Evaluating efficiency (and effectiveness) of sport promotional campaigns in Flanders

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Introduction
It is likely that sport promotional campaigns have a positive impact on the sport participation degree of citizens. Although effects of sport promotion are hard to measure, as a variety of factors might influence the sport participation level of people, it remains important to evaluate the efforts that are made. It was indicated that one of the key issues in quality care is the determination of the customers needs on a regular basis and the development of products and services that correspond to these needs (a.o., Jammernegg & Reiner, 1997). However despite a growing awareness of quality care in sport, to date, sport promotional initiatives have rarely been evaluated in a systematic way. Evaluations are often only quantitative in nature, without attention to the customers’ satisfaction or impact on their sporting behaviour. The evaluations that do occasionally occur are often unstructured and not systematic. A number of reasons have been described for the fact that sport promotion initiatives have rarely been evaluated. Many organisations indicated that there is a lack of time to evaluate their initiatives as well as of personnel (see also Hoogerwerf & Zoutendijk, 1990; van der Poel, 1999). Furthermore, Van der Poel (1999) indicated that sport policy makers have very little interest in the actual effects of initiatives. In most cases, the number of participants is more important, whereas no attention is paid to the degree of customers’ satisfaction and the impact on their sporting behaviour. Bramham (1998) stated that there are many ways in which the results of an evaluation can be used in policy processes. For example, evaluation results are often used selectively if they confirm an existing policy or certain preferences of policy makers. Or more negative results can be overlooked as they are regarded as ‘just another report’.

Methods
An instrument was developed which was conducted by order of the sport governmental body of Flanders (Bloso), to evaluate the efficiency of sports promotional campaigns and to determine their impact on specific target groups. The starting point of the instrument was Weese’s approach model (1997), which exists of four elements, namely the goals, systems resource, process and multiple constituency approach. Considering the (dis)advantages of each technique in determining customers needs and the quality of an organisation, a written semi-structured questionnaire was used. For each group that is internally (organizers, partners, sponsors…) or externally (users) involved with the organisation, a different questionnaire was developed. These questionnaires contain items such as the goals of the organisation, co-operation with different partners (schools, clubs…), financial management, human resource management etc. The instrument was tested through a pilot-study involving 28 different sports activities promoting sport for all through several techniques by independent examiners revealing its strengths and weaknesses. In addition, a ‘ready to hand’ manual was set up in order to use the instrument correctly and was spread among the sport policy makers and sport promoters in Flanders. Additionally, 279 sport policy makers and sport promoters in Flanders of national, provincial and local sport authorities were questioned about the importance of quality care within their sport promotional activities. Next to it, they were asked to indicate whether and to what extent the current instrument was useful and meaningful.

Results and Discussion
Results indicated among other things that many organisations are more occupied with the planning, preparation and actual organisation of their activities, while they often neglect the evaluation and follow-up. Almost all adult participants that were involved in the test cases (98.0%) appreciated that the evaluation was done so that they could give feedback to the organisation. Next to supporting sport policy makers and organisers with the evaluation of their future sport promotional initiatives, this instrument also aims at making organisers more aware of the importance of evaluations. Many organisers that participated in the test cases mentioned that the instrument could provide new ideas and insights about the organisation.

At this stage the instrument has left out some target groups, such as sport instructors and non-participants. This instrument might also be adapted to evaluate other kind of sport initiatives (such as elite sport events). Another application might also be to evaluate the general functioning of organisations themselves (such as municipal sport service). Our initial belief was confirmed by the test results that many organisations are more occupied with the planning, preparation and execution of their activities, while they often neglect the evaluation and the follow-up of these activities. According to Hoogerwerf and Zoutendijk (1990), legal obligations for evaluations on a regular basis could be a possible solution to encourage organisers to actually do so. The instrument that was described in the present paper might be regarded as a support for sport policy makers and local organisers in determining the efficiency of their sport promotional initiatives and the participants’ satisfaction. As was mentioned before, it is very difficult to measure the effects of an initiative, particularly when the initiative aims at a changed behaviour (e.g., an increased sport participation level). The instrument within this study was oriented towards the developing process and
as such focuses on the efficiency in the way an initiative is organised. However, that does not mean that evaluation of effectiveness is less important.

References