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Stuck between medals and participation: an institutional theory perspective on why sport federations struggle to reach Sport-for-All goals

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Background

Sport-for-All emphasizes that every individual has the right to participate in sport. Despite all efforts to deliver Sport-for-All during the past decades, studies indicate that sport participation rates stagnated, whereas social inequalities in sport continue to exist. Our study specifically explores how the dual mission of sport federations, i.e. providing Sport-for-All and high performance sport, affects their Sport-for-All delivery. By applying institutional theory this study sheds light on how the underlying institutional logic of Flemish sport federations affects their Sport-for-All contributions.

Method

A cross-sectional field study of the sport federations was applied in the study. In particular, the sport federations selected for our study are the 47 Flemish sport federations.

Methodologically, qualitative research methods (i.e., document analysis) as quantitative research methods (i.e., a new questionnaire was developed based on institutional theory) were applied in the study.

Results

Results indicate that sport federations are important partners in support of Sport-for-All projects (n=218), but that there is a discrepancy between the projects of the high performance-

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oriented and the Sport-for-All-oriented federations. Specifically, the high performance-oriented federations aim on youth participants, whereas Sport-for-all-oriented aim to reach disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the results indicate that high performance-oriented federations endure more institutional pressure than Sport-for-All-oriented federations.

Conclusion

This study provides insights in the amount of Sport-for-All projects the Flemish sport federations support and organize. Moreover, the conducted mapping of projects offers findings on which specific target groups the projects aim to reach. Our study indicates that the competitive federations especially aim on target groups like youth and open for all.

Remarkable is that their Sport-for-All projects lack a focus on disadvantaged groups.

1. Introduction

The societal advantages of sport participation are widely recognized, illustrated by such outcomes as improved social capital and public health [1, 2]. With that consideration in mind, the Council of Europe has been promoting the Sport-for-All ideology, since the launch of the Sport-for-All Charter in 1975. The main aim of this Charter was to provide more sporting opportunities for as many Europeans and to motivate the Europeans to become more sport active. To this aim, the charter has triggered national governments to promote sport among all layers of society [3]. In the democratizing process of the national sport policies, national governments relied on the national sport federations.

The national sports federation and their members (i.e., sports clubs) continue to be one of the most privileged partners of the national governments to implement Sport-for-All. More precisely, sport federations are urged to assist in the delivery of Sport-for-All, by offering and supporting Sport-for-All projects [4]. In general, these projects are considered a success. However, over the years, several challenges have persisted [5]. Sport participation rates have been stagnating in recent years, as the organized sport sector struggles to reach disadvantaged groups [6].

Given these challenges the aim of this study is twofold: (a) providing knowledge on what kind of Sport-for-All projects sport federations are currently supporting; and (b) offering insights in potential tensions between the strive for elite sport and Sport-for-All within the sport federations. To shed light on these tensions, the framework of institutional theory is applied. To this twofold aim, the following research questions are formulated: How are sport federations contributing to the contemporary Sport-for-All delivery? (RQ1); How are sport

federations affected by the tense relations between the Sport-for-All and the competitive logic? (RQ2); and What implications have the underlying logic on how sport federations experience institutional pressure or getting legitimacy from their institutional environment? (RQ 3). As such, the study contributes to the call for more theory-guided and empirically intensive research in function of an increased understanding of dominant logics in sport and their implications (Skille, 2011a).

2. Literature review

2.1. The rise of the Sport-for-All ideology

Having deeper historical roots, the identification of sport participation as a right is not a recent phenomenon e.g. at the beginning of the 19th century the Olympic Movement acknowledged the philosophy that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in sport [5]. Nevertheless, this philosophy only became broadly accepted after the Second World War. In the post-war era, national governments all over the world started to develop more deliberate policies to involve their citizens in sport [7-9]. Although actions have been implemented aiming to include all layers of society in sport, the post-war sport participation was dominated by young, achievement-oriented white males, mostly from the middle and upper social class [10-15].

A first considerable appeal to implement a more inclusive and organized sport policy was elaborated by the Council of Europe. In 1975, the Council launched the Sport-for-All Charter, thereby taking the lead role in advocating a broader and more democratized sport participation in Europe [16, 17]. The Sport-for-All Charter soon became well-established throughout Europe, emphasizing that every individual has the right to participate in sport [5, 18]. Furthermore, the charter enhanced the assignment that national governments of the

European Union had to coordinate and promote sports among all layers of society, including disadvantaged communities [3, 19, 20].

