

Civil society, community development, local activity in sport  
Characteristics of the sport NGOs and their relationship with the local  
government

Abstract of PhD. thesis

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## 1. Introduction

After the collapse of the communist regime in Hungary, the non-governmental (in other words, civil) sector went through a fast and impressive development. The studies and statistics on the nonprofit organisations followed the development quickly, nowadays researchers have an exact picture on the Hungarian civil sector. Looking at the numbers, it is clear, that almost one-fifth of the nonprofit organisations are related to sport or free time activities, therefore the nature of these organisations define strongly the characteristics of the whole civil society in the country. Next to this fact, sport sociologists emphasise, that the status and function of the civil organisations of sport has drastically changed after 1989, and the sport associations suffered the most from the negative aspects of the changes. Since sport clubs are declared to be the most significant role players of sport, their decline affect the whole Hungarian sport society as well.

Sport, as it is mentioned above, has a special place in the Hungarian civil sector. As for its public utility, it enjoys a lower position than other civil activities, while it forms the biggest group among them. Its genesis is also different from other parts of the civil sector: the sport associations existed before 1989 as well, so they rather changed in number, size, function and role in the society, unlike most of the other civil organisations, which grew from nothing. In the meanwhile, the numerous sport and leisure associations play an important role in forming local communities, practicing volunteering, thus developing social competences.

One of the most significant characteristics of the development and operation of the non-governmental sector is its relationship with the state and the central and local governmental organisations, especially concerning the financing and the legal background. As a heritage of the socialist system, the civil sphere in Hungary is more strongly related to the state than in the Western-European countries or in the United States.

The relationship between the governmental and the non-governmental sector in sport is complicated also because the governmental role has changed drastically recently. The central state financing of sport and the strong control has decreased with a big margin, while the role of the local governments increased a lot.

Besides that all these facts make the research on the Hungarian civil sport sphere very interesting, it is also a must to study this area in more details, since only partial research went on this issue, and the existing statistical data needs to be corrected and improved as well.

## **2. Aims**

The exact topic of the thesis is to analyse the relationship between the local governments and the local sport NGOs. An empirical survey was carried out to study the relationship among the local governments and the sport associations. Next to the survey, a comprehensive analysis was carried out to draw a detailed picture on the whole Hungarian sport civil sphere, comparing the tendencies with the tendencies in general in the Hungarian civil society. A detailed research on the local governments' sport policy make the thesis complete in this issue.

The aim of the thesis is to make a comprehensive study on the civil sport sphere, and the sport policy of local governments, and to analyse the relationship and the ways of co-operation among the local governments and the local sport associations.

The main questions of the study:

- The role of the civil sport sphere in the society today
- The size and structure of the Hungarian civil sport sphere
- The main types of the civil sport organisations,
- employment in the sport civil sector and the revenues of the sport association
- the sport policy and sport tasks of the local governments

The relationship, based on the empirical survey, was seeking for the answers of the following questions:

1. the role of sport and the civil organisations of sport in the life of a local society
2. the co-operation among the local governments and the sport associations in the sport life of a settlement
3. the role of the local governments in the activities of the sport associations
4. the participation of the sport associations in the local governments' decision-making process

## **3. Hypotheses**

1. Sport plays an important integrating role in a local community, it has a key role in forming the local identity. In general, sport associations can integrate the population more than other organisations with different activities. However, Hungarian sport associations are

not able to fulfil the sporting needs of the local community, especially because they have not yet developed their sport for all activities, and concentrate too much still on competitive sport.

2. The sport policies of the local government determine the activities of the civil sport associations. At the same time, if the local government has a strong sport organising activity within its body, it may weaken the sport associations, which may also become lazier.
3. The margin of the local governmental subsidy plays a key role in the activity of the sport associations. However, the own incomes and the sponsorship money are increasing in their life.
4. Today the participation of the civil sport organisations in the local decision-making process has become natural by now, both parties find it important. The governmental and the non-governmental sector in sport cannot do without one another, and there is also a little entrusting between them. Lobbying, personal relations and corruption is still too much in the decision-making process.

