

Original Article

How can we get to know local governance of sports? – A case study in a Lagged region

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Published online.: June 30 2011

(Accepted for publication January 13 2011)

Abstract

This paper aims to produce some new knowledge on local sport in a lagged region of Portugal – Guarda. Considering sport as a relevant social phenomenon while it allocates public funding and has important media impact, we need to know better how the sport institutions and clubs develop and finance their projects in order to produce better collective actions. In this paper we study Guarda County and understood how its 26's entities (Local municipality and School Sport Team, 7 federated sport associations, 5 schools and 13 volunteer private clubs) organize and finance sports activities. After a reflective characterization of the public expenditure and cost calculus of some sport activities we concluded some of the most relevant clubs in number of practitioners are not the most costly activities. The Municipality plays a determinant role in the sport structure but other entities value more the Public School Team for sport development. Soccer continues to play a central role in those entities lives but Judo, Handball, Volleyball and Athletics are raising their prestige.

Keywords: Local sports, lagged region, public policies, social networks, sport management, public funds, sport activities, entities value, policy implications, sport environment

Introduction

Rationale

In sport development literature there is huge debate on the impact sports have in community development and how much should we require from the State to invest in sports either in maintenance or infrastructure [2, 8, 20, 21; 22, 11]. Liking or not, the State and local authorities keep spending public resources either in new facilities or bidding for sport mega events, expecting new votes or simply thinking they are promoting development, employment and economic dynamics in the territory. Independently of the positive impacts being over estimated, local authorities have the responsibility of doing things to promote development and sport is, no doubt, one of those things [1, 11, 12, 18].

In [3] we can read something close to: considering the increasing needs for leisure time and the new challenges from economic, technological, social and demographic changes, we must underline that local authorities cannot maintain a passive or reacting attitude. They should transform their activities in proactive and strategic public service, identifying and analysing the needs, prioritizing resource distribution through developing strategic plans and specific group directed programs. And [9] adds, in the Portuguese context, that after a deep diagnosis of the sportive context, such a plan should consider the broad strategic guide orientation for specific and basic sports. According to [23] it is critical to understand how local sports organizations are ready to assume the responsibility to conceive and implement local sport policies. The paper “*outline the position of sports in public policies and its organizational, financial and personnel background within the organizational structures of the authorities*” (*ibidem*:51).

Admitting we have to change sports organization at the local level [10] states that “*structural changes seem to have little impact on decision making processes because this process is centred on some small official and public decision centres. Therefore organizations must build a clear strategic vision before they jump into any change program*” [*ibidem*: 48]. Change requires a small continuum of changes as opposed to the structures of transformation and strategic reorganization, output of the reflexive analysis over the sports context. [19] argues that either than understanding the structure and organize sports, we need to know the process and to manage after it; this implies that we understand how people interact within sports context and organization.

In Portugal, almost every local authority is organizing Municipal Charts for Sports where they state that public-private partnership is almost compulsory and that all the sport related entities are very important. They also want to establish the appropriate rules in order to distribute the subsidies they intend to. Usually the criteria to subsidize depends on a composite formula with the number of sport practitioners, the number of training teams per age level and the fact that the club competition is local, regional or national. But they never defined criteria

based on what the municipality thinks it wants to be in the future, which constitutes a strong constraint in order to develop and constitutes the natural path to maintain or even decline sport quality in the future. In this paper we show an easy method to find out which entities within a local sport environment or relational space strategic and where subsidizing or investing funds from national and local policy should go when governmental bodies want to develop sports at the local level.

After the introductory section we present a second one for the concrete case, describing the sport organizational structure of the county; the following section is devoted to present and discuss the main results. The remaining of the paper is dedicated to a few set of concluding remarks and policy implications, followed by the bibliographic reference list.

The case of Guarda municipality

Besides the local government, the Ministry of Education subsidizes the activities and expenditures with salaries for teachers and coaches plus a certain amount of money that goes straight to the schools budgets to cover up global costs with transports, food and lodgement during the competitions.

In each district (a set of several municipalities) there are Sport Associations completely funded by public funds given by the government to each Sport Federation (Football, Handball, Volleyball, etc.). The only Federation that is able to raise other funding is the Soccer Federation, together with district Associations; the majority of those funds come from own income from ticket selling taxes and refereeing bodies paid by the clubs. The local clubs affiliated athletes (or not) live essentially supported by private donations or public subsidies given by the municipality.

