Intergovernmental Collaboration Among Fragmented Bureaucracies: Policy Networks in Sport-based Industry Convergence in China

Yanni Xu, Beijing Sport University
Shengxin Li, Beijing Sport University
Jingyi Cao, Beijing Sport University

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Research Question: Since 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, China has put great efforts on sport industry development, and promoting sport-based industry convergence is an important policy approach. However, inherited from the planned economy, bureaucracies in China typically are belong to different portfolios and headed by different government chiefs within the administrative machinery, this kind of fragmented authoritarianism makes policy coordination even more difficult. This paper illustrates how the fragmented bureaucracies in China collaborate with each other to promote sport development through industry convergence.

Theoretical background: This paper mainly refers to the intergovernmental relations (IGR) theory, which is discussed a lot in the public administration and political science. As in the sport development, inter-organizational relations are much more discussed than the IGR, although still at the beginning, mainly about the interactions and collaborations among the stakeholders (government, non-profit, and commercial) analyzes inter-organizational interdependencies management in sport, and the role of government hasn't been fully discussed. Therefore, this paper applies the IGR theory to address the intergovernmental collaboration among fragmented bureaucracies in sport governance.

Methodology and data: Co-authorship analysis of the joint policies is applied. Concerning the industry convergence between sport and tourism, culture, healthcare and the pension industry, 69 policies, with the policy-makers as the China’s national ministries such as General Administration of Sport (GAS), the National Administration of Tourism(GAT), the Ministry of Education(ME), the Ministry of Culture(MC), the Ministry of Finance(MF), the National Development and Reform Commission(NDRC), and etc., issued during 2001-2018, are collected from their official websites. A comprehensive analysis of the four policy fields and their policy network structures are studied.

Findings and discussion: Collaboration among the fragmented ministries in China has rapidly increased, showing in the policy networks from 2001 to 2018. (1) Networks vary among four policy arenas. The collaboration among ministries in promoting the convergence between sport and tourism are the best with the deepest involvement of administrative ministries such as GAS and GAT and the supportive ministries such as MF and NDRC, and that in pension industry is the worst, showing by the network density. (2) Imposed authority and territorial contests have different effect in the dynamics of the network. The extent to which other ministries will collaborate with GAS, the national sport administration, are positively related with the attentions from the central committee of Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council, showing an authority-oriented collaboration more than an industry-development-oriented. Moreover, where there is an inclusive interest among the ministries, there will be a more intensified collaboration.

Contribution and implication: This paper may contribute to existing research on inter-organizational relations in sport by analyzing the intergovernmental relations among the fragmented ministries inside the central government in China, opening the “black box” of policy-making in sport industry in a transitional country under the state-funded and state-organized sport administration system, illuminating that the country’s party-state system is not a monolithic top-down machine, despite it authoritarian nature. Managerial suggestions will also be provided to better promote the sport industry development and governance.