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Delivery networks and community sport in England

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Abstract

Purpose

The paper aims to utilise Adam and Kriesi's Network Approach to policy analysis to examine the range of exogenous factors that affect interactions in the community sport policy process from a local authority perspective.

Methodology

The research is based upon two case studies. Each case study involved semi-structured interviews with three local authority middle/senior managers, three senior CSP representatives, and eight regional/county NGB representatives.

Findings

While the two cases exhibit distinctive socio-economic and structural profiles they provide valuable evidence regarding the operation of the network of partners involved in community sport and also illustrate the utility of Adam and Kriesi's analytical framework. In relation to Adam and Kriesi's power/interaction model both cases illustrate the fragmentation of power at the community level although interaction in one case exhibits a pattern best characterised as 'competition' whereas interaction in the other is more closely associated with 'horizontal cooperation'.

Research Implications

The paper highlights the need for improved theorisation of partnership arrangements in community sport, in particular: examining the relationship between issues such as resources, organisational capacity, and traditional involvement in sport development and attitudes toward the community sport policy process; linked to this, mapping the causal relationships in partnerships, i.e. what factors lead to what actions or behaviours; and investigating the utility of various strategies in developing a more cohesive and effective sub-regional policy system.

Originality/value

Local authority perspectives of community sport policy is an under-researched topic. It is timely to study these perspectives due to the refreshed community sport policy for 2013-17, the traditional status of local government as the major funder of community sport, and the public sector budget reductions and reported implications for non-statutory services, such as community sport.

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1. Introduction

There is a long-standing paradox in English sport policy. While community sport has received consistent political support at the rhetorical level there has been an absence of consistent commitment of resources (including expertise, organisation and finance). The paradox is the result, in part, of unclear and shifting national objectives, for example whether the focus should be on competitive sport or physical activity, who should be the primary target groups and what should be the appropriate weekly participation target (Green 2006; Bloyce and Smith 2012). However, part of the explanation also lies in the difficulty of constructing an effective delivery infrastructure for national community sport objectives. In the 2000s the preferred delivery partners of Blair's Labour government were local authorities who were encouraged to view sport as both a means and an end in relation to the government's over-arching concern to achieve greater social inclusion¹ (cf. (Bloyce and Smith, 2009, 2012; Collins, 2010; Houlihan and Green, 2010; Houlihan and Lindsey, 2013; King, 2009). In short, local authorities as primary delivery partners gradually fell out of favour for three reasons: first, their failure to deliver increased participation; second, because so many local authorities overlaid or replaced government policy objectives with their own; and third, the cost and complexity of having to work with more than 350 local authorities.

The issue of community participation in sport and how it might be increased resurfaced following the successful British bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games and the government's concern to demonstrate a tangible sporting legacy from the event. Part of that legacy was to be increased community participation in sport. However, in contrast to the Labour government's strategy for delivery the primary partners for the coalition government were to be national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) with County Sport Partnerships (CSPs) playing a strong facilitating and coordinating role. Community sport was defined by Sport England in 2008 as relating to 'adult (16+) participation in sport'. However, illustrating the continuing uncertainty about the precise character of community sport the government altered the definition in 2012 to address more directly the problem of drop-off in post-school sports participation and identified 14 to 25 year olds as the target group (Sport England, 2012a; 1).

Figure 1 illustrates the organisations involved in the current delivery infrastructure for community sport. As mentioned above a central role is played by NGBs which lead the translation and implementation of community sport policy and by CSPs who support NGBs and also local authorities. A total of 46 NGBs have developed a whole sport plan which details, *inter alia*, how each sport will achieve increased participation. Sport England is investing £493m in NGBs between 20013 and 2017 to support the implementation of these plans with each NGB receiving an allocation based on pre-published criteria². The 49 CSPs³ provide services that support the NGB with the implementation of community sport policy. The support services provided by CSPs are part of a contractual arrangement between Sport England and CSPs with the latter receiving annual core funding of £240,000 (Sport England,

2012b). The role of CSPs includes the strategic leadership of sport at the sub-regional level, bringing together key partners such as local authorities, higher education institutions, and local sports clubs. Here, the rhetoric suggests that CSPs can galvanise a community sport consensus from the bottom-up, although recent studies underscore the top-down reality of community sport, one which is controlled by tightly defined objectives and a carefully policed performance management system (Grix and Phillpots, 2011; Harris, forthcoming; Phillpots, Grix and Quarmby, 2010).

