities such as doping and corruption (cf. EC 1985, EC 1997, Council of Europe 2000, TNS 2005). To date, however, no explicit EU policies on sport have been produced. On the other hand, EU policies concerning health, media rights, and education, for example, do indirectly affect the area of sport. Although the EU is lending its name to different sport events and schemes, currently there is no explicit funding for sport. Nevertheless, sport projects relating to other Community policies, such as integration or specific health issues, may indirectly be awarded funding from the EU.

The Declaration on Sport in the Treaty of Amsterdam was the first EU document that explicitly underlined the important social function played by sport, 'in particular its role in forging identity and bringing people together' (EC 1997), and declared that sport

³ Case 36/74 Walrave and Koch v. Union Cycliste Internationale [1974] ECR 1405 at para. 4. Case 13/76.

⁴ Case C-415/93 Union Royale Belge de Societes de Football v. Jean-Marc Bosman [1995] ECR I-4921, para.5.

therefore needs to be taken into account on a Community level. Two years later, the Helsinki Report on Sport took the relationship between the EU and sport one step further when stressing its role in relation to integration, education and health, but also its general social function. It does, however, recognise that the Commission does not have any responsibility for sport governance under the current Treaty (EC 1999):

On the basis of these principles, there is a need for a new partnership between the European institutions, the Member States and the sports organisations, all moving in the same direction, in order to encourage the promotion of sport in European society, while respecting sporting values, the autonomy of sporting organisations and the Treaty, especially the principle of subsidiarity.

EC 1999: 10.

This was once again asserted in the Presidency conclusion of the Nice European Council meeting in December 2000 where the European Council stressed that the 'cohesion and ties of solidarity binding the practice of sports at every level, fair competition and both the moral and material interest and the physical integrity of those involved in the practice of sport, especially minors, may be preserved' (Council of Europe 2000: 34). The Council asserted that sport rests on fundamental social, educational and cultural values, but also that it is a factor for integration, tolerance and acceptance of difference, as well as playing by the rules. It furthermore talks about equal access independent of sex, aspiration and abilities and that sport federations 'must continue to be the key feature of a form of organisation providing a guarantee of sporting cohesion and participatory democracy' (ibid.: 35). Three years later in 2003, the European Parliament declared that women's involvement in sport is an expression of the right to equality and the freedom of all women to take control of their bodies and participate in sports publicly, regardless of nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion. The Parliament called on each Member State and their regulatory authorities to recognise and assist sport organisations to adopt statutory provisions ensuring equal representation of women and men at all levels and for all decision making posts (European Parliament 2003).

Discussions within the European Convention on the future of Europe finally led to the inclusion of a sport policy in the never-realised European Constitution of 2004. The constitution finally made sport an area of Community competence in its own right. The European Union should, according to the draft Constitution, 'contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function [as well as] encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life...' (EC 2004a: 73). In implementing a sport policy, special attention was to be given to a 'high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health' (EC 2004a: 1). The development of this policy did of course not take place in a vacuum. According to the Special Eurobarometer study of 2004 (EC 2004b), the majority of European citizens would like the EU to be involved in the promotion of both ethical and social values through sport and 'approves the enshrining of sport in the European Constitution...' (ibid.: 48). This result should however be put in context of the 2004 European Year of Education through Sport (EYES), which had an overall goal of promoting the use of sport as a means of formal and informal education and as a vehicle for social integration (TNS 2005).

The EU, Social Capital, and Sport

The development towards an EU policy on sport, although so-far not ratified, has also been a discussion that has brought discussions on sport closer to (unexpressed) references to social capital. In 2003, the Council of the Europe underlined 'the need to develop the positive interactions of social and human capital in three areas in particular: learning, work, and social cohesion, while integrating the gender dimension into all these areas' (Council of Europe 2003). According to the Council social capital is defined as: 'Networks and participation in public life together with shared norms, values, culture, habits and practices, trust and understanding that facilitate cooperation within or among groups, to pursue shared objectives' (ibid.). However, there is no reference that social capital also may have a 'darker side' to its uses. Although the EU has seemingly agreed on a definition of social capital and the importance of the concept as an indicator of social wellbeing, its absence from mentioned documents addressing sport continues. For example, the Council decided to establish a Community action programme to promote

active European citizenship or civic participation, however the document outlining this vision makes no reference to social capital (EC 2004c). Nevertheless, this document does discuss bringing citizens closer to the European Union and its institutions, encouraging them to frequently engage with its institutions, and the need to reflect and discuss the construction of the European Union. Social capital on its own is today more frequently referred to in general documents. For example, the European Observatory on the Social Situation does use the concept when for example referring to Swedish health policies in their report for the European Commission on health status and living conditions in an enlarged Europe (EOSS 2005).

