

# **The role of voluntary sector sports clubs in promoting local policy outcomes**

Dr Andrew Adams

Southampton Solent University

# Structure of the presentation

- What are local (community) policy outcomes?
- What is the context of the VSC?
- How does a VSC promote these?

# Local policy outcomes

- **Aims:** vague, shifting and of variable salience to government
  - Increasing participation
  - Quality of life
  - Contribution to 'big picture'
  - Lifelong learning, social inclusion, community safety, economic vitality, sustainability, youth crime reduction, encourages voluntarism (LA documentation)
    - Translated from macro community policy
  - 'From Sport For All to not about sport at all' to only about competitive sport
- **Means:** Delivery mechanisms have varied (local authorities, CSPs, local delivery networks, clubs/NGBs)

# VSC: Dominant contexts

- Developing capacity for the social capital dividend
- Modernisation

Q: A place for like-minded individuals or a public space that is reactive and proactive regarding policymaking?

Q :An aspect of civil society (between state and market) or state sponsored functionality?

Q: Operated by volunteers (serious leisure etc) or volunteers driven by utility and conditioned by participation protocols?

Q: A self-destroying process? (Horch, 1998)

# Political opportunity structure

**Dominated by modernisation** (Houlihan and Green, 2009)

- Rhetorical
- Concrete reference
- Strategy of governance (Finlayson, 2003)

**Enabled New Labour: redefine & re-energise  
idea of community**

- As antidote to excessive individualism
- As positive force to develop collective values of reciprocity & solidarity
- Civic renewal/active citizenship now through social capital via voluntary organisations

# Social capital

- Democratic strain dominant
- Privileges voluntary associations
- Encourages provision of public goods – ‘purposive stance’
- VSCs – doubly virtuous
- Self-evidently a good thing (Rowe, 2005)
- Mythopoeic status (Coalter, 2007)

# PhD research: methodology

- Critical realist, iterative and reflexive
- Phase 1 - County council and 2 embedded local authorities
- Phase 2 - 2 rugby club, 2 swimming clubs, 1 football club
- In-depth, qualitative interviews. Phase 1  $n=31$ , phase 2  $n=27$ . all recorded and transcribed

# Findings

- The inferring upwards of collective action seems at best misguided & possibly a methodological fallacy
- ‘Enables other individuals to participate in rugby in the round, there is community development, but it is difficult to quantify. There is a value to the council who can say “we can demonstrate that within our parameters we have a range of sports”’

# Findings

## Social capital & policy

- Lack of conceptual depth to democratic strain
- Macro level policy never full takes into account structural factors
- Policy resorts to emphasising agency
- Results in bottom-up policy
  - which suggests that individuals can drive civic change

# Findings

**Councillor:** ‘ ...we genuinely believe that increased participation is good for the well-being of our community both in terms of mental health and physical health and in terms of what our council mission is in improving the quality of life for all our residents’

**CLO:** ‘what we are trying to do is help them [VSCs] to see and develop in a way which means that they reach their potential in terms of the value that they contribute to the community’

# Findings

- VSCs hence not paragons of civic change
- Why not?
- Because structural factors missing from analyses
- Contextual factors overlooked
- OK for bonding social capital (playing with mates), not for bridging

# Implications

- The potential of voluntary associations is over-valued
- Political opportunity structure – places social capital as a meso level social structure – integrates individual action with structural conditions (i.e. SC sets out a range of structural conditions which enable and constrain individual agency)
- Individual VSC culture/ideology tends to be ignored

# Implications

- Dominance of mutual aid in VSCs subverts the potential of existing policy streams focussed on social capital formation
- Policy outcome anticipated concerning the value of VSCs in forming social capital is corrupted
  - whilst policy aims at forming democratic social capital the evidence indicates that it is the rational or critical strains of social capital that are being formed in these clubs

# VSCs/Sport volunteers: Street level bureaucrats?

- moving towards being local sport policy implementers
  - Translation model, (Skille, 2008)
- **VSCs & volunteers** (Following Lipsky, 1980)
  - *Face dilemmas*  
  
‘corrupted world of service where they struggle with insufficient resources and vague policy goals’ (Evans & Harris, 2004)