Within the current delivery infrastructure the role of local authorities remains ambiguous. Local authorities are acknowledged as the largest investor in community sport services in England (Sport England, 2013). In 2011/12 the combined local authority annual spend on sport⁴ was reported to be £700 million⁵. Whilst past policy has explicitly positioned local government as a key part of the delivery system (Sport England, 2007), the most recent strategies are decidedly vague.

Figure 1 here

This ambiguity regarding the role of local government in the community sport policy process is the focus of this study. Utilising Adam and Kriesi's Network Theory (2007) the research provides a critical realist account of the place of local authorities within sub-regional networks (CSPs) through an analysis of two case studies.

2. Policy Network Theory

Policy Network Theory emphasises the involvement of multiple organisations in policy making and implementation and also the significance of informal as well as formal processes. For the purpose of this analysis policy networks are defined as 'the stable patterns of social relations existing between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or programmes' (Kickert et al., 1997: 6). Policy network theory also draws attention to the non-hierarchical patterns of interaction between government agencies, interest groups, elected officials, other institutions and individuals exogenous to formal government organizations (Kenis and Schneider, 1991), and the extent to which these interactions modify the way power is exercised and influence the actions of the government (Miller and Demir, 2007). Lindsey (2009) has previously used Marsh and Rhodes' (1992) theoretical insights to contextualise understanding of collaboration in sport at the local level. This study uses Adam and Kriesi's conceptualisation of policy networks. This framework is considered to have utility in the community sport policy process as it gives attention to the structural and agential context that shapes network structures and network interaction. Further, the framework provides a typology of network interaction which considers the power structures of policy subsystems as well as the degree of cooperation among actors.

In their analysis Kriesi et al (2006) stress the importance of domestic political systems (national context) in shaping sectoral policy networks. Borrowing from Lijphart (1999), Adam and Kriesi (2007) categorise England as a majoritarian-unitarian democracy as decision making is concentrated amongst a small number of institutions and actors. This is evident in the key decisions taken for community sport which are the outcome of a hierarchical policy system controlled by a limited coalition comprising government departments, primarily the DCMS but also the Departments of Health and Education, and Sport England (Harris, forthcoming). In such systems, the uneven distribution of power influences important decisions concerning policy formulation and implementation which shape the specific configurations of subsystem membership and modes of interaction between agents (Coleman, 1988). This is exemplified in relation to the community sport policy process where NGBs are allocated public money to deliver against DCMS/Sport England priorities with limited involvement or consent from other actors involved in the policy process such as local authorities, education institutions or local clubs and trusts.

Figure 2 here

The policy domain-specific context involves two types of variable that influence the structure of policy networks: (i) general policy-specific variables (see Kenis, 1991; Coleman & Perl., 1999; Schneider, 1992) and (ii) situational policy-specific variables (see Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Dudley and Richardson, 1996). With general variables, the context that is specific to a particular policy subsystem and the features of that subsystem will inevitably influence the shape and structure of the policy network (Coleman & Perl., 1999). Policies and networks differ according to the resources and incentives provided for network formation, the expectations that are generated, their visibility among the mass public and the ability to measure impact (Adam and Kriesi, 2007). Policy subsystems with invited group formation, such as CSPs, are likely to produce networks with fragmented structures (*ibid*, 2007). Policies such as those governing community sport that are characterised by high expectations, high visibility/salience and easy traceability of policy effects, may cause conflict as certain actors may have to defend their positions against important groups and the mass public (Adam and Kriesi, 2007).

Highly relevant to this study is the situational policy-specific variable. This illuminates the range of factors that directly change the structure of the network, the distribution of power across the network and the type of interaction between agents. Here, it is assumed that the characteristics of a policy network remain stable unless affected by exogenous or endogenous factors (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Adam and Kriesi, 2007). Exogenous factors may destabilise the structure of policy networks (Sabatier, 1988; Houlihan, 2005; Sabatier and Weible, 2007). They can include 'significant events' brought about by changes in socio-economic conditions, public opinion, and the governing coalition or policy decisions from other subsystems (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Endogenous factors are represented by the influence of

'ideas, values and knowledge' (Adam and Kriesi, 2007: 142), where 'new ideas [lead to] new patterns of behaviour' (Haas, 1992: 3), which tend to precede changes in policy (Hay, 2002).