The Norwegian and Flemish (Belgium) governments were the first governments to practically implement the Sport-for-All idea. Both governments aimed to inspire their citizens with the Sport-for-All idea, through the launch of numerous recreational sport projects in the early seventies [8, 21]. Under impetus of the Sport-for-All Charter, other European governments soon followed the example of Norway and Flanders. As such, Sport-for-All acquired an enhanced significance in the national sport policies, which had been dominated by prioritizing elite sport. The range of Sport-for-All providers on which these governments rely is wide and varied, including non-profit and for-profit sport and non-sport organizations [22]. More specifically, the responsibility to provide Sport-for-All is in many European countries shared by local authorities and municipalities on the one hand, and sport federations and their members (i.e., the sport clubs) on the other hand [4].

From a European perspective, sport federations were one of the first and most privileged organizations in executing governmental sport policy programs, as they fulfil a mediating role in the relation between the governmental sport policy and the citizens [23-25]. For years, as regards the Sport-for-All policies, sport federations and their related sport clubs were the executor of multiple Sport-for-All projects. Although the role of the federations in the Sport-for-All policies differs from country to country, the implementation of Sport for All projects remains a key responsibility of sport federations in most countries [4].

These Sport-for-All projects supported by the sport federations can be situated in a wider spectrum of sport programs. Coalter (2007) distinguishes three types of sport projects. The first type of projects is related to the traditional sport sector, which assumes inherent development properties of sport participation. The second type of projects includes the *sport*

plus projects. Sport plus projects emphasize the traditional sport development objectives, but these objectives are rarely the sole rationale. Moreover sport plus projects use sport as an instrumental tool to address a number of broader social issues. The third type of projects are the *plus sport* projects, in which the main focus is given to social, educational, and health issues. Sport - and its ability to bring together a large number of people - is in this type acknowledged as part of a much broader and more complex set of processes [26-28]. The majority of projects supported by the sport federations are affiliated with the traditional sport sector.

According to Coalter (2002), Sport-for-All projects attached to the traditional sport sector embody several shared characteristics. More specifically, Coalter (2002) distinguishes five characteristics. A first characteristic encompasses the removal of barriers to sport participation for specific target groups, as some of them still encounter exclusionary mechanisms such as discrimination, high membership fees and financial costs. Sport-for-All projects aim to remove these barriers [29-32]. Second, these projects provide opportunities to develop sporting skills. Third, these projects aid to overcome the gap between recreational participation and competition. Fourth, extra training and support of coaches is considered as important in the projects. Coaches can fulfill a key role in motivating specific target group to become and stay active in sport [33, 34]. A fifth characteristic is the establishment of partnerships with schools, sport clubs and the wider community. Partnerships can mean an added value to reach specific target groups [35-37].

2.2. Decline of the Sport-for-All as guiding ideology?

Nowadays, the Sport-for-All concept still resonates in both academic and policy settings. In terms of policy, the concept is related to at least two contexts [31, 38]. Firstly, many governments conceived Sport-for-All as a policy tool to achieve a number of ambitious

health targets, such as concerns regarding non-participation rates in sport and rising obesity levels in the general population. Due to this policy interest, substantial investments have been made in facility development to provide more opportunities to execute the Sport-for-All projects [39, 40]. Secondly, Sport-for-All is omnipresent in the most well-known sport political movement: the Olympic Movement. Most countries have been confronted with a growing political legitimization of funding support for the development of the nation's elites (Olympic) athletes. Policy makers thereby believed that elite sport success would trigger the mass to become more active in sport [39]. This belief in the reciprocity between elite sport and mass sport has been part of the Western sport regime for at least the past century [38, 41].

This twofold application of Sport-for-All is exemplified in the way countries deliver Sport-for-All in the 21st century. To clarify this twofold application we refer to the case of a) Scandinavian countries, where sport is perceived as physical exercise to improve public health, and, b) England, where a narrower scope is used to define Sport-for-All. According to Green (2004), Sport-for-All in England used to be about realizing social welfare policy goals and provide sporting activities opportunities for the general population, and for certain target groups in particular. However, the Sport-for-All policy in England shifted to a narrow twofold focus that on the one hand targets children and young people. On the other hand, they are focused on winning Olympic medals and trophies on an international stage, assuming that the successes of their elites athletes will inspire the mass to become active in Sport-for-All projects [19, 42, 43]. This approach of Sport-for-All is narrower compared to the Scandinavian countries as greater emphasis is put on competitive games [5].

