

Original Research

Formalizing sports-based interventions in cross-sectoral cooperation: Governing and infrastructuring practice, program, and preconditions

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ABSTRACT

Sports-based interventions are utilized today in many countries in cross-sectoral cooperation, for instance, as a means of social inclusion. However, not enough is known about the conditions of development or the formalization of operations. Accordingly, in this article, we focus on two instances of midnight football carried out in two suburban areas in Sweden in order to explore the mechanisms and conditions for interventions to achieve increased formalization and sustained operation. Through an analysis of interviews and network visualizations, we examine how collaborating agencies conceive of and describe their role in the assemblages of agencies surrounding and enabling the interventions. By looking closely at the forms of collaboration and communication in these networks, we find that the interventions have developed locally and not according to a central or strategic design. We identify three levels of design within the interventions, where communication, cooperation, and formalization can be governed: *practice*, *program*, and *preconditions*. Through a detailed analysis of these levels of intervention, we present crucial mechanisms for increased formalization and sustained operation and how these mechanisms differ between sites. In conclusion, on the basis of our analysis, we discuss refined approaches to understanding the temporality and interchangeability in the formation of cooperation and thus offer a refined conceptualization of the formalization of operations.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the processes of development of two interconnected sports-based interventions and their

conditions of formalization. The analysis illustrates that interventions performed in cross-sectoral cooperation between a variety of actors are experienced as complex and difficult to manage. Moreover, the analysis suggests how designing, infrastructuring, and governing can be carried out on multiple levels for such complex interventions. Sports-based interventions are utilized in many countries today as ways of achieving various social-policy objectives (Houlihan et al., 2009), such as social inclusion (e.g. Agergaard, 2012; Haudenhuyse, 2017) or even peace (e.g. Svensson et al., 2016) or other forms of international aid (Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010; Kay, 2012). They are often deployed in cross-sectoral collaborations between public, private, and civil society or community actors (e.g. Agergaard, 2012; Rosso & McGrath, 2017). Such situations and developments have also been noted in Sweden, where civil-society organizations, such as sports associations, have increasingly been implementers of social-policy initiatives (Norberg, 2011; Stenling, 2015). Consequently, in recent years, a variety of sports-based interventions have been set up in cooperation between sports associations and public (municipal) agencies, sponsored and supported financially and organizationally by market-based actors and charitable supporters (Ekholm & Dahlstedt, 2018). This development directs attention toward the infrastructuring of the technologies of governing that is being promoted in these networks and cross-sectoral forms of cooperation. Looking at the concerns around the development and management of innovative sports-based interventions noted in the scientific literature about organizing sport for development interventions, questions of formalization, cooperation, and communication seem to be particularly prominent in contemporary challenges. However, little is known about the developmental processes through which cooperation

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becomes formalized between the variety of stakeholders, such as municipalities and sports associations, as well as other community actors. Therefore, we want to understand more about the conditions and mechanisms that are needed to facilitate and enable interventions in order to achieve increased formalization and sustainability in operations.

In this article, we report on an investigation into and analysis of two sports-based interventions, West City and East City midnight football (MF), enacted in two mid-sized cities (with populations ranging between 100,000 and 200,000) in Sweden. These interventions are part of the same overarching organization orchestrated by a national foundation that performs activities locally in up to 20 different municipalities in Sweden. All activities are based on different cross-sectoral forms of cooperation. The interventions are carried out by local sports clubs in collaboration with the foundation and funded by sponsors and municipal agencies. We explore the relations between representatives of the sports clubs (i.e., the local management) and the foundation, municipalities, and sponsors. The two interventions investigated are examples of developing activities that are currently established in two neighboring cities of similar size. These interventions constitute sites for examining the formation of the intervention structure that has been developed in these distinct local operations. We use them to examine and visualize how operations can be formalized and locally diffused, not through formal comparative analyses, but by analyzing both interventions separately in order to gain perspectives and diverse insights. This approach constitutes a theoretically framed exploratory analysis intended to discover the variety of elements of intervention development and management at the two sites. The interventions are examples of a rapidly growing form of practice of utilizing sport to achieve social objectives, as well as an example of the cross-sector cooperation that is developing in contemporary social policy. MF is a well-established concept and has gained widespread media attention for the presumed social benefits it provides. It has been nominated for and won several prizes and awards.

In this article, we spotlight the development processes—the conditions and mechanisms—facilitating and enabling the interventions. The aim of the article is to explore the crucial mechanisms, necessary conditions, and opportunities for interventions to achieve increased formalization and sustained operation. We also seek to better understand how they may be diffused. Hence, the following research questions guide the analysis: How are networks of collaboration (re-)assembled, and what role do these networks play in the development and increased formalization of interventions? How are collaboration,

cooperation, and communication understood from the various multiagency perspectives of partnering agencies? What crucial mechanisms and conditions can be mapped out as necessary for the development and formalization of interventions?

Methodologically, we examine how the range of collaborating actors and agencies conceive of and describe their role in the networks surrounding and enabling the interventions. We focus on communication and cooperation between agencies, the conditions for formalization of the interventions, and possibilities for interventions to multiply. From this qualitative perspective, we direct attention to how the various actors interpret and articulate their roles and experiences in relation to how the interventions develop. It is via this interpretivist and constructionist epistemology that we view networks and descriptions of development and formalization. Considering this qualitative ambition to understand how the variety of actors conceive of and articulate the networks and how they facilitate dimensions of communication, development, and formalization of the interventions, the research questions can be approached systematically. The questions raised are underpinned by a variety of concepts that will be mapped out in the following sections.

By looking analytically at the forms of collaboration and communication in the networks surrounding the intervention management of West City and East City MF, we identify three levels of intervention design and infrastructuring of the interventions, whereby communication, cooperation, and formalization can be addressed and governed in order to enable sustained operation. We call these levels: *practice*, *program*, and *preconditions*. At each of these levels of organization, particular efforts can be made to develop the interventions. We examine these in detail, reflect on the variety of mechanisms and conditions of formalization identified, and discuss the general possibilities for governing and infrastructuring.