Alongside their network approach, Adam and Kriesi (2007) created a two-dimensional typology which captures the fundamental elements of networks, actors and the relations between them (see Figure 3). Two variables clarify these elements: (i) composition variables—these relate to actor attributes and (ii) structural variables, referring to the types of relations between actors. With regards to composition variables, Adam and Kriesi pay particular attention to capabilities, in particular the distribution of capabilities across the group of actors. In other words, the first part of Adam and Kriesi's typology is concerned with the distribution of power across the set of actors involved in the policy subsystem. This aspect considers whether power is concentrated in the hands of one dominant actor or coalition or whether power is shared. The second aspect of the typology addresses the degree of cooperation between actors and coalitions and illuminates specific arrangements within networks. Cooperation can be one of three types—(i) conflict/competition, (ii) cooperation and with elements of both, (iii) bargaining/negotiation (Adam and Kriesi, 2007).

Figure 3 here

3. Method

The study is informed by a critical realist ontology and retroductive approach to the analysis of data (Bhaskar 1975, Ragin 1994). The realist accepts the possibility of causal explanations while also accepting the need for theory to reveal the multiple realities that exist under the surface (Hay, 2002). Critical realism also bridges the object-subject gap (Neuman, 2003: 85), allowing a fuller consideration of agency and the relationship between this and the social structures that shape and condition human behaviour (Bhaskar, 1978). The retroductive approach centres attention on the interaction between theory and observation (Ragin, 1994). Analysis starts with the data and work backwards using theory to develop an explanation for observations. Given its realist position and the nature of the research aim, this research will follow the structuralist version of the retroductive research strategy advocated by Bhaskar (1979) which considers structure and agency as being equally important in shaping the attitude and experiences of agents.

The study provides an analysis of two cases which developed through documentary analysis (strategies, guidance notes, reports, and websites) and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews which were undertaken between May-July 2012. Each case study involved three CSP representatives, three local authority representatives and eight NGB representatives (see Table 1). Most interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes and were recorded. Transcripts were analysed using an open code thematic

framework whereby data were coded and then grouped into specific themes and categories.

Table 1 here

4. Case Studies

Case one

This case involved a conurbation, relatively small in area but densely populated. It has a single-tier local government structure comprised of four large metropolitan boroughs. Each of the four areas covered by the Councils has a notable and distinctive local culture. The combined budget for sport and recreation for 2011/12 was £12.2 million, down from £15.1 million in 2010/11 (-18.8%). All four authorities have a strong traditional commitment to sport development. Despite the public sector austerity measures, they have retained relatively large sport development teams (three to 12 officers), with two authorities outsourcing the development function to a leisure trust and the remaining two housing sports development internally.

The CSP has company limited by guarantee status and was created in 2008. It is hosted by a local development agency and has a representative board with members from education, local authorities, public health, commerce, and NGBs. According to the CSP's strategy, 'the partnership represents all the main stakeholders in PE, sport and physical activity, including local authorities, NGBs, PCTs, further education, University, and the voluntary and community sector, private sector, leisure trusts and the LEP'. Underpinning this, the three strategic priorities for the CSP for 2012-2015 are (i) increasing adult participation in sport and physical activity, (ii) increasing youth participation in sport and physical activity, and (iii) increasing the quantity and quality of the sport workforce across the partnership area. The CSP employs a total of 10 full-time staff and in 2011/12 had a turnover of £1million.

The three local authorities involved in the study had different perspectives toward their place within community sport policy. One authority (MBC1) retained a sport development service more common in years past. It maintained a large development team with some members of the team focused on physical activity and broader community development-type work and others focused on activities associated with the sport development continuum. The other two authorities had a slightly different perspective, focusing more on the instrumental use of sport as a vehicle to promote health and wellbeing and develop communities. The changing role of local authorities was an issue of concern and, in particular, the implications for local authorities' long-term involvement in sport and physical activity:

...ultimately, [the Metropolitan Borough Council] won't be doing sport or physical activity, I think local government by the very nature of what is going on is becoming smaller and smaller and therefore the vacuum

is being filled by the other structures and the organisations that are out there ... what you will see in the future is more sub-regional type work with authorities commissioning others to deliver certain services, like sport or physical activity (*Interview: Head of Sport & Physical Activity, Metropolitan Borough Council 2 & Chairman of CSP*).

