Sport policy in Spain

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1. Steps and processes of Spanish Sports Policy

It is generally considered that, at a general level, the evolution of the Spanish Sports system from 1975 to present can be divided in three stages (Puig, 1993; Puig et al., 2003; Tapiador, 2008). These stages have been influenced by historical events that have, in one way or another, had an impact on the local sport systems. The first stage, from 1975 to 1983, was dominated by the transition to democracy after forty years of dictatorship under General Franco’s regime. It is normally considered that 1983 represents the end of the first stage because by then the structures for a new democratic state were properly in place. The second stage (1983-1992) features a slow reconstruction of civil society and a consolidation of the state structures. The literature on Spanish sport history tends to consider 1992 an inflexion point because of the Barcelona summer Olympics. There are, however, some discrepancies to that respect (Puig, 1993). The Olympic Games certainly had a strong influence in the proximity of Barcelona, the host city, but the development of sport structures was slower for the rest of the country, which benefitted from the impulse of the Olympics, consolidating this second stage until 1996. It is then when the creation of organizational structures and sporting infrastructures in Spain is finally completed. At the same time, voluntary and commercial sport organizations have been strengthened.
A new stage begins in 1996, which is characterized by a rationalization of sport policy management, a diversification of sport organizations and the definite incursion in the public sphere of sport as a commodity that increases its weight in the local economy.

The political transition to democracy (1975-1983) was underpinned by a predominance of democratic and solidary values (Subirats, 1999). This tendency was clearly present in all the discussions about future policies and in the first decisions of the public authorities, from the local to the regional and the national levels. A majority of those elected to positions of public responsibility in the first years of democracy had been active members of illegal centre-left and left leaning political parties of neighborhood associations during Franco’s regime. Before the end of Francoism they led social movements claiming better living conditions and the abolition of social inequality. Franco’s dictatorship did not provide equal opportunities of access to education, health, culture, social services and sport, while the civil organisations received no support from -- and were sometimes proscribed by -- the authoritarian regime. With the reinstatement of democracy, people involved in those movements were elected to public offices and there was a general belief that the state (at any level form the national to the local) should contribute to reduce social inequality.

Sport was no exception in this tendency (Puig et al., 2003). Civil society during Francoism had been unable to make sport accessible to everyone. In some Autonomous Communities (Comunidades Autónomas2), the small number of sport clubs were reserved for upper classes or for people interested in competitive sport. Those without financial resources or no interest in competitive sport were denied access to this activity. Other Comunidades Autónomas (mainly Catalonia, Navarra and the Basque Country) had a more comprehensive sports movement but with insufficient capacity to cater for the whole population, especially the lower and lower-middle classes. Thus, the existing sport clubs were mostly oriented towards satisfying the interest of their members, which did not necessarily coincide with those of the rest of the population wanting to engage in sport of physical activity.

There was a general belief that the voluntary sports sector was unable to provide access to sport to the general population. This was such an accepted argument amongst politicians and the population that the Spanish Constitution of 1975 explicitly put in the hands of the state

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2 Spain is divided politically into 17 Comunidades Autónomas, each with its own government enjoying different degrees of autonomy respect to the central government.
responsibility for access to sport. Article 43.3 of the Spanish Constitution stipulates that ‘the public authorities shall foster health education, physical education and sport. They will also promote suitable use of leisure time’. The inclusion of sport in the text of the Constitution implies -- albeit not explicitly -- the right to engage in sport (Agirreazkuenaga, 1998:50; Blanco et al., 1999:47). By associating sport to the public authorities, the Constitution also holds them responsible for ensuring that citizens may exercise this right (Agirreazkuenaga, 1998:56; Espartero, 2000:318). Thus, the Constitution reflected a well widespread that the welfare state should handle the issue of sport policy. Public authorities, the municipalities in particular, assumed the responsibility of making sport accessible to the entire population. Since the first democratic local elections in 1979, sport departments have been created in every municipality, and the budgets for sport have notably increased, especially in the medium-sized and large cities (Puig et al., 1985). The programmes developed by local councils are considered to be the main cause of the increase in indexes of sport participation since 1975 (García Ferrando 1997).