As will be described later, previous research and literature on sport for development interventions has focused on the forms of organization that are deployed in collaborations, as well as the conditions of formalization and sustainability. In this article, we contribute to this body of knowledge by examining in detail and visualizing how networks are (re-)assembled, experienced, and employed for intervention purposes. Such knowledge is significant and relevant to both the academic discourse on formalization and the sustainability of sports-based interventions (Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2016). This discourse in general, as well as certain specific findings of the analysis presented here, provides

concrete guidance for practitioners in the field who are developing interventions in practice. Such knowledge is important and much needed, not least for the leverage of sports-based interventions to contribute to socially sustainable development (Svensson & Loat, 2019).

The governing and infrastructuring of social interventions

The theoretical approach and analytical lens that we have used directs attention to communication, cooperation, and the formalization of social interventions. We see this development as processes of infrastructuring (Star & Ruhleder, 1996) technologies of governing (Dean, 2010), with the aim of promoting social inclusion and social change. Here, governing refers to the conduct of conduct (Dean, 2010). Generally, this refers to the regulation of the actions and behavior of young people, along with the technologies employed for this purpose (Dean, 2010). More precisely, this directs our attention to the organizational infrastructuring within which such formation is conducted (Dean, 2010). One example of such technologies is innovative sports-based interventions targeting urban youth in the name of social inclusion.

We want to highlight two points about the concept of governing: a focus on *cross-sectoral governing* and *governing rationality*. First, nonstate actors have played a crucial role in governing through hybrid or collaborative networks (Villadsen, 2008), something that is understood from a variety of perspectives (Hodge & Greve, 2007), highlighting operational differences between distinct sectors and actors (Hefetz & Warner, 2012), not least in welfare provision. Villadsen (2008), though, has argued that, traditionally, institutional and governance perspectives have overemphasized sector divides and differences between actors in cooperating networks—an approach to which we pay attention, focusing rather on how welfare interventions are developed in cross-sectoral assemblages (Villadsen 2008). Second, collaborations between actors and agencies are formed in accordance with a certain rationality (Rose, 1999). Interventions often evolve ad hoc, not necessarily as a result of strategic policy design. This does not mean that programs are the result of random or irrational actions—they are imbued with a certain rationality of governing—but rather, that the designs are not necessarily controlled by a central strategic body (Rose, 1999). Accordingly, “governing” is used as both a description and a context to frame the analytical lens presented, which focuses on very concrete forms of developing innovative interventions.

There has been a surge of initiatives situated within the overlap between policy development, social innovation, and

participatory design (McGann et al., 2018; Björgvinsson et al., 2010). In particular, in the literature on sport for development there have been explicit calls for research about design thinking with respect to the organization of sports-based interventions in order to facilitate innovation and sustainable management (Schulenkorf, 2017). Joachim et al. (2019) have outlined a set of indicators through which the design of an intervention can be assessed. Design in these settings refers to the knowledge-intensive practice of articulating alternative futures and engaging the actors and stakeholders who make those futures possible using experience-based and expressive methods and techniques. When utilized in the intersection between policy development and social innovation, innovations employ infrastructuring in a variety of ways (Manzini, 2015; Star & Ruhleder, 1996). In participatory social innovation, the term “infrastructuring” is used to describe the processes used to develop infrastructures, such as relations, forms of operation, technologies, etc., that go beyond a specific project to support continued development and sustained operations (Hillgren et al., 2011). Central to infrastructuring is an ongoing alignment, or calibration, within and between contexts (Star & Ruhleder, 1996). In this sense, infrastructuring is also an approach to understanding the governing interventions that promote social inclusion. Jégou and Manzini (2008) highlight the relational qualities and trust between actors as enablers, particularly in relation to the communication and collaborative aspects of assemblages. Infrastructuring also relies on an openness to emergence and thus is an organic approach to collaboration, structures of facilitation, and engagement (Björgvinsson et al., 2010). With respect to the infrastructuring and development of social innovations, processes of formalization are central (Herrera, 2016; Mirvis et al., 2016). Herrera (2016) refers to formalization as the organizational processes of forming policies, institutions, and organizations to conduct activities and make innovations sustainable.

On this basis, we acknowledge the contingency of sector divisions and shed light on how interventions may transcend such boundaries. We consider the importance of participatory design, network relations, and infrastructuring practices for establishing and formalizing governing interventions. We see the design of interventions—their development—as a matter of rationality, meaning that this development is not arbitrary, however, neither is it necessarily strategic or controlled.

Sport for development research

Sports-based interventions often involve civil society and private agencies in welfare provision (Coalter, 2017;

Collins & Haudenhuyse, 2015; Lindsey et al., 2019) and it has been suggested that such cross-sectoral forms of organization may contribute to increased sporting participation among young people in socioeconomically disadvantaged positions (Dobbels et al., 2016). However, certain criticisms have been raised concerning the generally poor development of program theory, which makes it difficult to assess how operations function or what can be expected from them (e.g., Coalter, 2010, 2013; Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2016). Research has focused on such cooperation with respect to how it is organized and the conditions for sustained operation. There are great variations in how cooperative relations are formed, and this is important to note in order to explore the development or implementation of interventions (Lindsey et al., 2019). For instance, the configurations of relationships could be more or less state-centered, complementary, or coproductive development (Lindsey et al., 2019), and the influence of external stakeholders can vary greatly (Svensson & Hambrick, 2019; Svensson et al., 2019).

Here, the variety of organizational capacities facilitating the development of intervention programs is repeatedly stressed, directing attention to the *formalization* of interventions, *cooperation* between the various agencies involved, and the *communication* of goals and objectives. Notably, many studies have approached the organizational forms of cooperation and collaboration in terms of network relations (Cousens et al., 2012; Dobbels et al., 2016; Hambrick et al., 2019; MacLean et al., 2011; Lusher et al., 2010; Meisel et al., 2014; Wäsche et al., 2017). Mainly, the questions in focus address the degree to which networks are loosely connected (MacLean et al., 2011), fragmented (Jones et al., 2017b) or structured and coordinated (Dobbels et al., 2016). Establishing and infrastructuring sustainable networks or network relations seems to be crucial for the development and management of interventions (Dobbels et al., 2016; Svensson & Seifried, 2017; Wäsche et al., 2017), or using existing channels for the provision of interventions (Burnett, 2009).