Local authorities revealed a largely sceptical attitude toward the CSP, despite the Chairman of the CSP being the Head of Sport and Physical Activity in one of the Metropolitan Borough Councils. This scepticism appears to relate to three issues: the leadership of the CSP, the CSP's aspiration to provide strategic leadership for sport across the sub-region, and the operational function of the CSP. First, the board was criticised by one representative for maintaining a largely passive, observational role, receiving programme updates and financial reports, with little, if any, discussion concerning the bigger decisions of the partnership's vision or strategy:

... [the board] are well connected, they're highly influential people. The problem is that they are supposed to be steering and shaping the strategic view of sport across the sub-region... but that strategic shaping doesn't happen. Most of the time they get updates or the CEO's recommendations on this or that ... most of it is coming down from Sport England (*Interview: Principal Sport and Recreation Manager, Metropolitan Borough Council 1*).

The second issue concerned tensions arising from the CSP's ambition to be acknowledged as the strategic agency for sport in the sub-region. This was an ambition that the CSP senior management strongly promoted, citing their role as an 'umbrella agency for sport in the sub-region', one which coordinates, advocates and influences. But to do this effectively, two conditions must be met. First, the CSP must develop and pursue a strategic role. Second, it must have legitimacy; it must be viewed and sanctioned as the strategic lead for sport by the agencies it represents. In short, this case is a prime example of the CSP assuming the former without having achieved the latter. In fact, local authority representatives resolutely refuted the view of the CSP as a strategic agency and emphasised their autonomy, their resistance to external leadership, their distrust of the ambitions of the CSP and their legitimate power as the traditional strategic agency for sport for their area.

The CSP talks about being the strategic lead, strategic lead this, strategic lead that...but actually, strategic leadership comes at the local level...there is an argument that there is no need for CSPs. If NGBs worked more effectively with local authorities there would be more resources available to coordinate programmes in order to sustain and grow participation (*Interview: Principal Sports & Recreation Manager, Metropolitan Borough Council 1*).

These criticisms were offset by a more positive and arguably more pragmatic view of the role of the CSP:

we are trying to work strategically ... yes there are things we need to improve, but it's a lot more efficient than the system used to be. I remember the days when the regional officer would come knocking around February/March time to see whether you had any projects that they could commit some funding to as they needed to spend their budget or face the risk of losing it the following financial year (*Interview: Head of Sport & Physical Activity, Metropolitan Borough Council 2 & Chairman of CSP*).

The third issue concerned the questioning by local authorities of the operational role of CSPs, stating that these 'add another layer of bureaucracy' to the community sport system as well as exacerbate the potential for duplicating the programmes of NGBs and local authorities. There are two distinct issues here. The first relates to the CSP as a strategic agent, one viewed by some authorities as an additional, unnecessary layer in the community sport system. The other relates to problem of duplication, particularly with local authorities across the sub-region:

... there is some stepping on toes, you know things like club support, funding advice, school-club links, you know things that we have been doing for a while, a number of years and now you have the CSP coming along and doing the same thing (*Interview: Community Development Manager, City Council*).

Unsurprisingly, the role that local authorities play within the CSP varied. As previously mentioned, a local authority representative also chairs the CSP board—but there appears to be no structural arrangement to feed back from the board to local authorities. In 2009, all four local authorities made an annual financial commitment to the CSP; since then, two authorities have ceased funding. These decisions were made based on the need for budget reductions and the perceived lack of value associated with 'investing in something that we do ourselves' (*Interview: Community Development Manager, City Council*). Notably, the two authorities that continued to fund the CSP have their sport development function delivered by an external Trust, whereas the two who withdrew funding retain an internal sport development function. It is notable that one senior local government officer believed that the local authorities' financial commitment to the CSP reflected the nature of the local authority-CSP relationship. The evidence, for two of the four local authorities, pointed to a perceived lack of added value in the CSP: 'they don't do anything and are not involved in anything that the local authority could not do itself' (*Principal Sport & Active Recreation Manager, Metropolitan Borough Council*).