According to Green (2004), these distinct approaches to Sport-for-All indicate that there may be something inherently problematic about the Sport-for-All ethos. Green argues that Sport-for-All has been a prominent guiding policy ethos for decades, but its momentum as guiding ethos is declining. A main reason for the devaluation of Sport-for-All as a guiding

policy is its extreme flexibility and lack of specificity [42, 44]. Given this background, Green (2006) concluded that Sport-for-All is a convenient umbrella term for a diverse and constantly shifting set of objectives. Yet, this blurriness makes it problematic to understand or to measure the effect of Sport-for-All [38, 42]. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the Sport-for-All concept impedes the attainment of its original goals, being the encouragement of sport participation for all citizens (including disadvantaged groups). Although the past decades have been characterized by concerted efforts of national governments, the growing levels of physical inactivity among the population remains a major concern for national policy makers [3, 38, 45].

When referring back to the case of England, Rowe, Adams, and Beasley (2004), reported that the sport participation rates in England remained broadly unchanged over the last decades and sport in England has continued to be characterized by considerable social inequalities. Despite all efforts to deliver Sport-for-All, participation rates did not increase while inequalities continue to exist or even augmented. More striking is that this conclusion applies not only to England but can be considered as a trend in many Western societies [46-49]. Hylton and Totten (2012) conclude that despite its attractions, the reality of Sport-for-All has never been fully achieved, and successes remain incomplete and partial. Gains have been made, but massive social inequalities remain.

3. Theoretical Framework: institutional theory

To analyze the tension between the strive for augmenting participation levels and winning medals at international championships within sport federations, institutional theory is here applied as overarching theoretical framework. Several reasons justify the application of institutional theory in sport. First, one of the issues that makes sport attractive as an application of institutional theory is the large amount of potential stakeholders and ‘license-

holders' of sport [50]. Second, all sport federations are embedded in an institutional context and are subject to pressure from key suppliers of resources, their members, competitors, and regulatory agencies [51]. Moreover, they encounter more governmental interference in comparison to many other organizational settings [4]. Finally, the framework provides us with an understanding in how federations acquire social acceptance and authorization by adopting the norms and expectations of their institutional environment [52, 53].

The fundamental concern that institutional theory aims to acknowledge is '*why and with what consequence do organizations exhibit particular organizational arrangements that defy traditional rational explanations.*' (Greenwood et al. 2017, p. 8). To this aim, institutional theory distinguishes multiple key elements, which we will shortly describe in the following part [50, 54-56].

The first element implies that organizations are embedded and influenced within an institutional context. Institutional context understood as '*those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organizations that produce similar services or products.*' [55]. The institutional context represents an intermediate level between organizations and society. It forms the area in which field-level actors directly interact and influence one another in a structured manner [57]. According to institutional theory, the institutional context is characterized by isomorphic processes. The central idea of isomorphism is that the institutional context constrains organizations to resemble other field-level actors that oppose the same set of conditions and pressures them to adopt specific practices and processes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Secondly, the institutional context includes divergent belief systems that are operating inside the environment, while providing the organizing principles of that environment. These

principles are known as institutional logics [58-61]. Institutional logics are defined as ‘*the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.*’ [60, 62]. According to Reay and Hinings (2009) institutional logics are meaningful theoretical constructs, because they provide understanding of the connections that create a sense of common purpose and unity in the institutional context. Institutional theorists subscribe the interpretation that the institutional environments are organized to dominant institutional logic [61-63]. Once a set of logics becomes dominant and shapes how organizations behave and relate to others, they constitute an institution [53, 64]. According to institutional theory, institutionalized logics are taken for granted, widely accepted, and resistant to change [50, 63]

The third key element of institutional analysis is that by addressing the dominant institutional logics, organizations hope to receive legitimacy and ultimately to survive in their environment [65]. The struggle for legitimacy, defined here as ‘*a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, or appropriated within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions*’ (Suchman 1995, p. 574) plays a decisive role in the emergence of dominant logics and is one of the core insights of institutional theory [50, 66-68].

This closely relates to the fourth element of institutional theory. Where the institutional context is buffered from core technology, addressing logics that help to gain legitimacy may be contrary to practices improving efficiency [69].