A range of challenges in the development of interventions has been noted in scientific discourse. Here, a lack of calibration of goals and objectives between collaborating actors is highlighted (MacIntosh et al., 2016; Welty Peachey et al., 2018). Importantly, interventions need to establish interorganizational communication between collaborating actors for the calibration of goals and objectives (Burnett, 2009; MacIntosh et al., 2016) and to establish common frames of reference (Sherry & Schulenkorf, 2016), particularly when it comes to segregated communities (Schulenkorf & Sugden, 2011). Understanding and articulating the connections between organizational goals

and the activities carried out within the programs has been noted as a vital feature of strategic management and instrumental for more and more formalized organizations and sustained practices (Petkovic et al., 2016). In addition, the various stakeholders and engaged actors need to establish long-term plans of action in order to foresee future operations, manage varied circumstances, and continue interventions in new forms of operation (MacIntosh et al., 2016).

Management competencies, such as the administration of finances, planning development, and governing external relations (Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Svensson et al., 2018), setting up and maintaining support networks (Welty Peachey et al., 2018), innovation capacities (Svensson et al., 2019) and facilitative processes for decision making (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012) as well as strategic awareness of risks and opportunities (Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019) are very important. Notably, such competencies may be associated with especially capable individuals (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012). Still, the conditions for developing, accessing, or mobilizing such competencies vary between different contexts, and are thus difficult to structure according to an all-encompassing or universal design (Burnett, 2009; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Here, the importance of the competencies needed to navigate the complex landscape of cross-sectoral and hybrid organization, as well as tensions between goals and expectations among leaders and managers becomes particularly evident (Svensson & Seifried, 2017).

Jones et al. (2017a), in particular, have highlighted the crucial importance of relationships and network capacity for establishing cross-sector cooperation, involving nonprofit organizations, private and market-based actors, and public agencies. Such capacities refer to the ability to establish and sustain networks with funding agencies, corporations, partners, and governmental bodies (Dobbels et al., 2016; Wäsche et al., 2017). Collaboration and integration within public-sector and social-policy agencies are key factors for enabling sustained operation and goal attainment (Lindsey & Banda, 2011). Welty Peachey et al. (2018) note that the strategies employed to promote sustainability include a focus on starting up small interventions that can be diversified and diffused. The highlighted conditions are underpinned by notions that actors from different sectors may complement each other with respect to knowledge, strategies, and social connections; however, programs and practices often fall short of such complementary potential (Jones et al., 2017a). Moreover, the design of interventions displays certain power relations that need to be acknowledged, not least in order to design operations on participants' own conditions (Straume & Steen-Johnsen,

2012).

All these features and elements of management refer principally to questions of formalization, cooperation, and communication, both within organizational networks and between the variety of agencies involved. For the purposes of analysis, it is these concerns of management that are scrutinized in relation to the particular context of the MF interventions outlined in this article. The themes noted in previous research into the field of sport for development and sports-based interventions in a broader sense have guided the explorations in this article, both in terms of elaborating on research questions and focusing attention, as well as what is made visible in the empirical scrutiny of perceived networks and articulated statements.

METHODS

Site context: Midnight football

Midnight football is a sports-based social intervention coordinated by a national corporate social responsibility (CSR)-funded foundation, which is a nonprofit, politically disengaged body working for the common good, utilizing sports practices to counter social exclusion. The interventions are performed and managed by local organizations. The foundation is supported by a wide network of financial sponsors and has 10 permanent employees working with several social programs. In public documents presented on the website of the foundation, the objectives of the intervention are described in terms of “promoting social inclusion . . . through sport to prevent social exclusion [and] to contribute to crime reduction” (Source omitted to protect confidentiality). Midnight football consists of organized, yet spontaneous, indoor, five-a-side football (soccer) games on Saturday nights, running from 8:00 p.m. to midnight, open primarily to young people aged between 12 and 25 years. The interventions reach out to local youth in residential areas that are characterized by socioeconomic marginalization and exclusion as well as ethnocultural segregation. In practice, this means that participants are almost exclusively boys and young men (cf. Ekholm et al., 2019) with a first- or second-generation migrant background (cf. Ekholm & Dahlstedt 2019).

Midnight football is orchestrated by the foundation’s management with the aim that it will be deployed in specific areas by local managers and organizers. The two interventions selected for analysis here constitute examples of midnight football deployed in different places by different managers and employing different forms of cooperation. By examining these two interventions, we are able to explore patterns of how the interventions are

developed, diffused, and formalized.

In West City, the intervention is conducted by a local sports club in collaboration with the foundation. Activities are funded primarily by sponsors and supported by municipal agencies through subsidies. In East City, the intervention is conducted by two local sports clubs. The activities are funded by the municipality and supported by sponsors.

Empirical material

We interviewed individuals who are part of the networks surrounding the two interventions. After mapping out how these networks were perceived by local management at the respective sites, we selected the specific respondents because they were seen as the most engaged, involved, or informed about the interventions. Semistructured interviews were conducted with a total of 25 individuals. This form of interview was chosen because it allows interviewees to narrate their own views and understandings of the topic, with few restrictions imposed by the interviewer. Interviews were conducted in person at the places where respondents work or are active in their role with respect to the intervention, primarily by Ekholm and on a few occasions by coworkers from the project group, during late 2017 and 2018. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim either by Ekholm or by a professional transcriber. Interview guides were structured around descriptions of (a) network relations, (b) the rationale and objectives of MF, (c) respondents’ own role and function, and (d) forms of communication and cooperation. Consequently, the material contains descriptions of the interventions’ organization, the activities being organized, and the forms of cooperation from the perspectives of the various cooperating agencies.