For the most part, municipal councils carried out their initiatives without counting on other social agents, such as clubs or commercial firms, whom they regarded with mistrust. It was reckoned at that time that only a form of management entirely in the hands of public authorities could guarantee social justice. By way of an example, in 1989 around 75% of municipal councillors responsible for sport in the province of Barcelona felt that clubs should perform advisory, rather than decision-making, functions in local politics (Burriel, 1990). The primacy of the public sector can be partly explained by the almost insignificant role of civil society during Franco’s regime. Forty years of dictatorship had curtailed the development of any significant structure of civil society.

The issue of citizen's participation was hotly discussed in the early stages of the transition to democracy. In this context, it has to be considered that during the last stages of Franco’s dictatorship the social movements (political parties, trade unions, neighborhood associations, sport clubs and so forth) channeled people's discontent with the lack of services and collective facilities. Their action favoured the first steps towards the democratising process at a time when the entire democratic state still had to be built. These movements advocated for a strong public sector that could assume its responsibilities.
However, as the different governmental bodies of the new State were gradually constituted, major conflicts arose between these institutions and the above-mentioned social movements (Puig, 1994:74-75). Public authorities had to define their own space which, due to historical circumstances, had been occupied by other agents.

At the local level, much pressure was exerted to guarantee citizens' participation in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the recently elected municipal councils countered this demand, and the trend was to create consultative organs that have survived to this day (Puig, 1984). The discourse that came to prevail was that citizens’ participation in decision-making represented a ‘decrease in the autonomy of the political powers in decision-making’ (Andrés, 1980). In 1985 the Ley Reguladora de las Bases del Régimen Local (Local Government At), finally regulated the decision-making and consultative structures at local level in the whole country, establishing limits to the interaction between the local councils and the voluntary associations. According to the Local Government Act, ‘the forms, means and procedures of participation may not under any circumstances undermine the decision-making faculties that correspond to the representative organs governed by law’ (Burriel, 1992:43).

Thus, during this period the municipal councils acted as providers of sport services rather than as agents who would mediate between different agents to ensure that these services would become effective (Vázquez Rabaz, 1997:13). The type of sport programmes developed by the public sector differed greatly from those of the vast majority of sport clubs and all the federations. It was called ‘popular’, ‘recreational’ and eventually ‘sport for all’. As we know, its main characteristic is that it is not intended to develop performance but to foster wellbeing and to facilitate social relations and enjoyment. While this type of sport is totally accepted today, in the mid 1970s and early 1980s in Spain it was the cause of strong -- even violent -- discussions that may be interpreted as a reflection of conflicts linked to inequality (territorial, gender, class).

At the beginning of the 1990s these trends described above began to change. The democratic and solidary discourse was progressively substituted by another one in which individual values, efficiency and market ideology started to dominate. Sport for all became fitness and the public sector faced an increasing demand for quality services, which made it imperative to reformulate the ideological principles informing institutional programmes. However, this transformation did not necessarily mean that the acquisitions from the past disappeared. On the contrary, sport for all, recreational sport, etc. became totally accepted in the political discourse, so that now very
few continue to regard sport as restricted to clubs and federations. The intervention of public authorities has been paramount to change perceptions about the role of sport. Former confrontations between the advocates of sport for all and those responsible for elite sport have disappeared and there is now an overall consensus on the fact that the public powers must attend all the dimensions of the sport phenomenon (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2000; Paris, 1996).

At present, within the framework of a general trend whereby the public sector develops its sport policies in collaboration with other organisations (voluntary or commercial), ideological positions vary from one Comunidad Autónoma to another and at different levels of intervention. The ideological differences on the role of public authorities in sport are clearly reflected in the regional sports acts of the different Comunidades Autónomas. Burriel (1994:13) classifies these acts into four groups. (1) Acts where an equally prominent role is played by the public authorities and voluntary sport entities (Aragón, Murcia and Valencia); (2) Acts that assign the prominent role to the autonomous (i.e. regional) government (Madrid); (3) acts that shrine a prominent role of the voluntary sport entities (Catalonia); and (4) acts that assign a more prominent role to the local branch of central government than to autonomous government (the Basque Country and Castilla y León).