#### **4. Methods**

Following the review of the related literature, the main method of the research was a survey on local governments and sport associations. 93 local governments and 189 sport clubs were interviewed by the questionnaire, the sample is representative for the total population. There were open and closed questions as well as opinion-scale questions, which were evaluated by a cumulative scale.

Next to the survey, analysis of documents and oral interviews were also used. The documents were nonprofit statistics, sport strategies of local governments, sport regulations, local surveys, budgets, public reports on the operation of sport associations. The interviews were made with sport leaders of the local governments, sport managers of the associations, sport leaders of national sport federations and governmental bodies. In more cases round-table discussions were organised with the participation of both governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The most interesting fact around the empirical survey is that in many cases the two types of questionnaires correlate; the same questions were put for both groups (the local governments and the sport associations), and the answers were analysed in comparison.

The indicators for the evaluation of the results:

1. First topic: the role of sport and the civil organisations of sport in the life of a local society
  - Number of sport associations in a settlement, the rate of the sport clubs compared to the population
  - The rate of the sport associations among all the civil organisations in the settlement
  - The membership and registered sportsmen in the sport associations
  - Employees and volunteers of the sport associations
  - The activities, sections, sports of the sport associations
  - The level of the competitive sport, talent development in the sport associations
  - The level of the population's involvement and the social activity of the sport associations
  - The number and characteristics of the sport associations' sponsors
  - The membership of sport associations in other associations (federations, umbrella organisations)
2. Second topic: the co-operation among the local governments and the sport associations in the sport life of a settlement
  - the rate of sport association that co-operate with the local government
  - The characteristics of the co-operation
  - The number and characteristics of the privileged sport associations by the local government
  - Written agreements among the local governments and the sport associations
  - The local sport policy and written documents of the local government
  - The number and size of sport facilities run by the local governments
  - The financing policy and the grant award system of the local governments
3. Third topic: the role of the local governments in the activities of the sport associations
  - The rate of the local government's subsidy within the revenues of the sport associations
  - The form of local governmental subsidy

- The types of in kind contributions
  - The grant request and application habits of the sport associations
4. Fourth topic: the participation of the sport associations in the local governments' decision-making process
- The invitation and involvement of the sport associations to the decision-making forums
  - The participation in the sport associations' board of local governmental leaders or persons holding other social positions

In the survey two different questionnaires were used: one filled out by the local governments and one by the sport associations.

In the first case 93 local governments were involved. All of them have city rank or they are Budapest's districts. Except for five settlements, all of them have more than 10 thousand inhabitants. The sample is representative for the cities in Hungary, since the smaller settlements' sport is not really significant, can be identified very easily, and they have very few sport associations in the settlement or not at all.

The sample was grouped in four categories: districts of Budapest, cities with county rank (the 22 biggest Hungarian cities), cities having more than 24 thousand inhabitants, and smaller cities.

Most of the 189 sport associations came from the cities with county rank. In the research five types of sport associations are classified, four types (II., III., IV., and V.) are involved in the empirical survey. The five types are:

I. The first category consists of the most successful and biggest sport clubs, which have international reputation as well and they are known all over Hungary. They give the biggest rate of the Hungarian top sport, the international successes, the most known teams. They all have more teams, usually more than 5 – the biggest Hungarian sport club has 17 different teams dealing with 19 different sports. In operation these big clubs are more similar to for-profit organisations. They have employees, office, high operational costs, infrastructure – in many case they also own sport facilities or they operate the facility of a different owner. Despite of the high budget, these clubs are facing serious financial problems. Many of them are in Budapest, where there is a oversupply of sport clubs and sport teams, there are not enough sponsors, spectators, and it is difficult to make benefit on running the sport facilities.

Though people consider them as the average sport clubs, they are not more than 40-50, only 1% of all sport clubs in Hungary.