A card-based facilitation tool was used in the interviews to enable each informant to share their conceptualization and experience of the assemblage of people and actors, through a visual/material technique (Sutton, 2011; Banks, 2001; Čaić et al., 2019). The cards carry pictograms of people with space to write a name, a role, or an organization. The respondents were asked to name actors and relationships that make MF work, and these were then documented on the cards and in a network depicting the relationships among these actors. The resulting assemblages consist of images of the collaborating actors and agencies (e.g., the managers, the foundation, municipal agencies, and sponsors) as well as the agencies involved or approached through the intervention (e.g., coaches, youths, distant community actors, police, etc.). The assemblages are mapped out to illustrate the networks and relations as they are perceived by the specific respondent. In this sense, the

network assemblages are representations of one respondent's views on the current network in operation and how that respondent acts (Kirsh, 2010; Malafouris, 2013) to make MF possible. The facilitation tool augmented the interviews (Sutton, 2011) and complemented the explicit descriptions, giving opportunities to express both latent and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967), working as documentation of what has been talked about, as well as providing something concrete to talk about.

Initially, during the process of analysis, we distinguished four kinds of actors and agencies that are instrumental in the management and operation of the interventions. These categories of actors were identified after an initial thematic analysis of the interviews. Notably, these categories were outlined in the respondents' statements.

Local management provides the local organization, performs the interventions, and manages the networks. At both sites, we interviewed the intervention management and sports coaches leading the activities. In the analysis presented below, we draw primarily on the networks described and interviews with the two senior managers at the respective sites (West City manager and East City manager). They are both men aged 30 to 35 and actively engaged in the sports movement and local associations.

The *foundation* provides a general concept of the intervention as well as providing support for the local management. Here, we interviewed the foundation's three central officials. In the analysis, we draw primarily on the networks described by the foundation's manager, a social entrepreneur actively engaged in the local intervention activities.

Municipal agencies provide subsidies and grants as well as general support in terms of facilities, etc. We interviewed both policymakers and civil servants who have insights into cooperation and are responsible for it in both municipal administrations. We illustrate the analysis primarily based on descriptions provided in West City by the chairperson of the Board of Culture and Leisure Affairs and in East City by the chief civil servant responsible for sports issues in the administration of cultural and leisure affairs.

Financial sponsors provide financial support but also support the management with organizational capacities and extended networks. Here, we interviewed a variety of actors. In order to present the analysis and key findings, we selected one local sponsor at each site, who is important for facilitating the interventions. For West City MF, we draw on the materials provided by one key sponsor, the factory owner, to highlight and illustrate the analysis of supportive

sponsors, and for East City MF, we use materials from a local gym owner who supports the operations. The financial sponsors are not actively engaged in the sports activities at the respective sites, however, they are involved in financial and organizational support.

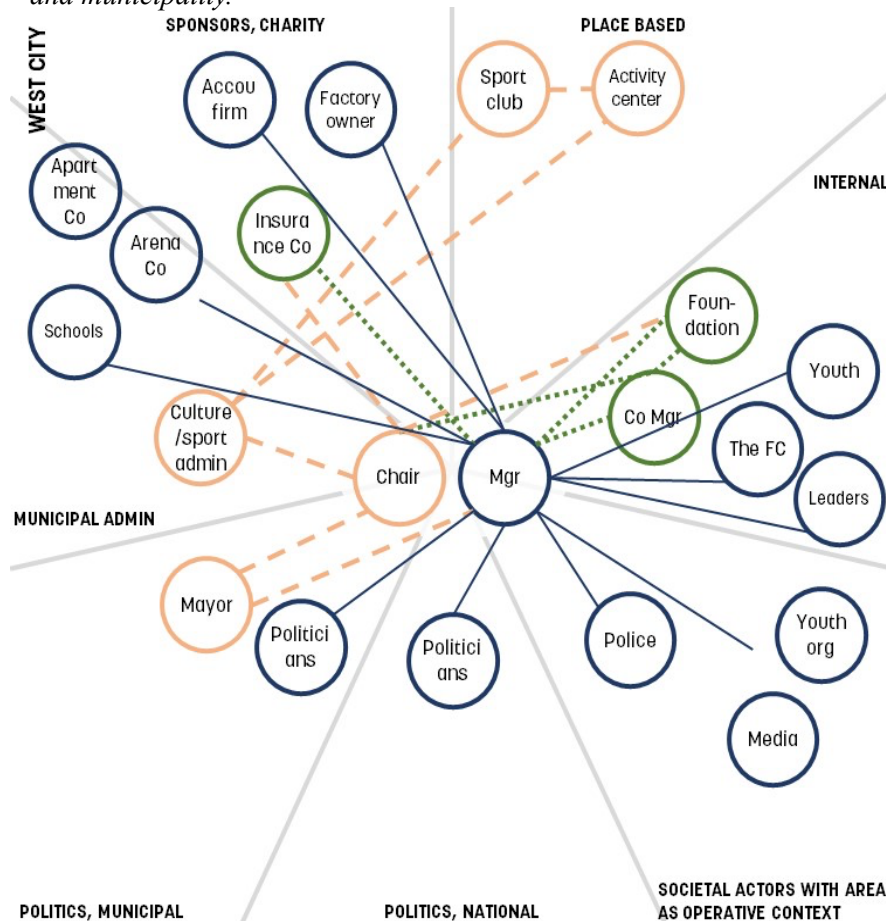
Analytical procedure

The analysis presented in this article is based on the totality of interviews and assembled network charts, however, in order to visualize and illustrate the forms of communication, relations formed, and cooperation experienced, we singled out certain individuals from the various actors and agencies in order to highlight the main findings and rationale. Representatives of actors and agencies chosen for visualizing the analysis were selected on the basis of their engagement in the operations. Indications of their engagement were assessed qualitatively on the basis of the interviews analyzed. Specifically, when it came to visualizations of actor networks, when there was more than one possible choice, we chose actors for whom a relationship was defined by local management and where this actor also defined a reciprocal relationship with local management. Moreover, this relationship had to be articulated as significant in relation to establishing the initiative. Specifically, for sponsors, we analyzed both a locally engaged sponsor with an interest in the city and a sponsor with a business interest in the initiative.