Guarda's sport facilities available for sport practice (either in federations or not) are: a complex of outdoor swimming pools, municipal stadium and sport arena, Inatel (public foundation for workers) arena and five school sport pavilions. Five out of twelve private volunteer clubs/associations possess their own facilities, all of them devoted to soccer practice.

Under the federated sports, clubs do participate essentially in soccer and mostly at the district level; just one out of the twelve clubs compete in the 1st district championship. Indoor 5-soccer has one representative at the 2nd national competition. However, in school sports competitions, most of the teams in several sports reach the national level of the competition with some national champions in female volleyball.

Materials and methods

We triangle the sources with (i) official statistics, (ii) primary information close to what the organizational managers perceived on funds and subsidies and (iii) special paper fill up about the interactions perceived by the whole set of agents.

This is a contextual mixed methodology to describe the municipal sportive phenomenon; but it is also inductive while we cared about the perceptions of the agents, on relations and interactions in order to understand the sportive local process. It is not for sure a traditional deductive methodology with quantitative approaches and tests of hypothesis but it has a number of descriptive statistics that will allow some policy implications.

Instruments and Procedures

From [14] (National Institute for Statistics) and the [13] (National Institute for Sports) we gather the main numbers on number of clubs, number of sport practitioners per sport, capital municipal expenditures and municipal maintenance expenditures from 2002-2007. To a better understanding on how managers perceived the local sportive situation we collect data from half structured interviews of one hour time with each individual; in the same interview the managers filled up a matrix where they would point to which of the other organizations they keep interactions and to which other organizations they would like to cooperate in common projects to develop sport. Data was analysed using Excel 7.0 and Ucinet 6.0 software [4]. The samples includes all the 27 organizations acting within Guardas' sport space and are listed in the matrixes to be presented later, including public sector – Local municipality and School Sport Team, seven federated sport associations, five schools and thirteen volunteer private clubs.

Results

After analysing data from questionnaires and interviews we find that:

- Local Municipality and the School Sport Team are the entities which pull most of the practitioners (2.537), and develop regular sport activity in: Athletics, Handball, Badminton, Basketball, Gymnastics, Scaling, Futsal, Golf, Table Tennis and Volleyball.
- The practice of non federated associations developed under the leadership of volunteer associations such as Traditional Games and Mountain Club are those which pull more practitioners and affiliates (1.850).
- In the universe of 3.426 students, almost 1/3 (28,6%) practice school sports and Sequeira is the most active school (49%).

- Soccer, Basketball, Athletics and Handball are the most relevant sports in practice on official federated competitions.
- The higher budgets in clubs are from those which organize just soccer as a sport; at the same time they also are the more autonomous. The clubs with higher financial support also have more practitioners and develop the larger number of sports and training age teams. The municipality sticks to the Rules they approved when it comes to decide subsidies.

Public Sector

The Sport Associations are responsible to promote all the competitions and to train sport agents such as coaches and referees (exception for soccer). In Guarda, there are seven associations, which organize 26 clubs and over 1.717 athletes. Soccer has 12 active clubs much less affiliated practitioners than the Association of Traditional games. The activities carried on by schools promote the sport training of the students and perform a significant role within the scholar community considering the percentage rate (1/3) of the practitioners.

Private Sector

All this information was collected as primary data after the interviews of each club manager. The Clube Montanhismo is the most dynamic with half of the municipality practitioners and the lowest cost per capita. In fact they regularly organize several initiatives and where most of the practitioners are also affiliated in other sports (Table 1).

If we rank the clubs by annual budget there is a fit with the number of practitioners with the exception of C.D. Vila Cortêz because they just practice soccer and have the team on the 1st district league. The clubs with higher level of self financing are those who have soccer as a priority in several age teams; this is the reason why they can pull some advertising subsidies and sponsoring Money as we got during the interviews. Considering the autonomy level of the clubs it is interesting to confirm that the 1st in the ranking is actually the second in number of practitioners, the one who most events is able to organize and has the ability to pull the population for their events and activities.