Institutional theory in sport

By applying those characteristics, it becomes clear that the organization of sport is indeed a context characterized by multiple - and at times contending - logics [70-74]. The

research on institutional logics can be linked to the decline of Sport-for-All. More specifically, research on the Scandinavian context contributes to explaining the decline of Sport-for-All, by analyzing the dichotomous relation between different logics in sport clubs more closely.

Stenling and Fahlén (2009, 2016) stated that Swedish sport clubs are characterized by a struggle between institutional logics. They identified three dominant logics: (a) the Sport-for-All logic, (b) a result-oriented logic, and (c) a commercialization and professionalization logic. They indicated that, although the Swedish sport system argues to be mainly Sport-for-All-oriented, the sport clubs are usually an expression of the result-oriented and professionalization logic. They conclude that there is an order of logics where the Sport-for-All logic is overshadowed by the other two. One of their arguments is that rewards given for adhering to some logics are simply higher, or perhaps more easily understood, than for others. Organizations have no specific way of measuring the achievement in Sport-for-All, while it is easy to discover whether one won a tournament [74]. Skille (2011a) elaborated on the tension between the Sport-for-All and the competitive logic. He concluded that, as long as competitiveness is the dominant focus of sport, it implies that Sport-for-All and other logics are hard to realize. Skille (2011a) raised the call that further research is necessary to enhance our understanding of sport logics and – not at least – their implications. This study contributes to that call and explores how sport federations deal with the dichotomous relation between the Sport-for-All and competitive logic, while also shedding light on how this relation affects their Sport-for-All delivery.

4. Methodology

Study design

The overall study design was shaped by the twofold aim of the study. To this aim, the study applied a cross-sectional field study of the sport federations. The outcome of the study is a snapshot of the position of Sport-for-All in the institutional context of sport federations.

Sample selection

The sport federations selected for our study are the 47 Flemish sport federations subsidized by the Flemish government. To be more precise, Flanders (which is the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) counts 70 registered sport federations, of which 47 sport federations are subsidized by the Flemish government. The other 23 sport federations are registered, but not subsidized (Sport Flanders, 2018). Three reasons can be presented to support why only subsidized federations are taken into account. First, the group of 47 subsidized sport federations is related to the most popular sports. As such, they comprise the highest membership rates. Second, these federations are obliged to disclose their policy documents on their websites and to update their website frequently, which is in contrast to the non-subsidized sport federations. Third, the subsidy entails obligations, such as providing elite and non-elite sport. By only including the subsidized federations, we have a homogenous sample of federations that are facing a similar set of obligations based on the subsidies these federations receive. In the population of 47 subsidized sport federations, 40 sport federations address one specific sport. The other seven federations are the so-called multisport federations, representing several sports (Sport Flanders, 2018).

Although our empirical focus is on the Flemish sport federations, the selected federations display the same organizational characteristics as federations of other countries. They incorporate key organizational characteristics distinguished by Bayle and Robinson

(2007), enabling the comparison of federations. First, sport federations '*have a social orientation that is different from the periodization or systematic search for profits that characterizes commercial organisations*' (Bayle and Robinson 2007, p. 250). Second, the staff of sport federations consists of a mix of volunteers and paid representatives. Third, sport federations have varied economic models in terms of financing. Fourth, sport federations are supervised by both national and international sport systems. Finally, they are network organizations, operating via a network of regional structures and clubs.

Data collection

The data collection consisted of two phases. In the first phase, the focus was put on the mapping of the Sport-for-All projects, comprising an analysis of three types of research sources. First, a document analysis was conducted, including all policy plans, annual reports, reports of board meetings, and reports of the regulatory agency (i.e., Sport Flanders), to map all Sport-for-All projects supported by the sport federations. Second, the websites of the sport federations were examined. Third, the mapping was supplemented with data from a questionnaire, for which federations were invited to list all the Sport-for-All projects they support. This triangulation method provided a complete overview of the Sport-for-All projects of sport federations in Flanders (Belgium) (Rudd and Burke, 2010).

To map the Sport-for-All projects, we applied two selection criteria. First, the project had to have a direct affiliation with one of the Flemish subsidized sport federations. As the study's focus is on sport federations, Sport-for-All projects supported by one of the sport clubs - but not by the federation, were not included in the mapping. Second, the project had to diminish exclusionary mechanisms for participants.

In addition to the mapping of projects, the distinguished characteristics of the Sport-for-All projects were assessed, according to the work of Coalter (2002). Our study aims to

indicate how these characteristics are integrated in the Sport-for-All projects. To that aim we analyzed the multiple characteristics pursued by the projects: remove barriers to sport participation, provision of opportunities to develop sporting skills, provision of a recreational competition, extra support program for coaches and the establishment of partnerships with schools, sport clubs, and the wider community.