2. The organisational framework of sport in Spain

Figure 1 represents the organization of the Spanish sport system. It can be clearly seen the preponderant role of public authorities (Puig et al., 1999; Puig et al., 2003). Public institutions constitute a coherent network whose powers are shrined by law. The local councils, according to the Constitution, are responsible for making sport accessible to the general population. The central governmet has responsibilities of a general nature (planning of sport facilities, research programmes, overall coordination and so on) and of international representation. Their regional/autonomous counterparts are responsible for implementing policies within their jurisdiction. And both regional and central governments provide funding and support for the programmes devised by the municipalities. The public sector, as a whole, occupies a position of hegemony in the Spanish sport system, as it does in many other spheres of social life. This phenomenon may be explained in terms of the social-historical context of the country, which has been late to develop a civil society able to organise itself with the focus on meeting democratic, egalitarian objectives (Burriel and Puig, 1999; Puig et al., 2003)
In the central government, sport does not have a ministerial level. The department responsible for sport is the Higher Council for Sports (Consejo Superior de Deportes, CSD in its Spanish acronym). It is a sub-ministerial division directly dependent of the Prime Minister’s office. The CSD has competencies on issues of national interest (professional sport, especially football, focuses most of its attention), the preparation of the Olympic national teams, the development of sport sciences, the construction of large sport infrastructures and the promotion of school sport in some concrete cases.

The Comunidades Autónomas (regional level) are in charge of building or funding the construction of sport facilities, promoting sport for all and supporting elite sport. They are also responsible for school sport, since they have competencies in the area of education. Regional governments overlook as well the education and training of sport technicians and the development of research in sport sciences. Similar responsibilities are also played by the so-called diputaciones provinciales, but they focus basically in supporting local councils.

Finally, the local councils have a paramount role in the sport sector. Municipalities do not have a mere implementing role. They also intervene actively in sport policy. They organize sport activities, build facilities, promote training courses, publish books and fact sheets… Sometimes the municipalities design their actions in collaboration with sport clubs, but in many others they set up their activities on their own, even competing with the local sport clubs.

Sports clubs constitute the basis of the voluntary sector. Each club may be assigned to one or several governing bodies at autonomous level (autonomous federations), which in turn are linked to the governing bodies (federations) at national/state level. At this level, there is no umbrella organisation to coordinate all these governing bodies. That makes the voluntary sector very divided and dependent on the public one (Puig et al., 2003).

The Spanish Sport system is defined and regulated by the National Sports Act (Ley del Deporte, Law 10/1990). Title III of the Sports act classifies the different types of sport organisations, with a clear priority for nacional sport organisations since regional and local
entities are regulated by specific legislation of their respective autonomous community. The National Sports Act introduced new types of associations, mainly due to the development of sport-business during the 1990s. Thus, the provisions of the Sports Act with a bigger social impact where those creating the so-called *Sociedades Anonimas Deportivas*, a special type of private limited company especially tailored to the needs of the Sports market. These were created following structures already common in other European countries and the main objective was to regulate professional football and basketball. Another remarkable introduction of the Sports Act was the recognition of the *Entes de Promoción Deportiva* at national level. These are organisations grouping sport for all associations. The purpose of these organisations is to ensure that the entire population has access to sport.

In Spain, there are currently 65 national governing bodies for sport recognised under the regulations of the Sports Act (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2008), including five organisations dealing with sport for the disabled. The National Sports Act recognises these federations as private entities working on behalf of the administration. That is to say, they are declared as being of ‘public interest’.