II. The second group of clubs are also quite successful in top sport, but rarely they have international results. They also have more teams, usually both top sport and lower class competitive sport. They also try to serve the needs of the population by offering sport for all activities. Usually they play a significant role in the sport life of the local community, but they have a much smaller budget than the clubs in the first group. They often get distinguished subsidy from the local government. They are usually the key locations of the talent development, but in most cases they can not keep the top sportsmen at the club, because of the lack of finances. There are about 300-350 of them in the country.

III. The third group is the group of sport clubs, which concentrate on one sport, even if they have other activities. They usually show up in lower class championships. (Actually there are more and more success sports forming a one-team sport club, which produce excellent results.) There are several clubs which as teams belonged to a big sport club from the first group, but then they split. Many of these clubs were founded recently, dealing with new, popular sports, they organise camps, courses (eg. karate, fitness), single events. They try to involve the children at school and the population by teaching the basics of the sport. Many of the sport clubs, around 50% (3000-3500) belong to this group.

IV. The typical sport for all clubs belong to the fourth group. It does not have competitive sport activity at all, usually it is possible to practice more sport as a member. They organise many sport events, excursions, camps. Usually the members come from a settlement or a local community, or they provide sport for asocial class, age group, working or other community. They are hiking, technical, mass sport, life style, local community clubs, their rate is also significant, around 35%.

V. In the fifth group there are school sport or university sport clubs, they clearly belong to an educational institution. They take part in the school sport championships and provide sport activity to the pupils and students. They don't have national or international successes, the most excellent sportsmen leave for bigger sport clubs from these clubs. There are 515 school sport clubs and 56 university sport clubs. (There are a so-called sport circle in almost every schools, but they do not have legal personality, they belong financially to the schools.) This group gives 10% of all the Hungarian sport clubs.

## **5. The main results**

### *The Hungarian civil society and sport's civil society after the collapse of the socialist system*

With the change of the political system, the structural change within the civil sphere has started. The rate of the sport civil organisations among all the civil organisations decreased step by step. Between 1989 and 2012 the rate went down from 36% to 1%.

The development of sport's civil society after 1989 was different from the development in the civil society in general. There are differences, but there are similarities as well. In sport, there are some large associations with high budget, employees, they usually stay close to the government, while there are a lot of small clubs with small budget, small membership and less activities. In sport about 15-20% of the associations are passive, which is a similar rate to the whole civil sphere.

Next to these similarities, the main difference is that unlike in the general civil sphere, in sport there was not only increase in size and in activity, but also, an even stronger tendency of decrease. In the structure of the civil sport sector there was rather a change than a clear increase.

Although in international comparison the rate of employment in the Hungarian civil sector is rather low, in the civil sector of sport it is even lower. On the other hand, voluntary work is the highest in sport.

### *The co-operation of local governments and the sport associations*

In general, the local government's subsidy to a sport association is not a big sum, but it ensures the secure operation. The local governments are not very definitive in choosing priorities in their sport policy, they rather try to support all of them, even with a small subsidy. The structure of the effective supervising of the given support is not yet developed.

Among all the civil activities, sport receives the most local governmental subsidy. On the other hand, the subvention per association is not the highest in sport, which underlines the fact, that many clubs get small subventions. The local governments prefer direct support (subvention in kind, paying the bills of a supported activity directly).

### *The role of sport and the civil organisations of sport in the local community*

Among all the civil activities, sport organisations are the most frequent in a local community, in case of clubs, their rate is especially high.

Compared to the possibilities, the sport club membership is rather low. It clearly shows, that the sport associations are not able to adopt their activities to the needs of the local population. Those, who do, are mainly new clubs, established for sport for all activities. There are not enough sport clubs, which can integrate more different sport or other (leisure, cultural) activities. The reason is probably the lack of leisure time culture, and that sport was considered to be the activity of excellent sportsmen at competitions.