In the Final Report from the European Commission on studies of education, sport, and multiculturalism, sport and social capital are connected. The Danish project 'Participation of children coming from difficult family backgrounds in sport and club life' is described as providing finance to allow membership of sports clubs and recognises that 'this will disproportionately assist members of ethnic minorities, helping them establish networks and social capital useful for fostering employment possibilities' (EC 2004d: 19). Although acknowledging the connection between social capital and health, the Final Report described above is not interested in the overt benefits of participation in sport explicitly but in 'the development of dialogue, the establishing or reinforcing of community networks, and the building of social capital' (EC 2004d: 91). The report also recognises that with competitive sports come both success and defeat, and that, in the context of inclusion versus exclusion, '[w]here goals are those of developing social capital in a minority group, or building links with the local sporting community, the selection of sports in which the minority community has strength and where local clubs lack members, provides opportunities for exploitation' (ibid.: 92).

However, in the Workshop Reports from the consultation conference on 'The EU & Sport – Matching Expectations' (EC 2005), the connection between sport and social capital is made explicit. The reports assert that sport does not only contribute to employment but is an important arena for meeting other people, associating, collaborating, and building social capital. The importance of researching sport and social capital and how the outcome may be influenced by public management tools becomes evident when the report stresses that:

[v]oluntary sport organisations, in particular, fulfil a wide range of additional social and inclusive functions and they contribute to the integration of democratic civil society at large: volunteers provide significant benefits to society and create “social capital”. Therefore, it should be not only the “product” that needs to be considered, but also how that product is produced.

EC 2005: 8

Public Management Elements Influencing Social Capital and Sport

As has been discussed in the preceding sections, European institutions and policy makers are highly aware of the social functions of sport, although direct linking to concepts of social capital is rare. Moreover, a cursory glance at concrete national policies across Europe confirms that the same range of awareness has been transmitted on the level of public administration and local governance of particular states. For example, the Italian Ministry of Sport has set up a round table to discuss sport issues in recognition of sport’s social function. The previously mentioned Danish project, *Participation of children coming from difficult family backgrounds in sport and club life*, provides finance to allow membership in sports clubs. It is recognised that this will assist members of ethnic minorities, helping them to establish networks and social capital useful for fostering employment possibilities. The Football Association of the Czech Republic manages a project entitled *Football without borders*, which fosters social relationships between Czech and German young players on the borders, contributing therefore to the development of social capital in the area. Sport has very often been presented as a vehicle for stimulating social features not far removed from those that have been labelled in the academic discussions as social capital.

In the next paragraphs, we will discuss in more depth the processes of policy creation and policy application concerning sport and social capital. The discussion takes into consideration not only the current state of policies that perceive social functions of sport almost exclusively in a strictly positive manner; it will conceive sport-oriented policy as a tool to overcome negative externalities produced through sport. In other words, it will take into consideration an eventual dark side of social capital and sport.

Moreover, while approaching this issue, it is important to highlight the heterogeneity of social actors and institutions participating in the process of sport policy creation and policy application. There is a dynamic complex of actors and institutions involved in this policy making, each of which is required in the negotiating process. The influence of this heterogeneity on the final nature of social policies may lead to unintended consequences, although with good intentions of stimulating network creation, social cohesion and social inclusion. We will discuss different courses of action for affronting the problem of unintended consequences, and fostering more effective policy application.

Policy Creation in the Dynamic Complex

In the most transparent, ideal, and direct way, policy documents are produced and applied in an interaction between three major subjects: public administration institutions, sport governing bodies, and sport participants (associated in clubs). As has been stated before, the set of actors and institutions is complex and it does, or it may, involve other different social actors and institutions as well. The process of building of social capital can also be influenced by other influences (cross-sectional policy building) such as: research teams, NGOs not dealing primarily with sport but dealing with issues that are part of social capital (for example with different forms of diversity), and sponsors providing sport with necessary funding.