National sport federations are represented in the Spanish national olympic committee (*Comité Olímpico Español*, COE) and in the General Assembly of Sport, a consultative body of the CSD. The composition of the assembly is made of representatives from the regional sport federations, professional sport leagues, sport clubs, athletes, coaches and referees.

In the sphere of sport linked to the world of federations, hiking associations should be singled out by virtue of their great importance, particularly in Catalonia, Madrid and the Basque Country. Hiking is characterised by a set of cultural traits and governed by organisational principles very different from those of other sports (Puig *et al.*, 1999).

At regional level, each autonomous community has adopted its own regional Sports act, regulating the legal procedures to recognise sport organisations within the given territory. Each and every one of Spain’s 17 Autonomous Communities has enacted a sort of sport regulation. These regional sport acts recognise and organise the constitution of regional sport federations with an independent legal personality to their national counterparts. Therefore, despite governance links, regional federations are, legally, separate organisations. However, regional federations must be members of their national counterparts if they want to...
participate in national competitions. The number and characteristics of the regional federations varies from one autonomous community to the other, but there is an average of 50 to 55 sport federations per region.

Clubs and sport associations are regulated at regional level by the respective Sports act. Generally, there is a differentiation between sport associations focused in promoting competitive sport (e.g. the tradicional sport club) and those associations with a focus on other dimensions of sport, such as sport for all, school sport, university sport, sport for the disabled, etc.

Lastly, there are also voluntary organisations that foster body care through the use of naturist methods, physical activities and alternative medicines. These organisations have their own communication channels and are thoroughly dissociated from the sport movement, which they have nothing in common with.

Probably because of the strong intervention of the state in organised sport, Spain does not have any umbrella organisation for the voluntary sport sector unlike many other European countries. The internal communications among the stakeholders in the sport sector are very confusing due to a lack of structures. Thus, the hegemony of the public sector. Public authorities dictate procedures, working methods, rights and duties. The hegemony of the public sector in Spanish sport is specially clear when analysing the legal Framework, the public budget dedicated to sport and the situation of sport organisations. In short, voluntary sport organisations constitute a complex mix in which federations and clubs geared towards competition, hiking associations with their own dynamics and a set of organisations (sport for all, body care...) disassociated from the structures of federated sport coexist.

Finally, mention must be made of commercial organisations which are conditioned by the laws and regulations of the market. Since sport in Spain has become a consumer commodity the number of commercial organisations of all kinds has grown, and one wonders what effect their emergence in the sport panorama will have on the voluntary movement (Campos 2000; Dehesa 2000; Heinemann 1994). El crecimiento se da tanto entre organizaciones vinculadas a

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3 One exception to this is the UFEC (Unió de Federacions Esportives de Catalunya, Union of Catalan Sport Federations) that brings together all the sport federations in Catalonia. It is necessary to point out that Catalonia has a tradition of a strong civil society, more independent from public authorities than in other Spanish regions.
la industria como entre las empresas de servicios deportivos que actúan con eficacia y que se están convirtiendo en interlocutores privilegiados del sector público desde que a mediados de los años 90 comenzó a delegar algunas de sus responsabilidades. Overall, the sports commercial sector in Spain is working competently and with efficiency. Therefore, one might ask which effects this is going to have over the voluntary Sports sector in the near and long-term future.

3. Funding of Spanish Sports Policy

Funding of Spanish sport relies heavily on the public budget (exchequer). Partiendo de esta premisa, la propia organización de sistema deportivo reparte los recursos económicos en los niveles que correspondan: Consejo Superior de Deportes, Comunidades Autónomas y entes locales. Competitive sport, infrastructures, sport development are some of the budgetary allocations for the tax payer’s money. Unlike other European countries, the funding for sport in Spain does not depend heavily on lotto or pools Money. It is exchequer money, whose main revenue sources for budget allocations are of course current taxes and tributes.