*The co-operation among the local governments and the sport associations in the sport life of a settlement*

There is a strong and live co-operation among the local governments and the sport associations, sometimes they are even too close to one another. The local governments are more active in taking the initiative, but the sport clubs also look for the co-operation, especially for their own interest. Besides the slightly natural antipathy against the local government (as a governmental body), most of the sport associations recognise the complex adventure of the co-operation.

At almost all the settlements there is one or a few more significant sport association that is privileged by the local government, both professionally and financially. These clubs are usually those ones, which have more teams and sports, have long traditions, likely significant results in the competitive sport, and their main activity is the talent development. (Some of them are clubs working close, or even within sport schools.) These sport associations are usually famous outside of the settlement, so they are also good marketing tools.

In sport the control and supervision of the associations are usually work through personal relations. The local control of sport activities naturally works much better than the central governmental.

It is the interest of the leadership of the cities to support successful sport activities in the city, especially in team sports. This is a healthy local patriotism, which is a big advantage in the countryside, and rarely exists in Budapest.

*The role of the local governments in the activities of the sport associations*

For the small sport associations the local governmental subsidy is the guarantee for the continuous operation, even if it is a smaller amount. The bigger clubs would likely do without the local government's subvention, but it is also very important for them, as it is the most

secure type of revenue, and it attracts other incomes, for example sponsorship money from local enterprises.

Very few sport associations own sport facility, if so, their operation is probably not so expensive. Only few clubs – mainly the bigger ones – operate a sport facility, which is owned by the local government.

#### *The participation of the sport associations in the local governments' decision-making process*

It is natural for most of the local governments to involve sport associations into the decision-making process, mainly the more significant or privileged ones. In theory all the sport associations have the chance to express their opinion, but many of them does not use it. Those, who receive higher subvention from the local government, are more active in the public life of a local community.

## **6. Recommendations**

The activity of the sport clubs should be adapted much more to the needs of the local population. Social groups, like mothers, elderly people, and young professionals can hardly find possibilities to satisfy their sporting needs. Sport clubs could recognise it and organise such events. It would also be possible to offer sport programs for clubs, which were not founded for sport reasons (like hobby clubs). The co-operation of such clubs would also have better chances to receive grants for such activities.

The clubs should concentrate more on sports, which are easy to learn and do, such as basketball, badminton, table-tennis, bowling, sport games, excursions, water trips by small boats. The activities could be introduced in sport programs that are organised for families, schools, and children. It is also important to bring spectacular sport activities to a settlement, because it can create local identity.

The voluntarism in sport should be emphasised, because it is a big value of the area, and a good reason for receiving grants. At the same time it is important to increase the rate of employment in sport to develop management work and to involve young people in the work of sport associations – it would be beneficial for both the young professionals and for the sport sphere.

The existing sport structure (association – federation – umbrella organisation) should also be used for professional co-operation, common applications, and stronger representation of common interests.

Likely the most effective local governmental sport policy is, when the local government is not only providing subsidies, but promotes the autonomy and self-finance of the sport clubs. If there is a conception for the financial policy (e.g. if the local government calculates the subvention by the own revenues), it is not difficult to do. Next to this, the local government should also be active in providing information, training, and publications for the sport clubs.

The co-operation of the local governments and the sport associations should be strengthened by joint applications or jointly developed sport strategy.

The local governments should have a long-term, feasible sport financing strategy – it is essential for the secure operation of sport clubs, they must be able to count with the possibilities and plan the rest of their revenues.

The sport associations should also have long term plans, developed programs, because it is much easier to involve any kind of support for existing ideas. The self activity should be strengthened, as a consequence, increase the own income – it is the most important revenue in the life of a sport association, and the high own income makes an organisation strong and self-dependent.

The decision-making process of a local government can be much more effective, if the civil organisations are involved in ad hoc cases, if they are questioned in an exact matter. This can be supported by good information flow, with developed information channels. Besides that, it is essential to ensure the possibility to take part in open sessions of the local governmental committee meetings and assemblies, and to express the opinion of written proposals. It is not only important for sport professional reasons, but also for learning how democracy and civil-governmental co-operation works.