Network analysis is not new in sports research (e.g., Wäsche et al., 2017; Lusher et al., 2010). Previous research has focused on the network analysis of themes such as organization, management, and performance, mainly looking at sports clubs and formalized sports organizations. In general, in social network analysis, networks are construed as analytical aggregates of all input from all respondents, either in a sociocentric fashion, focusing on social structures, or an egocentric fashion, focusing on individual actors (Banks, 2001). Our focus is on individuals' conceptions of how the social intervention MF is made possible and the actors and relationships that each individual asserts to be part of that. Such a focus is in line with the studies that are called for in Wäsche et al. (2017) and specifically with respect to the interpretative and ethnographically inspired approaches stressed by Burnett (2015).

We have analyzed statements from the interviews and the network visualizations intertwined together, similarly to the qualitative analysis in Čaić et al. (2019). Initially, we analyzed network maps in pairs, acknowledging that each respondent views the other actors in the network in different ways and that each actor has a limited perspective on

Figure 1. West City midnight football network map between manager and municipality.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

whatever system they are part of. As they externalize this structure, they are communicating with themselves and articulating their mental model of the network that makes MF possible (Kirsh, 2010; Norman, 1988). Their conceptions will vary with respect to which actors are part of their network, which actors are connected to each other, and what roles each actor plays.

From a sociocentric point of view, taken together, the participants define the boundaries of the whole network. Our analysis begins with each individual's network and combines it with one other related actor's network, aggregating only those two actors' assemblages and thus creating duo-centric networks. Because we are only aggregating two respondents' perspectives in our analysis, we have not used standard network analytical concepts. The resulting network positions two actors at the center of the map and structures the other actors from those two maps into seven analytical categories around them. These categories were developed based on how the interviewees described the other actors during the interviews and how they were positioned in the original network maps.

Then, the descriptions of the networks as articulated in the

interviews were examined. Based on the conceptual understandings of themes such as communication, cooperation, formalization, and diffusion, as well as the theoretical framework of governmental rationality and cross-sectoral assemblages, the interview material was analyzed. Here, conceptual themes derived from previous research were integrated into the analytical frames of interpretation after initial and inductive scrutiny and coding processes, while notions of governmental rationality and constructivist epistemology guided the outline of aims and research questions generally. The analyses of perceived networks and articulated descriptions were conveyed by the two researchers in joint and common sessions of exploration in a series of meetings over 12 months. No specific software was used for analysis or coding. The analysis was marked by exploratory ambitions and empirical detail and proximity, guided by the aims and research questions outlined above. By means of the detailed and accurate reporting of the methods deployed and interpretative strategies used in the analysis, together with illustrative excerpts and insights into the empirical material analyzed, the credibility of the analysis and findings can be supported (Tracy, 2010).

Findings

The presentation of the results and analysis are structured into two subsections, highlighting how the collaborating networks were formed and understood with respect to each local site of intervention. Thereafter, based on this analysis, the conditions of formalization and diffusion are discussed. Based on six visualizations, this section goes into analytical detail about how the networks of cooperating actors and agencies are being formed. Here, we take the perspectives and descriptions of the West City and East City MF managers as our point of departure and analyze how relations to the municipality, the foundation, and the sponsors and supporters are experienced and described.

Cooperation, communication, and formalization: The networks in West City

From the perspective of the manager, the municipality is viewed as an important actor for several reasons. The municipality, formally governed by social policy that stresses social-inclusion objectives, provides the gymnasium where the activities take place. The manager views the municipality as a potential financial contributor to the MF intervention. This manager believes that the municipality should make larger financial contributions given the benefits of the program for local social inclusion. When visualizing the actor network and talking about the municipal government and administration, the manager refers to them as one integrated unit, with little emphasis on potential differences between policymakers (locally elected representatives) and civil servants (in various administrations) (see Figure 1). Instead, he describes the relationships with municipal functions in terms of personal relations. Accordingly, the manager enjoys good relations with a few policymakers and civil servants in their capacities as individuals. Moreover, he also enjoys good social relations with national policymakers. These relationships are described as being used to put pressure on the policymakers and civil servants responsible for the municipality's part in the intervention:

We chased them a lot . . . the Mayor, for instance. . . . What's his name . . . [opposition councilor, right-wing party]. I talked to him. [Opposition councilor, liberal-center party], we had a great relationship. . . . We need to talk to the political opposition to make things happen with the political majority. And we need to talk with the political majority to make things happen. . . . A good dialogue with policymakers doesn't hurt . . . having a good relationship with them. We had [the Minister for Home Affairs, social-democratic party] here. Invited him . . . or he even invited himself to our midnight football. . . . And the Crown Princess and Prince even contributed . . . gave us some

money and said they wanted to come. . . . But, like . . . everyone thinks it's a good thing. Until it comes down to making decisions. Then it becomes difficult. (West City MF manager)

From the perspective of the municipal agencies (the chair of the Board of Culture and Leisure and civil servants from associated administrations), four interrelated obstacles to developing successful cooperation are described. Initially, the intervention was organized through an economic association that requested funding based on the claimed social benefits. However, economic associations face legal restrictions on the kinds of support they can receive from the municipality, e.g., subsidies for renting the gymnasium are not available. Therefore, the intervention manager set up a new voluntary sports organization to make the intervention eligible for support. Here, operational differences based on the sector belonging attributed to the intervention's management impinged on the organization's opportunities. Support could not be granted on the basis of the claimed social benefits, since the Board of Culture and Leisure formally regarded the association as a sports provider rather than a provider of social support. Second, there was a lack of calibration of objectives between the intervention and the municipal representatives, who had different notions and made different assessments of inclusion. Third, municipal representatives promoted forms of cooperation with the municipal youth and culture centers that could provide leadership education and organizational support as well as insight and control (indirect links in Figure 1). Fourth, there are recurring descriptions of how the intervention manager engages in dialogue with a variety of policymakers (primarily high-level municipal councilors and national policymakers) to argue for financial support on the basis of the expected social benefits. This results in unproductive pressure being put on the local culture and leisure boards and the administration from external policymakers. Instead, communication should go through the municipal administration's civil servants, which would simplify communication and interaction and also the calibration of the intervention's objectives. This would then enable support, as illustrated by the chairperson of West City Board of Culture and Leisure:

The mayor got in touch and suggested that we should solve this problem for the midnight-football guys. . . . The usual way is to contact the administration handling grants. . . . So, they tried other ways . . . with the mayor and other policymakers. They only talked with politicians. And the problem when you talk to politicians is that nothing happens because policymakers can't hand out grants. Instead, you're referred to civil servants, who can solve this.