Lotto and pools money is only channeled to sport indirectly in a small percentage. The Diputaciones Provinciales (associations of local councils) receive some money from this source for the development of sport for all at local level. Similarly, the professional football leagues receives lottery money to fund infrastructure development and safety at football grounds. The wide remito of sport makes possible public funding through alternative budgetary lines. For instance, in Catalonia the regional tourism department has sponsored a golf tournament considered to be a touristic attraction.

Further to the exchequer money, Spanish sport also presents a system of mixed funding for sport, base don the collaboration between public money and provate capital. This is specially featured in two programmes. The ADO programme (Asociación de Deporte Olímpicos, aimed at elite sport development mainly for olympic sports) is currently funded with €9.37 million for a total of 486 grants distributed to 421 elite athletes and some olympic sport development initiatives. This programme started as a Basic initiative to support elite sport development fot the Barcelona Summer Olympic Games in 1992. It was the first time in Spanish history that private capital and sponsors contributed to the development of public sports policy.

* We are grateful to Andreu Camps for the information provided to complete this section.
The second of these programmes is the ADOP (Ayuda al Deportista Objetiva Paralímpico, aimed at developing paralympic sport), with an initial budget of €7.3 million, that has now risen to €10 million thanks to the incorporation of new sponsors.

In conclusión, for 2010 the CSD will have a fixed exchequer budget that will be transferred to sport federations, Autonomous Communities and universities. The figures for 2010 are €155.57 million in total (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2009). To that figures it is necessary to add the €7.8 million from the lottery and a round €20.6 million coming from income generated directly by the CSD. Thus, the total public budget for sport in 2010 is of around €181.1 million.

4. The Clubs in the Sports System

Spain has approximately 44,509 sport clubs. Depending on the number of different sports they offer, they are affiliated to one or several of the 600 regional or territorial federations that operate in each autonomous community. People who engage in sport account for 37% of the total population between the ages of 16 and 75 (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2005) and of these 21.2% practise their chosen sport(s) within sport clubs. There are differences according to gender (28.5% of men and 15.1% of women practise their sport(s) in a club).

This data should not be misinterpreted, however. In Spain, as in the rest of Europe, there is considerable diversification in forms of sports practice. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean a trend towards the disappearance or weakening of the importance of the clubs.

It is submitted that the relationship between sport organisations and the state need be interpreted in light of the social perception of a hegemonic role of the state in public life, very typical in Spain in the aftermath of Franco’s dictatorship and in the first years of transition to democracy. (Burriel and Puig, 1999). This relates to a general perception of the need for public authorities to adopt a hegemonic position at a particular point in time (Harvey; Beamish & Defrance, 1993:58).

No se trata únicamente de que entre el Estado y el movimiento asociativo deportivo haya una dependencia económica; los clubes también dependen de otros agentes. La cuestión es más compleja y debe centrarse en el análisis del agente que tiene el papel arbitral en un momento
Most part of Spanish sport clubs were founded in the 1980s. This coincided in time with the creation of a public sector aimed at providing services for the population. Thus, sport clubs in Spain developed alongside a public sector that was creating a space for itself in social and public life and, more importantly, it needs to legitimise its existente (Burriel, 1990; Puig, 1996a, 1996b). Thus, sport clubs needed to position themselves with respect to the public Partners that were being developed at the same time. It is not just a matter of funding, but of consensuating and defining which spaces of public life should be served by each organisation. Moreover, it was also a matter of finding suitable ways of collaborating to implement sport policies and services for the population.

Having said that, the hegemonic perception of the state in the social imaginary is of course subject to change. During the late 1980s and especially after the Barcelona Olympic Games and the World Expo in Sevilla of 1992 there was a dramatic transformation in the social perception of the role of the state in public life. The levels of public debt reached excessive levels and there was the perception of a need to rationalise public spending and public intervention.

At present there is a growing perception of the necessity of a public sector that promotes initiatives, corrects inequalities and facilitates existing initiatives. The absolute interventionism of the 1980s is hardly defended. In sport there is a search for structures that enable cooperation with the voluntary sector, especially with the clubs.