In sum, as one NGB representative concluded:

...the problem is that the [sub-region] don't really have a strong tradition of working together. There was no real partnership between the four local authorities to start with ... I'm not quite sure how the CSP can be strategic or work strategically with four local authorities that don't want to buy into the CSP as a strategic agency (Interview: Regional Development Manager, ASA).

Case two

In contrast to case one, case two focused on a non-metropolitan county, relatively large in terms of area with a dispersed population centred around three major towns. It has a traditional two-tier structure with seven local authority districts and a County Council. The authorities committed a total of £6.6 million to sport and recreation in 2011/12, compared to £7 million in 2010/11 (-6.5%). All seven districts retain a minimalist sport development service. This function commonly falls to a single officer. In many cases the officer has other responsibilities including health and wellbeing, arts development, playground management and sport facility management. The County Council also retains a strategic head of service focused on culture and sport.

The CSP is hosted by one of the local authorities and has no independent legal status. The partnership itself has been in existence since 1996, initially serving as a network forum for sport development within the county before evolving into the Active Sport Partnership in 2000 and then the County Sport Partnership in 2005/6. The CSP have a *skills-based* board meaning that members are elected based on their skills and competencies rather than any sectoral interests. The vision for the CSP is 'to make the county a physically active and successful sporting county through the provision of high quality opportunities for everyone' (CSP Business Plan, 2012). The priorities underpinning this vision are (i) increasing participation in sport and physical activity, (ii) strategic coordination of sport and physical activity across the county; (iii) NGB support, and (iv) workforce development. The CSP core team consists of 14 full-time employees (many of whom were formerly employed in the member local authorities) and in 2011/12 had a turnover of £1.2 million.

Local authorities revealed a defiant attitude regarding their place within the community sport system. For most, community sport was a fringe interest, secondary to promoting broader community development or health improvement. Rather than seeing themselves as being squeezed out of community sport, local authorities underscored their autonomy, the financial context and the need to focus on social improvement and development: 'the big issue is the economic climate and the ongoing challenge to cut our budgets' (*Interview: Community & Cultural Services Manager, District Council*); 'NGBs and Sport England need to appreciate the role and priorities of local authorities, we have many more responsibilities than just sport and less and less resources to deliver ... we have to prioritise' (*Interview: Sport Development Manager, Borough Council*); 'over the last few years, particularly after

the [Local Area Agreement], we have become more and more concerned about access and getting more physically active. This is not necessarily about sport but more about addressing health inequalities and creating [a] healthier, more active community' (*Interview: Head of Culture & Sport, County Council*). These comments suggest that some local authorities give limited attention to the range of external factors that directly shape their role in the community sport policy process and in its place emphasise their autonomy in selecting priorities and allocating resources. However, whilst these views provide an interesting insight into agents' responses to the recent changes in policy, it is also important to consider the extent to which this genuinely represents the local authority view, rather than an attempt for some local authorities to rationalise their marginalisation in sport development.

The authorities' views toward the CSP were largely positive, although there were some distinct differences of opinion between the District, Borough and County Council representatives regarding the value of the partnership, as noted below. All authority representatives had a degree of respect for the leadership of the partnership helped by the fact that the CSP Director was a former Director of Leisure Services. It was viewed as a professional and credible network. The board were trusted and respected leaders with a rich skills set. More than this, local authorities viewed the board as fulfilling its role in strategic leadership, developing an appropriate style of leadership and setting the strategic framework for sport and physical activity in the county.

... the other key challenge is the political dimension, working with a different set of councillors, different political persuasions, and the identity that each district wants, it's difficult to balance all of that. But that's the role the board. They try to bring the right sort of leadership, to bring people together to point in the right direction, albeit the direction maybe pointed towards achieving buy in to the 2012 Legacy or creating a vision for the county that the key players have had a hand in and everyone feels part of (*Interview: Head of Culture & Sport, County Council*).

Similarly, authorities viewed the CSP as a cooperative entity, one that involved the authorities and one that sought to provide strategic leadership on relevant issues. More than this, the partnership was seen as an important forum for sport and physical activity across the county, one where strategic and operational matters could be discussed, strategy devised and the interests of the county represented. In this way the partnership was generally seen as a coordinating network, one that had demonstrated an ability to bring a disparate group of actors together to develop a county strategy for physical activity. The credibility of the CSP rested on a perceived 'high-performance', and the reputation it has cultivated as a strategic, action-orientated forum since it was created in the mid-1990s. This has more recently been reinforced by the partnership's performance in securing consensus and support for

the county's physical activity vision: '[the CSP] have an energised consensus, commitment at the highest level across a range of partners to make this vision a reality' (*Interview: Head of Culture & Sport, County Council*). Furthermore, the CSP are cognisant of the tension between sport and physical activity as well as the potential conflict between national and local priorities.