The second phase of the data collection aligns with the second research question on how sport federations deal with the tension between the Sport-for-All and the competitive logic. To provide answers, a questionnaire was sent to all 47 subsidized sport federations. A new questionnaire was developed based on the key elements of institutional theory [50]. The questionnaire was tested in a sample of ex-staff members of sport federations and club representatives. After the test phase, the questionnaire was addressed to the chief executive of each subsidized federation. In the end, 40 out of the 47 sport federations completed the questionnaire, representing a total response rate of 87.3%.

Measurements

The questionnaire comprised four scales (i.e. institutional pressure, institutional logic, legitimacy, and efficiency), which relate to the key elements of the theoretical framework. Separate principal components analyses (PCAs) were used to explore the factor structure of the institutional pressure scale and the scales related to legitimacy and efficiency for sport federations with a competitive logic and Sport-for-All logic. These four scales each yielded one reliable factor. Only factor loadings higher than .4 were withheld in this study. Items with factor loadings lower than .4 were deleted from the analysis.

Institutional pressure. A variable institutional pressure was constructed to measure in what fashion federations encounter pressure from their institutional context. To compose this variable four items were developed based on the theoretical overview. One example items

was *'since the enactment of the new decree on the sport federations our sport federation experiences more supervision from Sport Flanders on how we execute our sport policy'*. This scale was shown to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha=.658$).

Institutional logic. Federations were asked to indicate the logic that best represent the main orientation of their organization. As the study aims to shed light on the tensions between the Sport-for-All and competitive logics, the federations had three options. They had the possibility to answer that their organization was more competitive-oriented, Sport-for-All-oriented, or they could opt to select a remark field to answer why they did not agree with the first two options.

Legitimacy. Federations were asked if they get legitimacy from the institutional context for subscribing a specific logic. Five items were developed for federations with a competitive logic. An example items was *'if our sport federation gets goods results on international tournaments we get recognition from other sport federations'*. This scale was shown to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha=.728$). Three items were developed for federations with a Sport-for-All logic. An example of an item is: *'Our sport federations is often asked for advice by other sport federations in how they should develop their Sport-for-All policies'*. This scale was shown to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha=.639$.)

Efficiency. Federations were asked if addressing a specific logic contributes to the efficiency of their organization. Five items were developed to measure efficiency by federations with a competitive logic. An example item was *'our sport federations spends the most of our budget on competition'*. This scale was shown to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha=.636$). For federations with a Sport-for-All logic three items were created to measure efficiency. An example items was *'our sport federations spends the most of our*

budget on Sport-for-All'. This scale was shown to be a reliable instrument (Cronbach's alpha=.738).

Data analysis

First, regarding the analysis of the consulted documents and websites, a thematic analysis was conducted on the policy documents and websites of sport federations to enhance our knowledge on what kind of Sport-for-All projects the sport federations support [75]. To analyze the target groups of the Sport-for-All project, we opted to separate the target groups of the project. For example, when a project aimed to reach disabled and senior participants, we distinguished two separate target groups. Therefore, the number of target groups is higher than the number of unique Sport-for-All projects.

Secondly, to shed light on the tensions between the Sport-for-All and the competitive logics, we utilized the questionnaire addressed to the sport federations. Data analysis was conducted with SPSS Statistics 25. A multivariate analysis of co-variance (MANCOVA) was used to compare sport federations with a competitive logic and federations with a Sport-for-All logic. Institutional pressure, legitimacy, and efficiency were included as the dependent variables. Organizational size (number of members) of the sport federations was added as a covariate.

5. Results

The first part of the results section focuses on our first research question: 'what kind of Sport-for-All projects do the sport federations support?,' whereas the second part relates to outlining the results of analyzing our second research question about potential tensions between the Sport-for-All and the competitive logic.

Sport-for-All projects

Based on the inclusion criteria, 218 Sport-for-All projects were distinguished by the 40 sport federations that conducted the survey, representing an average of 6.3 Sport-for-All projects per sport federation.