From the four clubs over the average in autonomy we should evidence C.D.C. Pinheiro (with just 30 practitioners) but with social activities very dynamic that act as an income source. Finally when it comes to the cost per practitioner, in table 1 the three first in the ranking are those which have only soccer as sport with >18 years old teams. Only 2 clubs are below the average.

Interactions

Social network analysis is the kind of methodology allowing us to identify the interaction structure within a relational space and the roles each of the agents Play today and in future actions. Theoretical basis for this approach is fully covered in [6, 7] and the connection with social capital formation in [18]. In fact it deals with the relational space of a set of agents and to understand from their interaction patterns which are the main leading roles and to know if there is one or some of the agents that play a determinant (keystone) role such that if he/she did not exist, the structure will break in two or more subsets with isolated nodes.

A great part of the scientific literature on these issues in business and organizational behaviour attend to these relational aspects (see [16]). Focus on interactions/relationships is an important complement to the research of patterns in organizational behaviour, most of which is still centred in agents/actors' attributes.

In this paper we replicate [15]. Would we have high density values in the networks (Q1), which are the agents with higher centrality values (Q2) and local prestige (Q3) and other measures such as keystones (Q4)?

According to [24] and [15] the *keystone sector is the* institution within the relational space without which the structure will lead to isolated nodes, splitting the network in 2 or more components. In fact it will be the entity responsible for the entire network connectivity.

We have found the centrality measures, in the network. Excising the municipality the network space splits into 4 components meaning some entities will be far apart from the others (disconnected) (Figure 1).

And what about the intentions to build future projects?

We can state that there is a difference. Although they double the interaction density (20 to 40%) compared to the initial situation, when we go to the real matrix, density it will just increase 4 points (18 instead 14%), which does not reveal a clear orientation for public and collective policy. When it comes to projects the most relevant entity here is the School Sport team, which, excised will also split the network although just in 2 components.

For future projects the only indispensable entity is the Sport School Team.

Discussion

Those 27 entities provide sports for over 2500 people where soccer plays the king role but other sports are also popular. Located in a lagged region of Portugal, it is interesting to note that the Association of Traditional Games and the mountain mobilize a considerable number of practitioners.

Schools are important organizations within the sport relational space and they pull about 1/3 of the students to practice sports in a competitive calendar.

Although soccer has been the king sport the clubs are also able to raise some funds and the municipality sticks to the subsidizing rules they approved at the Assembly.

Actual density within the relational space is lower (20%) than the same density for future projects (40%); however, this difference is higher in the intentions than in reality of the perceptions (18 instead of 14%).

The most central entities in the actual structure are the Municipality, the Soccer Association and the Sport School team. Following with important significance we have the Athletics Association and the schools Secundária Afonso de Albuquerque and C+S de S. Miguel.

With values between (0) and eighteen (18), each entity establishes over 4 interactions with all the other agents. In the second matrix (Project) amplitude is lower (1 a 16), with a general average of five connections.

Excising the Local Municipality, the relational space will split in 4 components, putting in isolation almost 25% per cent of the total agents. The emergent agents for the future are different; we keep the Soccer Association, the Handball Association and still the School Sport Team; these are followed by Escola Secundária Afonso de Albuquerque, Escola da Sé, Santa Clara and S. Miguel, and the club Guarda Unida. Judo and Volleyball associations come out to be central in this second matrix, when they have got the excluded status if the municipality would be excised from the matrix. The determinant entity for Projects would be the Sport School Team that, excised, would turn isolated Sequeira School the most relevant in participation.

Concluding remarks

We remember here that the promotion of the managerial thinking in the framework of the (multiannual) scientific research projects fulfills major roles and generates a remarkable potential impact [17] and this paper is the first piece of an ongoing research project.

We cannot extrapolate conclusions to other cases because each one of the examples is unique. But we provided an instrument to do it for other municipalities. The definition of a local and public sport policy is very requiring nowadays and needs a whole new set of modern attitudes to face it.

Not knowing the local reality does not enable us to provide a policy. Every entity is hanged up in the public sector to develop their activities and politicians have no ideas on how to deal with this increasing demand for funds in a deficit constrained environment. Through our analysis we are able to think that future projects should run through school boards and the cooperation the Ministry of Education can give.