... there are balancing acts that need to be achieved and conflicts to manage, we know we have slightly different priorities, so it's just a case of being clear about our common goals and how we can work together to achieve them ... ultimately, our priorities are about participation, supporting NGBs, volunteers and coaches, and providing strategic leadership. Strategic leadership is all about joining stuff up at the local level, whether that is stuff coming down from national level or whether it's working locally across things like health and physical activity (*Interview: CSP Director*).

There were contrasting perspectives on the role of CSPs. All local authorities were positive about the strategic capability of the partnership. However, there were jaundiced views about the CSP 'chasing pots of funding' (*Interview: Sport Development Manager, Borough Council*) and 'getting more involved in delivery' (*Interview: Community & Cultural Services Manager, District Council*). Thus, there is a real danger that the CSP's resource dependency will compromise their strategic credibility, with local authority agents viewing them as a sport development delivery agent or, in the words of one representative, 'the new local branch of Sport England' (*Interview: Head of Culture and Sport, County Council*). Whilst this notion of a new delivery agent may be considered favourable in some areas, it would not in this case, largely due to the historical and social context relating to the role of the CSP (and its predecessors) in the county.

The role of the local authorities in the CSP is managed directly by the CSP. Local authorities contribute to the regular development network meetings that are coordinated by the partnership, which has been in existence for close to 20 years. In addition, the partnership conducts twice yearly consultations with local authorities to ensure that each party is aware of changes and to discuss new opportunities or developments. Significantly, these discussions secure time to formally network and discuss strategic matters with senior officers. The evidence points to three interconnected challenges that are likely to affect the role of local authorities in the CSP: first, the structure of local government in the area is going through accelerated change as part of a joint-arrangements initiative whereby local authorities are sharing the administration of certain services and back-office functions in order to make efficiency savings; thus, the place of sport and physical activity, and the ability of authorities to play any significant role in the CSP in the future is unclear. Second, many 'sport-related posts are disappearing or being merged with other jobs' (*Interview: CSP Operations Manager*); as a result, there is the potential for a lack of

local authority capacity to work with the CSP. Third, local authorities are facing continued budgets cuts. The borough council, which has been considered one of the leading sport development teams in the region in recent years, has recently cut the team down to one officer and have withdrawn financial support to the CSP: 'this was not an easy decision, it was not something that we wanted to do, but the councillors have some very tough decisions to make' (*Interview: Sport Development Manager, Borough Council*). Whilst the remaining authorities continue to provide annual financial support, there are indications that others will follow suit, out of necessity rather than desire. Despite this challenge, the CSP felt that there might be different opportunities ahead, the chance to work with local authorities in a wholly different way, as a delivery agent as opposed to a strategic lead. Whilst this contradicts the evidence presented above, this view relates to a new model of delivery, one where the local authority relinquishes any delivery role in sport or physical activity and instead commissions the CSP to do it on their behalf. This, in the CSP Director's view, would serve the dual purpose of offering local authorities 'greater efficiency' whilst at the same time developing 'a more effective, joined-up system of delivery'.

5. Discussion

While the two cases exhibit distinctive socio-economic and structural profiles they provide valuable evidence regarding the operation of the network of partners involved in community sport and also illustrate the utility of Adam and Kriesi's analytical framework. In relation to Adam and Kriesi's power/interaction model both cases illustrate the fragmentation of power at the community level although interaction in case one exhibits a pattern best characterised as 'competition' while that in case two is closer to 'horizontal cooperation'. However, what the first case also illustrates is the capacity of networks to result in inertia when the partnership is perceived as a zero sum game resulting in a determination by organisations to defend policy territory. Case two generally exhibited more cooperative relationships and was more dynamic, particularly the way in which local authorities collaborated with the CSP and the CSPs ability to manage differing priorities. This is a dynamic that might be explained in part at least by the location of the partnership within one of the local authorities thus being seen perceived less as an independent and rival policy actor. It could also be in part due to the minimal community sport development capacity in the seven local authorities resulting in a greater degree of dependence on the resources that the CSP could leverage.