Target groups

The analysis shows that 58.5% of the projects addresses one specific target group, 11.8% addresses two target groups, and 29.6% of the projects are open for multiple target groups. The target group that is most addressed is *youth (under 18)* (29.1%), followed by *open for all* (26.3%) which refers to projects that are accessible for different kinds of target groups. Typical examples of such projects are the ‘*start2-projects*’, (e.g., Start2Run). The main goal of these ‘*start2-projects*’ is that participants can participate free of costs for several trainings to learn more about the sport and the sport federation or club. Other popular target groups are *disabled participants* (11.6%) and *elderly* (10.4%). Less frequently addressed are disadvantaged communities such as *lower SES-groups* (4.8%) and *people with a migration background* (4.8%).

Characteristics of the Sport-for-All projects

As mentioned by Coalter (2002), Sport-for-All projects can pursue multiple characteristics: remove barriers to sport participation, provision of opportunities to develop sporting skill, provision of a recreational competition, extra education programs for coaches and the establishment of partnerships with external partners to create a more efficient output. All 218 Sport-for-All projects addressed the first two characteristics. 28.9% of all projects provide a recreational competition, 28% of the projects include an educational program for the coaches, and 36.7% of the projects involve an external partnership.

Multivariate MANCOVA-measurement

With regard to our second research question, 65% of the sport federations reported to subscribe a competitive logic, 30% of the sport federations reported to be orientated towards a Sport-for-All logic, and 5% sport federations reported explicitly in the remark field to have a holistic view on sport and that it was difficult to appoint the most dominant policy. As only 5% of the federations reported a holistic view, these federations were not withheld for further analyses.

Furthermore, the MANCOVA-analysis revealed that the overall model was significant (Wilks' Lambda = .59, $F(7.369) = .00$, $p < .05$). More specifically, the MANCOVA-analysis indicated a discrepancy in how federations with a competitive and those with a Sport-for-All logic endure institutional pressure. Sport federations with a competitive logic endure more pressure than those with a Sport-for-All logic and this discrepancy was significant, $F(23.077) = .00$, $p < .05$. No significant difference was found for the variables legitimacy and efficiency. Table 1. offers an overview of the MANCOVA-analysis.

[Table 1: MANCOVA-analysis conducted on the sport federations]

Implications of the institutional logic on the Sport-for-All delivery

When linking the Sport-for-All projects to the underlying institutional logics of the sport federations, our analysis shows that the 26 sport federations with a competitive logic offer 155 Sport-for-All projects in total. The 12 sport federations with a Sport-for-All logic support 79 projects. Moreover, these results are supplemented with the analysis of the strategic goals of the federations. This analysis reveals that both types are addressing Sport-

for-All in their strategic target goals. The contrast lies in the fact that the competitive-oriented federations inserted more competitive and elite sport-oriented objectives in their strategic goals, such as winning medals in international competitions. In contrast to the Sport-for-All-oriented federations, competitive-oriented federations refer less often to specific Sport-for-All projects in their strategic goals.

Furthermore, the specific target groups were linked to the underlying logic of the federations to indicate how the Sport-for-All and competitive-oriented federations aim to reach specific target groups. The accompanying results are summarized in Table 2.

[Table 2: Target groups aimed at by the Sport-for-All projects]

The results presented in Table 2 are also reflected in the analysis of the strategic target goals. When sport federations with a competitive logic mention specific target groups in their strategic goals, they mostly refer to youth. This result slightly differs when comparing with federations with a Sport-for-All logic. The latter group of federations more often address disadvantaged groups, such as lower SES-groups, seniors, and participants with a migration background in their strategic objectives.

Finally, the specific characteristics of the projects were linked to the subscribed logic. Sport federations with a competitive logic provide 28.4% of their projects in a recreational competition. Moreover, an extra supportive program for the coaches is available in 23.9% of their projects, while 30.3% of their projects relies on assistance of an external partner. In the case of Sport-for-All-oriented federations, 21.5% of their projects include a recreational competition, 24.1% of their projects foresee in extra education for the coaches, and they rely on an external partnership in 35.4% of the projects.

6. Discussion

By responding to the critiques that sport participation rates in recent years have been stagnating and sport participation is still characterized by social inequalities, our study provided insights into how sport federations take position in the contemporary Sport-for-All delivery. In summary, we found that the Flemish sport federations deliver major contributions to the Sport-for-All delivery in quantitative terms. However, in qualitative terms, the projects often lack the intention to reach specific disadvantaged groups, such as participants with a migration background and lower SES-groups.