5. Current Public Policy Priorities and Future Trends

In the last years sport has emerged as a political priority in Spain at all geographical levels. Politicians are aware that the sport sector generates 2.7% of Spanish GDP and that Spaniards spend an average of €600 per person per year in sport activities, 75% of it spent in actual sporting practice and 25% in tickets, press or related activities (Lucas Peña, 2009).

Recently, responsibility for sport in the central government has been moved directly to the office of the Prime Minister, which in itself is symptomatic of the political importante
attributed to sport in Spain. The main priorities of the Spanish central government’s Sports policies are summarised as follows (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2004):

- Sport as social activity.
- The practice of sport as a fundamental component of the education system.
- Sport as a vehicle to correct social desintegration.
- Sport to foster equality and social solidarity.
- Elite sport as representation of Spain in the International level
- The regulation of the legal framework for sport
- Coordination and harmonisation of competencies between the central and regional governments to foster an active sporting culture

The success of Spanish sport in recent years has situated the country among the eight leading sporting nations in the World (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2007). Aprovechándose de la situación ventajosa de nuestro deporte, el sector privado está participando en la financiación del deporte español sobre todo a través del patrocinio. Esta fuente de financiación está evolucionando a grandes pasos; ésta y otras fórmulas serán una de las tendencias a seguir en el futuro.

Una mayor financiación genera la posibilidad de nuevos programas a nivel estatal desde el Consejo Superior de Deportes (CSD). Algunos son:

- el A+D (Plan Integral para la Actividad Física y el Deporte; [http://www.csd.gob.es/csd/noticias/plan-integral](http://www.csd.gob.es/csd/noticias/plan-integral)) con cerca de 100 medidas destinado a impulsar el acceso universal a una práctica deportiva de calidad para el conjunto de la población y que se articula en torno a cuatro principios fundamentales: salud, educación, igualdad y cohesión social
- el proyecto MAID ([http://www.proyecto-maid.net](http://www.proyecto-maid.net)) una iniciativa encaminada a mejorar y armonizar las instalaciones deportivas a fin de controlar y mejorar su calidad y la de los servicios prestados en ellas;
- y también, a través de Plan E ([http://www.plane.gob.es](http://www.plane.gob.es)) impulsado por el gobierno, merced a una inversión de 907 millones, con los que se han llevado a cabo 3.710 proyectos de infraestructuras deportivas.
A nivel legislativo hay una iniciativa de gran importancia: se presentará en un futuro la nueva Ley del Deporte Profesional realizada por una Comisión en el Congreso de los Diputados y que introducirá reformas en la Ley del Deporte de 1990. En el proceso están participando todos los sectores implicados.

A nivel autonómico, aunque cada municipio o provincia de España tenga su peculiaridad específica que le haga diferente y sus gobiernos sean de diferente color político e ideológico, se puede encontrar un denominador común base definidor de sus políticas. Se trata del papel ejercido como garantía para favorecer el acceso de la población a la práctica deportiva entendida como elemento de calidad de vida.

Este principio que ya se recoge en la Constitución y que otras leyes desarrollan después (Ley de Bases del Régimen Local, Leyes autonómicas municipales y del deporte, etc.) queda lo suficientemente abierto en su desarrollo normativo como para que cada municipio pueda adaptarlo a su realidad en función de su cultura, sus prioridades o sus recursos.

A nivel de financiación del deporte en el ámbito local, en los últimos años el sector privado está jugando un papel clave, con la situación económica del sector público en plena frenada y reconversión (hay que reducir el gasto para contener y reducir el déficit público). Se están replanteando las formas de gestión empleadas en los momentos de crecimiento y las políticas de precios de los servicios.

En conjunto, parece superado el concepto de presentar modelos ideales de actuación. Ha llegado el momento de considerar que no hay recetas mágicas ni modelos de gestión universales. El objetivo es garantizar la rentabilidad social, deportiva y también la económica del sistema deportivo.

**Bibliografía**


Figure 1. The Organization of sport in Spain

Source: adapted from Puig et al., 2003