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The political governance of international sport organisations in Switzerland

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Introduction

An emerging body of literature investigates the relations between public authorities and sport organisations under a political governance or “governance as steering” approach (see, for example, Garcia, 2011 or Gowthorp, Toohey, and Skinner, 2016). It puts emphasis on policy decisions and actions (e.g. moral pressure, financial incentives, dialogue) that seek to steer (rather than control) the behaviour and operations of sport organisations in order to achieve a range of socially desirable outcomes. This contribution aims to analyse the relations between the Swiss public authorities and international sport organisations (ISOs).

Methods

Building on literature on sport governance and policy, this contribution proposes a model that illustrates the decisions made and actions taken in the country to host ISOs on its territory. It offers a qualitative analysis of policy documents (e.g., laws, regulations, decisions) published by public authorities.

Results

Based on the subsidiarity principle, the role of the three political levels of Swiss federalism is to steer the sport system (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2011; Bayle 2017). Public authorities create the best conditions for the Swiss sport system to perform. ISOs are embedded in this system. Like national sport governing bodies, they are historically incorporated as associations and benefit from a flexible legal framework and attractive tax regime. From the mid-1980s and building on existing attractive geographical, economic and political conditions, the country has put in place a number of targeted actions that seek to steer the decision of ISOs to incorporate or remain in Switzerland with the belief that their presence would have a sporting (sport participation) and/or a non-sporting impact such as economic development or nation branding.

Discussion

Switzerland managed to attract and maintain a constellation of ISOs on its territory. It is explained in part by independent factors and the implementation of a balanced and targeted “policy mix” at horizontal and vertical levels. The quality of the model is discussed, namely in the light of the relations between public authorities and national sport governing bodies.

References

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