Giving Athletes Veto Power: Game Theory and Policy-Making in German Sport

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"Include athletes in the sausage making!"

"It is essential to listen to athletes!"

"Athletes need to have an equal say!"

"No decision without the athletes!"
“What if the players controlled the game?”
(Donnelly 2013, 2015)
the players controlled the game?”

What if ..?: Hypothetical nature → explorative case-study design
What if the players controlled the game?"

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the players: The political representative body of German Athletes → DOSB AC
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controlled: The capacity to (co-)determine the outcomes of → need for theoretical approach
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the game: Policy-making in German elite sport → Reform of elite sport funding & Anti-Doping Law
Control:

“The capacity to (co-)determine the outcomes of policy-making games”
A Glimpse into Tsebelis’ Veto Player Theory (2002)

• Policy outcomes are the result of Veto Player constellations.

• Veto Players are “actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo.”
  (Tsebelis 2002, p. 36)
  • Institutional VPs
  • Partisan VPs

Control:
“The capacity to (co-)determine the outcomes of policy-making games”
A Glimpse into Tsebelis’ Veto Player Theory (2002)

- N-dimensional policy space
- Operationalization of dimensions
- Status Quo
- Ideal Points of the VPs
- Indifference curves of the VPs
- Unanimity core
- Winset
- Agenda Setter
- Policy change?
“What if the players controlled the game?”

→ Modelling the reforms and adding the DOSB Athletes’ Commission as VP
→ Democratization of the policy-making system
   (building on Robert A. Dahl’s 1956 concept of Polyarchy)
Reforming Elite Sport Funding
Initial Model

“Who gets what...?” → concentration

“...and how?” → transparency

Source: the author
Reforming Elite Sport Funding Model including the DOSB AC

→ No change in the new policy due to the addition of the DOSB AC

Source: the author
Policy Gains Due to the Reform of Elite Sport Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veto Player</th>
<th>Preference Attainment</th>
<th>Relative Preference Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal Ministry of the Interior</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Minister Conference</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democratic Party</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Olympic Sport Confederation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOSB Athletes’ Commission</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: the author
Reforming Anti-Doping Policy Model including the DOSB AC

→ Policy deadlock
→ Law could not have been adopted

Source: the author
Summary: What if the players controlled the game?

• Providing the athletes with actual decision-making power in sport policy may lead to changes in the policy outcome (no generalizable results due to case-study design!)
  • Confirms existing findings that the inclusion of athletes in the decision-making of Anti-Doping Policy would have significant effects (cf. e.g. Thibault et al. 2010; Houlihan 2004)
• Athletes generally want certainty and security:
  • Financial security
  • Legal certainty
What’s next? Some recommendations from the study

... for Sport Governing Bodies:

• Incorporate preferences of the athletes if the legitimate representative role in policy-making is to be maintained!
  • Athletes as the main source of legitimacy (the *Demos thesis*, cf. Weiler et al. 1995)
Reforming Elite Sport Funding Model including the DOSB AC

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... for the athletes:
• Stress the legitimizing role of the athletes and connect globally!
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... for academics:
• Advance the understanding of policy-making in sport...
• ...to improve governance and inform evidence-based policy-making!
References

Thank you!

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