Figure 2. West City midnight football network map between manager and foundation.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

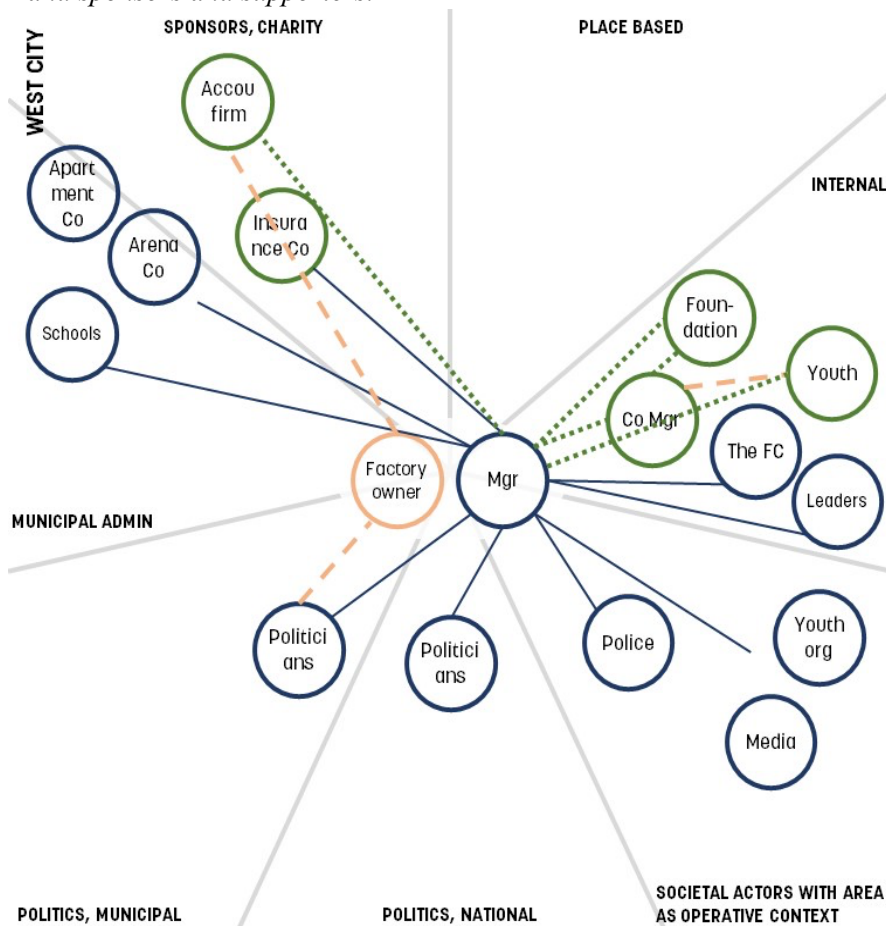
In sum, the policymaker here explains that, from this perspective, the contacts for which the West City MF manager is striving do not constitute a strategic or successful approach, but are instead counterproductive for the ambitions promoted.

The manager believes that he shares a common perspective on the practices with the foundation's management and explains that the foundation has a detailed concept of the football activities provided. This concerns a predefined practice arrangement: five-a-side football on Saturday nights, coaches divide youths into teams, first to score wins, the winners remain on court, subsequent teams enter after circulation. This manager also described detailed pedagogical ideas about how coaches should act and behave as role models. The manager sees the foundation as a facilitator and enabler of practices. However, he describes a lack of organizational support for management, financial administration, strategies of funding and of establishing collaborations with external agencies and funders. He says, "that's our biggest problem" and that the management consists of "a sound association but not a solid organization to manage" the variety of administration necessary. There

appears to be a lack of assistance with organization and administration.

The foundation's director views the foundation as a facilitator and the local intervention management as an implementer of practices, expressing confidence in their competence to carry out the intervention. The director states that he "brought the concept to Sweden from England and created MF" and that it is "a simple concept . . . opening doors to sports centers and fields . . . carried out in socioeconomically weak areas with problems, crime, gangs, and such." One of the foundation's representatives, a former elite footballer, states that he has good insight and well-established relations with the management and coaches leading the MF practices. He visited the sites and tutored the local coaches (see Figure 2). The foundation then focuses on the practices being performed and implemented. According to the foundation's representatives, they have occasionally, but not strategically, supported the intervention's management with contacts and discussions about formalized collaboration and financial support with municipality representatives.

Figure 3. West City midnight football network map between manager and sponsors and supporters.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

From the perspective of the manager, the financial supporters are charitable contributors (Ekholm & Dahlstedt, 2018) making the intervention possible either with financial resources or by supplying sports equipment. There is one example of a sponsor in the manager's personal network (the accounting firm) introducing another important sponsor: a factory owner. According to the West City MF manager, the factory owner said, "I will give you SEK 20,000 . . . that I want you to spend on the most boring things you can't sell to any other sponsor." The variety of sponsors provides an extended social network. The factory owner has his own personal network of social relations, as illustrated in Figure 3, most notably involving a range of high-level and national policymakers. According to the manager, such contacts had been used in dialogue with policymakers on the municipal council.

The factory owner (used as an example of a sponsor) has very limited insight into the organization of the intervention or into the surrounding cooperative networks. He describes well-established relations with local policymakers with whom he has contacts regarding the conditions for the MF. Relations with municipal councilors are enforced as a result of this contribution. The factory owner stresses his

reluctance to enter into dialogue with civil servants or, in his view, the overly bureaucratic municipal administration (see Ekholm & Dahlstedt, 2018). He explains, "I keep away from the administration, it would only end in misery . . . but I like to talk about this project in all possible contexts . . . with the municipal councilors." Accordingly, the network and contacts of the sponsor reaffirm that contacts with municipal representatives target high-level councilors and national policymakers, rather than the Board of Culture and Leisure and the associated administration (see Figure 3). This notion is underpinned by an antistatist view of how civil society should ideally be integrated into welfare provision. In addition, other sponsors, including the sports gear brand and the insurance company representatives, described how they have taken part in communicating with policymakers and the culture and leisure administration in support of the intervention's management.