The contrast between the two cases also suggests the significance of the 'situational policy-specific' variables in determining the likelihood of partnership cooperation. In particular the higher level of cooperation found in case two may also be explained by the higher level of trust between partners which in turn may be the product of the relatively long history of partnership working (back to the mid 1990s) which was absent in case one, the high proportion of staff who were former local authority employees and also the fact that the CSP Director had a local authority background.

Adam and Kriesi's suggestion that policy partnerships with invited group formation are likely to produce networks with fragmented structures is only partly supported. While case one provides some support this is counter-balanced by the experience in case two. However, if Adam and Kriesi's qualification is added – that networks differ according to the resources and incentives provide for network formation – then it is easier to explain the level of cooperation found in case two and also the lack of cooperation in case one. In case two the seven local authorities were 'resource poor' and consequently saw the CSP as a source of additional resources for the area. In case one however, the resources possessed by the CSP (expertise, finance and organisational capacity for example) were perceived as a threat to policy influence in at least two of the authorities.

In important respects the cases challenge some of the more optimistic assessments of the potential for partnership working in the community sport field. The rather idealised vision of networks as self-organising and non-hierarchical (Kenis and Schneider 1991) needs to be qualified. The two cases suggest that partnerships work most effectively when there is a strong shared set of beliefs about objectives (illustrated their absence in case one and presence in case two). However, partnership effectiveness is significantly reinforced if the strong common beliefs about objectives are supported by a pattern of resource dependence which results in an acknowledged (even if not preferred) pattern of authority within the network. This reinforces the notion that both external context and internal structure are influential in developing effective collaborations (Lindsey, 2009). Thus, CSPs will always struggle to fulfil their ambition to be the strategic lead for the area unless they can negotiate common objectives (which for some will be difficult given their accountability to Sport England) and reinforce their position with access to desirable resources which might not necessarily be finance, but might be sport development expertise, organisational capacity and brokering skills. However, the divergence in objectives between CSPs (who prioritise sport participation) and local authorities (who increasingly emphasise health and community well-being) seems to be increasing making collaborative working less easy to engineer and also making the widespread acceptance by local authorities of a strategic leading role for CSPs increasingly problematic.

6. Conclusion

This paper illuminated the place of local authorities within CSPs. While it is not claimed that the two cases are representative of all local authority areas in England, they do suggest themes that are likely to be relevant to the broader issue of collaboration in sport. In particular, Adam and Kriesi's model emphasises the importance of external context in shaping network structure and how these, in turn, influence interactions between actors.

Equally important in community sport is the power structure of the policy subsystem. Despite the implications of financial resource dependency, delivery level operators (such as local authorities) have the power to pursue their own locally determined interests with or without the support of the CSP. The degree of cooperation among

actors tends to be determined by the pattern of resource dependencies (finance, knowledge and organisational capacity) and the level of trust between actors. Recognition of such factors should sensitise policymakers and practitioners to the challenge associated with achieving collaboration and especially how to change patterns of interaction from competitive to cooperative in subsystems where power is largely fragmented and where network agents traditionally compete for resources.

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¹ For a more detailed overview of the recent changes in the English sport policy landscape, including the nature of policy objectives and the delivery systems employed to implement policy see (Bloyce and Smith, 2009, 2012; Collins, 2010; Houlihan and Green, 2010; Houlihan and Lindsey, 2013; King, 2009).

² see http://www.sportengland.org/funding/ngb_investment.aspx

³ CSPs exist in all counties/sub-regions across England. Their boundaries are usually coterminous with Metropolitan (e.g. Manchester, Birmingham), County (e.g. Buckinghamshire, Suffolk) or other distinctive sub-regional boundaries (e.g. Black Country). They are funded by Sport England to support NGBs in the delivery of community sport policy. They also work with local agencies in delivering local priorities (i.e. promoting physical activity, addressing inequality in sport, coach education/development and so on). See http://www.cspnetwork.org/en/about_csp_s/?s=EHGUgPdHZDsFfbide for further information.

⁴ Figures are based on local authority self report data for budgets allocated to sport development, community recreation and sport facilities. Annual data are collated and published by the Local Government Finance -- Data Collection Analysis and Accountancy division of Department for Communities and Local Government.