Predominance of soccer is evident in this case. In fact it must be the most popular king sport Com and the one able to pull a large sector of the population, available to cooperate volunteer, cooperate, organize and lead. Knowing the interior reality, soccer games on Sundays are one of the most popular events to gather people wanting to connect and socialize. There is not too much left to do it.

The study also provides us an explanation where the public funds are being spent and how much it costs each one of the sport practitioners. However we also need to improve the accounts and the statistical flows of data. Future work must involve religious and health entities because they have been active in sport activities processes.

Acknowledgments

We want to thank all the managers of the local private and public organizations in Guarda for their kind availability and the work of editing suggestions to Professor Mário Marques from CIDESD.

Figure 1 – The interaction matrix

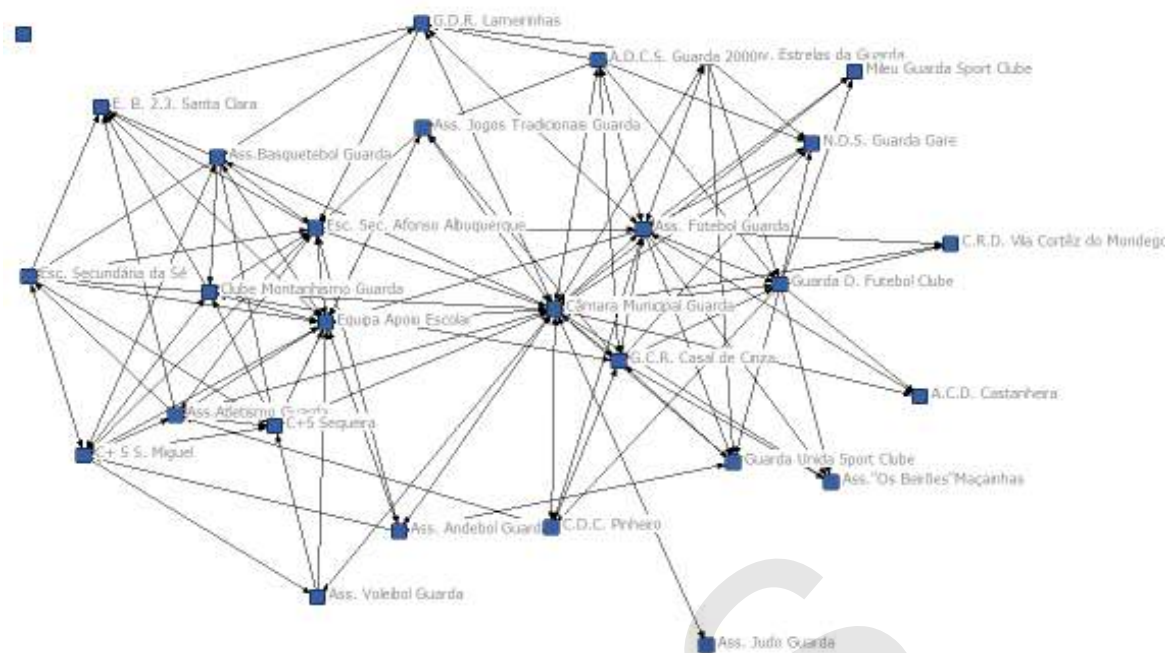


Table 1 – Entity ranking by variable

CLUBS	Practitioner s	Municipal Subsidy	Annual Budget	Self financing	Autonomy	Expenses / Nº Practitione rs (Euros)
TOTAL	2.100	261.300	505.000	310.700	61,52%	240,47
Clube Montanhismo	1	13	13	13	12	13
N.D.S.	2	1	2	5	10	11
Guarda Unida	3	3	1	1	1	8
A.D. Guarda 2000	4	8	12	12	13	12
Guarda F. Clube	5	6	4	3	4	6
G.D. Lameirinhas	6	2	6	11	11	10
G.R. Casal Cinza	7	7	7	9	9	7
A. "Os Beirões"	8	9	8	6	5	5
A.J.Estrelas Guarda	9	11	11	10	7	9
C.D.C. Pinheiro	10	12	10	8	2	4
A.C.D. Castanheira	11	10	9	7	6	3
Mileu Guarda S. C.	12	4	5	4	8	2
C.D. Vila Cortêz	13	5	3	2	3	1

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