Cooperation, communication, and formalization: The networks in East City

From the perspective of the East City manager, the municipal policymakers and administration constitute one among several cooperating agencies that make the

Figure 4. East City midnight-football network map between manager and municipality.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

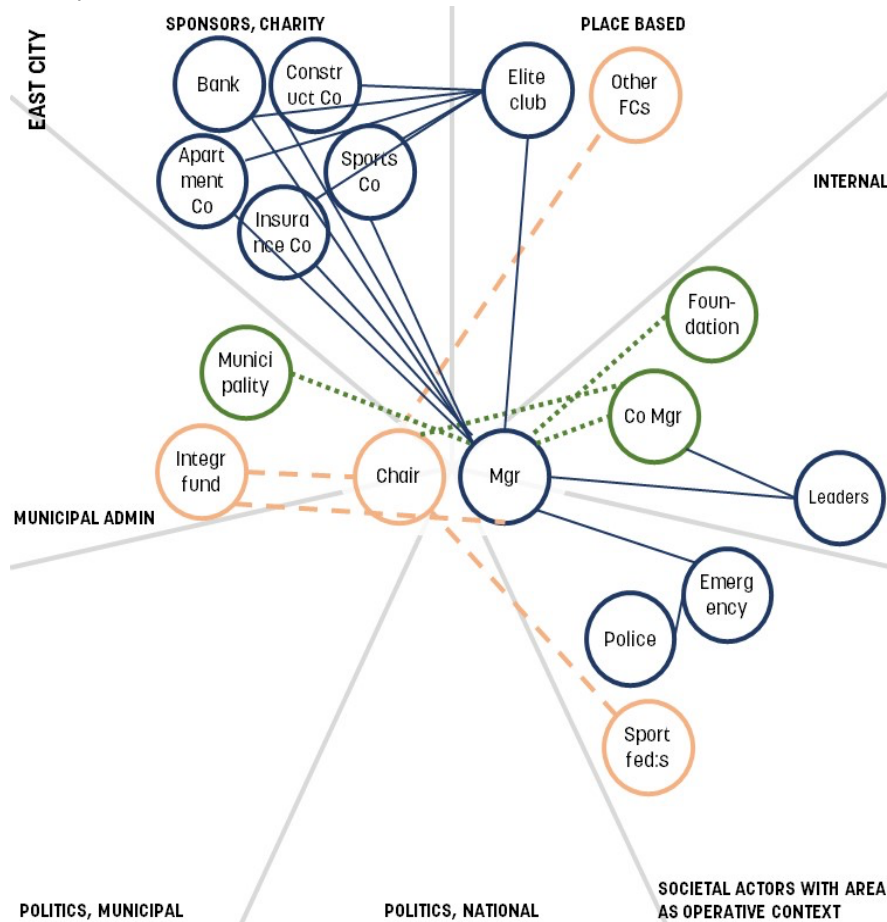
intervention possible. The manager describes how the municipality has granted financial support, both in terms of economic contributions and in the form of full subsidies for the costs of the gymnasium. In terms of expected financial support, the manager states that the interventions provide great economic gains for the municipality (following alleged crime- and drug-prevention effects), something that would underpin arguments for extended financial support and more formalized forms of cooperation. The manager has “estimated that we made socioeconomic savings of 28.5 million [SEK]” from “the 15,000 [SEK]” that supported the first stage. “I believe they could have invested a little more,” he continues. Moreover, the manager sees the municipal agencies as important in plans for the future expansion of the interventions, and he considers that cooperation in the forms already established with the municipal agencies is generally satisfactory. According to a well-established division of labor within the management, the manager deals with organizational functions: communication and cooperation with collaborating agencies, coach recruitment, economic administration, funding applications, etc., while the activity executive sets up the activities and supports the on-site coaches. The

manager stresses the importance of being able to navigate in the form of communication and cooperation with municipal agencies and of understanding the organization of the agencies involved. Additionally, the chart developed by the manager displays a structured notion of differentiation between the various agencies facilitating the intervention and the calibration of strategies and objectives. He explains,

The municipality offered us free access to the gymnasium. . . . The Board of Culture and Leisure paid. . . . In our project application, we described the goals and what we aim for . . . and our target group and. . . . There, we basically clarify what we will do. They, really. . . only demand that we do what we said we’d do and what we wrote in the application. So we can report back. (East City MF manager)

From the viewpoint of the municipality (presented primarily by the chief civil servant of sport in the administration), the importance of structured communication is stressed. Communication has been established primarily between the intervention manager and the civil servant. Accordingly, the civil servant describes herself as a point of entrance to the

Figure 5. East City midnight football network map between manager and foundation.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