These findings are in line with the Green's (2006) argument that Sport-for-All policies face an inherent problem, leading to the suggestion that Sport-for-All might never reaches its original objective to engage all people -and disadvantage groups in particular - to become (more) active in sport. Despite the Sport-for-All policy developed over time towards the inclusion of more (different) target groups our study supported the suggestion that the sport federations have to take the next step in terms of their Sport-for-All projects, increasing their commitment to reach disadvantaged groups.

Furthermore, our study aimed to strengthen our understanding about the tensions that might occur when sport federations have to balance the goal to win medals on the elite level, with the efforts to increase sport participation in general. The focus on sport federations provides a new angle that expands the existing literature which primarily focused on the tensions in sport clubs. One of the main findings of this study is that most sport federations apply a competitive logic. The fact that the underlying logic of most federations is competition-oriented, could be an explanation why the momentum for Sport-for-All, as a guiding ethos is declining. This reasoning can be linked with the thoughts of several leading authors in the field of Sport-for-All, such as Skille (2010; 2011a), Coalter (2007), Stenling

and Fahlén (2009). These authors are critical for a so-called ‘double track approach’ that is expressed in several national sport policies. This ‘double track approach’ refers to the complex issue of balancing the implementation Sport-for-All idea with the stimulation of elite sport achievements in the same organization. The abovementioned authors emphasize that the Sport-for-All ideal is hard to realize in those organizations, because the logic of competitiveness comprises various processes of elitism, selection, and exclusion [26, 76, 77]. Based on their thoughts, we assumed that sport federations that subscribe a competitive logic would not or only barely contribute to the Sport-for-All delivery. However, our study demonstrated that the gap between competitive and Sport-for-All-oriented federations is smaller than expected, which leads to the identification of several concerns or remarks.

First, the engagement of competitive-oriented sport federations in the Sport-for-All delivery can be seen as a remnant of their past commitment in the early Sport-for-All campaigns, as well as of their obligation to execute governmental policies related to the Sport-for-All (Scheerder et al, 2017). Flemish sport federations still get general subsidies in exchange for fulfilling basic tasks, as laid down in the decree (Scheerder et al., 2017). One of these basic tasks is that sport federations have to offer Sport-for-All. This obligation may help to explain why federations with a competitive logic are still contributing to the Sport-for-All delivery. This study indicates that this twofold tension, between competition and Sport-for-All, that the competitive federations face is embodied in their strategic goals. In contrast to the Sport-for-All-oriented federations - which are to a lesser extent, or (in some cases) not addressing competitive related target goals - the competitive-oriented federations adopt a staggered position when it comes to the tension between Sport-for-All and competitive target goals.

These findings accord with the results of the conducted MANCOVA-analysis. The analysis indicated that competitive-oriented federations experience significantly more

pressure than Sport-for-All-oriented federations. This finding extends the literature on institutional theory in sport. An explanation for this finding can relate to the fact that competitive-oriented federations are obliged to assist in the Sport-for-All delivery, while they aim to be successful on the international elite sport scene as well. The existing scholarship on institutional theory points out that organizations can manage multiple (and at times) competing institutional logics [61, 71, 78]. Furthermore, Kraatz and Block (2008) stated that organizations (outside the sport context) often endorse different institutional logics to conform to the varying amount of pressures they experience from the institutional context. This is in line with the results of the MANCOVA-analysis but further research has to be conducted to exclude other possible explanations for the significant difference in institutional pressure.

Second, when closely analyzing the specific target groups of the Sport-for-All projects, our study offers an intriguing finding. More specifically, that most projects of the competitive-oriented sport federations are focused on youth, open for all, and disabled sport participants. These target groups are – perhaps unsurprisingly - closely linked to their competitive core business [79-81]. It might be possible that federations with a competitive logic organize Sport-for-All projects, while applying the projects as a detection system for (future) sport talents. This hypothesis corresponds with research conducted on elite sport development, showing that a lot of elite athletes have their roots in Sport-for-All projects [81]. Exemplary for this analysis, is a notable quote a the competitive-oriented sport federation reported to Sport Flanders. The report included an evaluation of one of their Sport-for-All projects, wherein the federation expressed that one of the disabled participants had been recruited for the elite sport section of their organization.

When analyzing the target groups of the Sport-for-All-oriented federations, our study indicates that they aim to better reach disadvantaged groups like lower SES-groups, and participants with a migration background. Their efforts are much more in accordance with

how disadvantaged groups are represented in our society. For instance, more than eight percent of the inhabitants of Flanders do not possess the Belgian nationality (Flemish Government, 2018).