The function of sport research was highlighted by Grant Jarvie (1998) in his text on *Sport and Social Capital in British Higher Education*. According to him, sport and social capital relates to relations among communities, research groups and people; “[i]t is healthy to raise the number of networked sports researchers, particularly in policy areas, because this in itself would add to social capital through creating the basis of a more open, critical but supportive mass of academics and students.” (ibid.). In a similar way, the importance of research for sport and its social function is stressed in Giulianotti’s (2005) introduction to the critical sociology of sport, particularly when facing such phenomena as commercialisation or globalisation. In general, the role of sport research is to understand critically (not necessarily in negative terms), to evaluate inner dynamics influencing the production of social capital through sport, and to eventually provide proposals for dealing with occurring problems of wider societal impact.

This said, so-called cross-sectional cooperation in the third sector between different NGOs should reassure the inclusiveness of different social topics which do not have to be necessarily formulated within sport governing bodies, even if these form an important part of social capital. This could be namely the so-called bridging function of social capital, ensuring inclusiveness of disabled people, ethnic minorities or emigrants or encountering people from different social stratification levels.

In general, different forms of policy may be created in the course of dynamic negotiation between the abovementioned subjects, each of which is an actor with different, and sometimes incongruent, interests. But what does this inner incongruence of the complex of actors imply for effectiveness of applying policy tools and for their preparation? And what tools can the public administration provide in order to render these processes more effective, regarding the creation of social capital? These basic questions will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

Policy in the Field: Possible Limitations

Social capital is very often an unintended by-product of bottom-up activities dealing with specific problems, faced by the charitable activity of volunteers. However each policy, when applied, arrives from the opposite, top-down, direction and has to enter a field which develops with its own inner rules, structures, composed by actors who may be used to their autonomy. Apparently direct and wanted links between public policy, influencing governance in the sport governing bodies and contributing to increased social capital, could at the same time create some social by-products.

The diversity of actors participating in policy preparation may, therefore, provoke several problems that could evolve during a subsequent policy application, if not having already done so during the phase of its creation. In other words, the application of new policy may, except for intended positive effects on social capital, potentially cause unintended consequences that could be harmful for sport. When we mentioned the importance of academic research in the process of public policy creation, the ability to anticipate unintended consequences should be one of its major objectives. The concept of unintended consequences was introduced in academic writings by American sociologist Robert K. Merton, who distinguished five different causes of these effects: ignorance, error, deliberate ignoring of their potentiality, values and self-defeating prediction (Merton

1936). Anticipation of unintended consequence has been quite common in academic and evaluative writings on policy. To name a couple of examples we could name study on health (The Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship 2001) or on the management of public transport (Lindquist 1998). In sport, among these potential unintended effects some of the following consequences may occur.

Firstly, social capital oriented policy may break existing interpersonal ties, networks and trust ensuring the effectiveness of sport governing bodies, mainly as concerns managerial governance, rationalisation and efficiency. Some of the steps proposed by new policy, for example some of the policies created in order to eliminate the dark side effect of social capital in sport, may not necessarily fit with ideological and cultural background of managers who are already working within sport organisations and ensuring their functioning, regardless of whether this functioning means gaining financial merit or a merely struggling for survival. For these reasons, the effectiveness of sport governing bodies can be affected.

Secondly, social capital oriented policy may conflict with volunteers' motivation and affect their willingness to participate in some of the proposed activities, since they could find them more restrictive than facilitating. This is linked to their values connected with sport, and their perception of it as leisure; policy development needs to address potential unwillingness to conceive sport as a space for purposeful action with wider social aims.

Thirdly, social capital oriented policy may struggle to gain wider recognition of sport as a relevant arena for the governance of social issues. This can happen on a public level and it may be expressed in a form of suspicion that policies and funding in sport are just strategies which are used by local representatives and local governments in order to gain popularity and strengthen their dominant position. For example, this may be the case of local public administration policies which are confronted with complaints of citizens who criticise the financial support of sport facilities notwithstanding the fact that the local government neglects important infrastructures as sanitation services or adequate quality healthcare.

Fourthly, the abovementioned barrier for policy recognition of sport may be encountered among some of the organisations in third sector, particularly those politically and

intellectually oriented NGOs with an *a priori* hostile attitude towards sport.⁵ Therefore, the so-called cross-section cooperation between different NGOs may have certain limitations. Some of the institutions and organisations in third sector could refuse cooperation with sports federations competing for resources even if their shared knowledge would have brought benefits for broader social capital development aims.

Fifthly, financial resources provided to sports federations by government following a policy specifically oriented to foster social capital may be diverted for other aims. They may be absorbed into the sports federations' budgets, without causing any actual effect on social wellbeing. This can easily happen since the possibilities to control intervention into social, and therefore rather invisible features, are limited.