Finally, although the competitive-oriented federations are taking quantitative efforts to deliver Sport-for-All, our study identified a potential discrepancy in terms of quality compared to projects of federations with a Sport-for-All logic. Our analysis of the outcomes exposed that competitive-oriented federations more often implement a competition element in their projects in comparison to the Sport-for-All-oriented federations. The latter type of federations focus more on educational programs for the coaches and on external partnerships. The international literature on disadvantaged groups acknowledges that these target groups often rejects a competitive setting, because it comprises components similar to those that they have already failed to resolve [82, 83]. This might help explain why the competitive-oriented sport federations encounter more difficulties to reach these target groups. Furthermore, research revealed that the attitude and experiences of the coach play an important role in reaching these specific groups. Therefore, it is possible that the additional education programs for coaches in Sport-for-All federations are more oriented towards the young people's well-being and their specific needs and life situations, while the education programs in competitive-oriented federations are more fixated on competition [84].

Taking into account these three remarks, we would like to present an additional application for practice. Our suggestion is to separate the reversed logics into two different organizations or subsidiaries. The main reason for our suggestion is that, although most of the sport federations developed their Sport-for-All policies since the 1970's, the idea of Sport-for-All has still not been accomplished. Separating the logics into different organizations creates space for the organizations to solely focus on their dominant logic. This can have multiple advantages. Competitive federations can exclusively focus on improving the quality of their

competitions and elite athletes programs. On the other hand, the Sport-for-All-oriented federations can aim more fully on reaching disadvantaged groups. In support of our suggestion, we would like to point to the example of Denmark. Denmark is characterized as a country with a relatively high level of sport participation. Denmark differs from other sport systems in Europe due to a stronger separation between the organizations that focus on elite sport and the organizations that support Sport-for-All (Ibsen, 2017). In the Danish sport system, two organizations focus on elite sport. First, there is ‘Team Denmark‘ which solely promotes and supports elite sport. Second, there is the National Olympic Committee and Sport Confederation of Denmark (DIF). The DIF comprises the national sport federations that have most of their interest and money go to elite sport. For the development of Sport-for-All, the Danish system relies on the Danish Gymnastic and Sports Associations (DGI), which is the umbrella organization for 15 regional associations that focus solely on offering Sport-for-All [85, 86].

7. Conclusions

By exploring the role of sport federations contributions in the Sport-for-All delivery, our study helps to expand the literature in a twofold way.

Firstly, this study provides insights in the amount of Sport-for-All projects the Flemish sport federations support and organize. Moreover, the conducted mapping of projects offers findings on which specific target groups the projects aim to reach. Our study indicates that the competitive federations especially aim on target groups like youth and open for all. Remarkable is that their Sport-for-All projects lack a focus on disadvantaged groups.

Secondly, previous research emphasized the importance of more theoretically guided and empirical research to provide more insights in the understanding of sport logics and their

implications (Skille, 2011a). This paper attempts to contribute to this call. We developed a questionnaire to measure institutional theory on a quantitative way in federations. Our findings render a theoretical implication of institutional theory on sport federations.

Limitations and further research

Although interesting conclusions could be drawn, we need to address some limitations of this paper. Firstly, we focused on the tension between the competitive and Sport-for-All logic in the context of sport federations. We have to emphasize that other types of institutional logics can be at work in the institutional context of the sport federations. But these logics were not taken into account because of the particular focus on the tension between the competitive and Sport-for-All logic.

Secondly, the paper provides insights in the Sport-for-All delivery at a given time, but findings of the same study at a different time might differ, and therefore multiple points of measurement over a period of time would provide us with the means to analyze if sport federations' contribution to the Sport-for-All delivery is declining or increasing and if they succeed to reach more disadvantaged groups in the future.

Thirdly, because the mapping was based on a questionnaire, and policy documents, annual reports, websites of the federations, it is hard to draw conclusions about the execution of the Sport-for-All projects in practice.

This last limitation brings us to recommendations for further research. We raise the call to conduct more research that provides insights on whether there is a difference in terms of quality between the project of federations with a Sport-for-All logic and federations with a competitive logic.

A second recommendation is that more research can be conducted on institutional change in sport federations e.g. how can a competitive-oriented federations make the shift towards a Sport-for-All-oriented federation? Or, elaborating on our suggestion of separating the competing logics in different organizations, more research can be conducted on how this change process has to evolve within sport federations.

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