These five potential unintended consequences of new policy creation do not represent an entire enumeration of potential by-products of policy intervention. They are based on theoretical explorations supported by critical reading of different policies. It is self-evident that the list of potential dangers must be considered in conjunction with local particularities and other by-products predictable throughout the means of evaluative empirical research.

Public Management Tools: Anticipating Unintended Consequences

After providing a basic answer to the question of which may be the eventual threats for policies oriented to sport in order to foster social capital, we need to answer another question: "What can public administration do in order to eliminate or reduce a threat of these unintended consequences?"

In general, public administrators should take into account the danger of these unintended consequences when preparing final policy tools. These could be achieved by different means, distinguished here as *instrumental* and *cultural*. The notion of so-called *instrumental* means refers to funding which provides subsidies in support of policy on one hand, but also reassures the quality of controlling mechanisms. This means a necessity to

⁵ Similar thesis could be valid for academic research, namely for some of the theoretical discussions on social capital. The role of sport in the context of civil, and mainly politically oriented participation, is sometimes depreciated or neglected at all (cfr. Maloney and Rossteutscher 2006, Stolle and Rochon 1998).

designate precise rules for money redistribution and creation of high quality systems of accountability. The aim of these means is to avoid the danger of financial resources being used for different objectives than those for which they are assigned.

The notion of so-called *cultural* means refers to communication and stimulation of research. This communication must be both internal (between various actors and institutions participating in policy creation) and external (between policy makers and wider public). As concerns internal communication, public administrators governing sport policy preparation must ensure assessable opportunities for feedback on different subjects, such as round tables, online forums and advisory web pages. These tools can enforce relations among different actors, influence volunteers' and managers' motivation, and provide an arena for the exchange of experiences. As concerns external communication, this includes mainly the mass media communication strategy which should focus on explaining and popularising the importance of sport in fostering social capital. Except for constant references to current issues or state of the art of policy implementation in the form of press releases, more symbolic support events such as a 'Week for women in sport' may be organised, taking the activities of the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES) as a model. These tools can foster transparency and trust whilst simultaneously contributing to the recognition of sport among those who are sceptical about its social function.

Sport and Social Capital in the European Union: our current research

As mentioned previously in this paper, in the Declaration on Sport in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (EC 1997), the Conference called on "the bodies of the EU to listen to sports associations when important questions affecting sport are raised". The previous sections of this paper have outlined the current position of sport and of social capital in the eyes of European public policy, and have discussed practical approaches to public policy development and implementation. This section describes the current qualitative research being conducted by the authors. Building upon the existing scholarship and European documentation described in earlier sections of this paper, this project seeks to elucidate the relationships between a sport governing body (SGB) and its membership: the social benefits of association membership and how associations manage the trust placed in them to manage sport effectively and efficiently, across the international comparison of situations in Denmark, Italy, France, and the Czech Republic. These dimensions will aid

the development of EU policy on increased cooperation with SGBs, and foster social and economic policies within SGBs that promote and produce excellence. It seeks to prove that the concept of social capital can be effectively applied to the economic, social, and performance successes (and shortcomings) of sporting associations in Europe, to the benefit of European citizens.

This research will be of considerable importance to the effective implementation of the EU commitment to building effective sport policy and increasing cooperation with the sporting associations across the member states. Assessing the social capital generated by these associations connects a number of current European priorities: coherent understanding of sport governance and its economic and social contribution; greater European cohesion; and, importantly, the promotion of common social and ethical values in sport and sporting organisations.

The project will be conducted over three years from 2006 to 2008. During this time, the team of international researchers aims to explore the organisational structures and the nature of relationships between SGBs and their membership at local, regional and national levels; to assess the impact of SGB association networks on social capital at the local, national, and European levels; to assess the involvement of women in these networks, particularly in decision-making capacities; to assess practices for dispute resolution; and, to highlight the ways in which European policy can most effectively relate to SGBs and the Europeans they represent.

This project is firmly qualitative: the primary method for research will be multi-sited organisational ethnography. The project will use four separate case studies (Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and France) to provide an international comparison of the social capital generated by SGB decision-making and membership networks, and will consider the sports of sailing, handball, and football. This approach is not aimed at being representative on of pan-European activities; instead it aims at developing a model of research practice for studying these issues. Following fieldwork in 2007, analysis of data will focus on dimensions of comparison inter- and intra-sport such as: use of interpersonal networks, levels of trust, decision-making responsibilities, dispute resolution practices, and the detail of knowledge the association has about its members. Additionally, the research will consider the relationship between the need for managerial acumen versus

lay knowledge for decision-makers within the sport, the influence of different socio-cultural factors on the decision-making process, and the role of women in decision-making capacities. This research will illuminate synergies and opportunities for intra- and inter-organisational dialogues on local, national, and European scales. This study will consider the comparative ability of alternative organisational structures to manage disputes when they occur and to maintain public confidence in sport governing bodies. Additional interviews will also be carried out with representatives from international organisations influential in European debates around social capital (such as the OECD) and also with international sporting federations (such as the IOC).

Our qualitative, contextual approach to social capital in a sport governance context allows the study of this phenomenon to be separated into three levels: micro (individual participants), meso (sport governing bodies), and macro (sport policymakers). This is also in accordance with the different theories conceiving social capital as an individual or as a collective resource. For each of the three levels, our research units will be: policy makers at the national, and potentially each of neighbourhood, city, and/or regional levels; the sport governing bodies for handball, football and sailing in each of the four counties, as well as including sport associations/clubs/groups at the local and regional levels; and, individuals actively involved in these three sports, both as participants and/or as members of sport governing bodies.

Our primary research method is multi-sited organisational ethnography (c.f. Gellner & Hirsch 2001, Piccardo & Benozzo 1996, Wright 1994, Schwartzmann 1993). We intend to follow a multi-track qualitative research strategy allowing us to approach social capital with both a deductive and an inductive method, with fieldwork findings feeding-back into the research process. In brief, the micro level will be studied through semi-structured interviews and focus groups; the meso level will be studied through semi-structured interviews, participant observation and frame/content analysis of documents produced by the sport governing bodies; and, the macro level will be analyzed with interviews with informed actors and politicians, analysis of policy documents (including communities or governmental bodies budgets devoted to sport) and ad hoc literature.

Following social capital literature (*inter alia*, Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993, 2000), at the micro level, we will look for persons' levels of trust (whether interpersonal or

institutional), but also at the person's co-operative and altruistic behaviour, at his/her openness towards diversities. At the meso level, social capital will be analyzed through, on the one hand, the density and vibrancy of associational life, in our case, the richness of sport associations and clubs in a certain community and the density of ties/links among them (the robustness of the network established by sport associations). On the other hand, we will study these associations' characteristics: how they recruit their members, how they make decisions, which social values they promote, the role of women and minorities within their governing bodies, how they finance themselves, how they resolve disputes, and the nature of the relations they have with public authorities. At the macro level, social capital will be scrutinized by analyzing, on the one hand, the "stock", (in Putnam's terminology), of trust, reciprocity, openness to others, and tolerance diffused within the large group defined as 'community'.

Considerations

This is an important and timely project which explores an area of research that has received little prior attention from social scientists but which is rapidly becoming an important focus for policymakers. Social capital, as discussed above, is a key component for understanding the relationship between European sport governing bodies and civil society. However, we face certain research challenges, practical and theoretical. The theoretical challenges we face relate to bringing together the literatures of sport management, social capital, and European public policy; researching social capital and sport in the context of social policy also requires an understanding that social capital is often only revealed in complex ways that are both local and universal yet are rarely named or acknowledged by laypersons as relating to 'social capital'. Through our detailed ethnographies we seek to overcome this issue of nomenclature and address the concept in its day-to-day reality. This also extends to the practical challenges we face with a disparate audience of policy contributors at multiple levels: those actively involved in sport governance, sport participants, public managers at all levels. To maximize the utility of this research, we need to concentrate on the symbiotic and crucial relationship between social capital and SGB activities in order to provide a vital foundation for the development of informed future policy.

Overall, this project intends to deepen knowledge (both academic and practical) by orienting scholarship, research, and reflection from current and historical perspectives

(evaluative dimensions) toward future ones (encouraging policy design for empowerment), continually emphasising qualitative research as a method for understanding social capital in practice. It could only appropriately be conducted at the European level. The nature of national funding available is generally such that sport is rarely a priority, notwithstanding that a comparative study of social capital and sport across Europe is best supported by the EU, considering that the outcomes of this research will have direct use for the further development of EU sport policy and social policy. Only now that sport, sport governing bodies, and sport participants are becoming priorities at the European policy level could a project such as this be selected for funding. Funding this project marks a significant commitment by the European Commission to promoting excellence in social science research in Europe, as well as to promoting excellence in European sport policy.

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