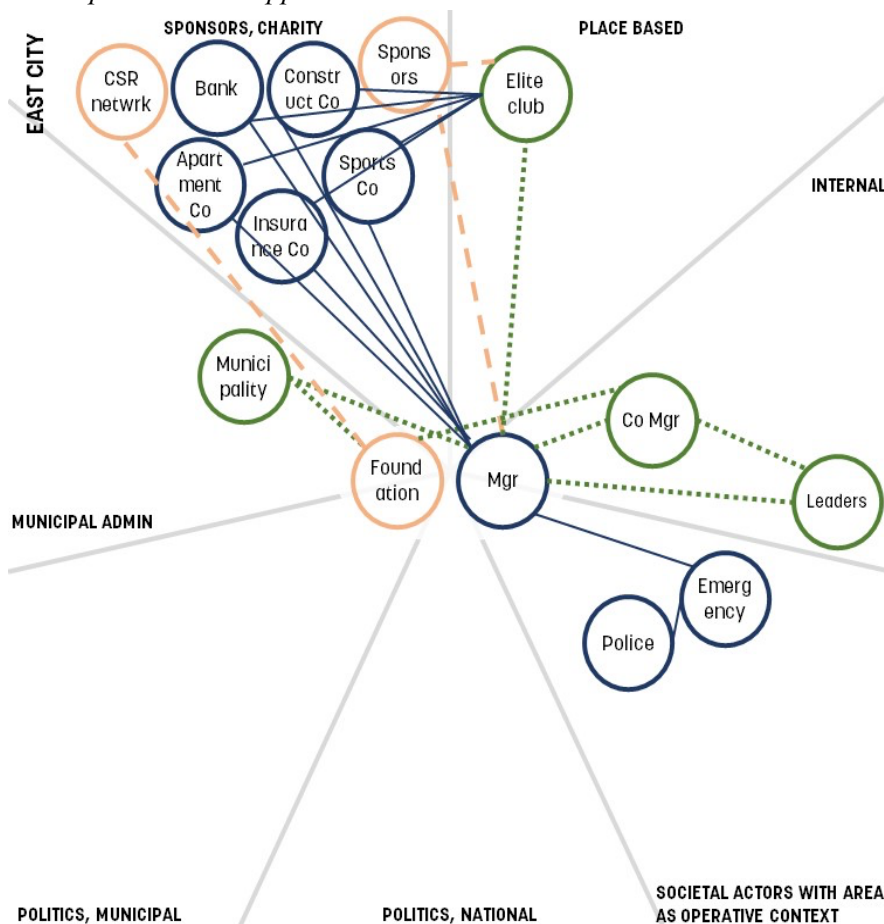
municipal bureaucracy, aiming to guide the collaborating partners in their contacts with different agencies within administration and policymaking. The chief civil servant describes it as important “to create better chances to contact the municipality, so it’s not an obstacle if you don’t happen to meet the right person.” The civil servant describes her function as being a node for sports associations and a point of reference for the distinct municipal agencies (see Figure 4). This form of interaction and communication has made possible a certain degree of calibration between the intervention objectives. Here, the Board of Culture and Leisure formulates the political goals and policy objectives. Then, the policy documents are communicated by the civil servant to the intervention manager, who commits to these objectives. Hence, the chairperson of East City Board of Culture and Leisure emphasizes that “the culture and leisure administration has great opportunities to develop applications and projects in dialogue with local community actors.” This civil servant deems the intervention to be in line with the articulated policy objectives, and the intervention can therefore receive financial support. This dual calibration, illustrated in the following excerpt, shows that the distinct agencies have synchronized their

objectives. The civil servant is explicit about not viewing the MF scheme as a competitor to the municipal youth and recreation centers. Even the chairperson and policymaker believe that they want to use the community as a means to promote social inclusion. She explains,

That’s a formal agreement . . . going as an official letter to the board for decision, stipulating the commission of the board and the political goals. . . . We believe that this is the right direction, because it really is in line with the objectives of the board, and the goals that we should achieve. Midnight football is an important piece of the puzzle here, and therefore we make it an assignment. (Chief civil servant, sports issues)

According to this statement, there are clear overlapping interests in utilizing sport to promote social goods and contribute to social inclusion, which is stipulated as a formal political objective of the municipalities’ governing bodies. By means of calibrating the contacts made and the objectives expounded, a certain form of cooperation seems viable.

Figure 6. East City midnight football network map between manager and sponsors and supporters.



Note. Blue: from managers map. Orange (dashed): from chairs map. Green (dotted): agreement between maps.

From the manager's perspective, the foundation is described as being the provider of a predefined concept. Originally, as the manager expounds, the sports association of which he is a board member had discussed how to arrange open, late-evening football practices for young people in the local residential area following social tensions and turmoil. The plans were developed in dialogue with the partnering elite sports club, and it was through this club that the manager got in contact with the foundation (see Figure 5). The manager explains that "the foundation presented a similar concept" and that they "educated our coaches in their concept . . . where all coaches have distinct roles and responsibilities." The foundation promoted the concept and the local management decided to engage with the foundation. Most notably, the manager stresses that the foundation provides a framework for the five-a-side game and a pedagogical plan containing a certain division of roles for the football coaches leading the activities. According to the manager, as the intervention has developed, the foundation has played a less important role. In this sense, when planning to expand the intervention into neighboring residential areas in the city, the foundation is not described as an important partner.

From the perspective of the foundation, local management is seen as an implementer of the intervention. The foundation director explains that "we identify where there is a need . . . and we localize associations," as with the club in East City. Given that the intervention is now implemented, that it has found its forms and is being performed regularly and in a formalized way, the foundation director explains that their efforts to support the local management have become less intense. Also, the foundation director states that he had previously engaged in dialogue with a representative of the municipal administration on occasion, but not regularly. The foundation director highlights the importance of the wide network of CSR supporters and social relations that the foundation provides.

From the manager's perspective, sponsors and financial supporters are facilitators of the intervention. The various sponsors provide support in different capacities. The manager explains that "from some partners, we've been given hard cash, to pay salaries, and from others we get benefits to carry out the activities [and] from the sports gear brand unlimited equipment, really." What is interesting about the organization of sponsor interaction at East City is

how the cooperating elite sports club has its own pre-established division for CSR engagement. The manager describes how this form of operation is used to channel funding and to reach out to local sponsors (see Figure 6): “We had a clear division of roles.” He continues, “[the elite sports club] manages the financing bit and nothing more . . . we do everything else.” This form of arrangement enables smooth and systematic cooperation with local sponsors (however, the elite sports club has recently decided to withdraw its participation). The local intervention manager, though, expects that collaborations and support can be sustained, even without the elite sports club and its CSR institution.

The local gym owner initially encountered the intervention through a previous job at a property company, which is now engaged as a sponsor that offers, among other things, gym activities for young participants. From her perspective, the local base for cooperation is paramount. Presence in the local neighborhood, along with personal and social networks, enable connections between the local intervention management and actors such as the local fire and emergency services (whose director the gym owner knows personally). After some social turmoil in the area, the gym owner recalls that “I contacted [the manager] and said I wanted to set up a match between the MF and the local fire and emergency services,” because “it’s harder to throw stones at someone you know.” The gym owner has enabled meetings between young people and the local authorities, although these bonds are not strategic parts of the intervention design. This part of the chart displays the local foundation of supporting networks. The representative from another important sponsor, the insurance company, particularly highlights how the local intervention management, beyond being just locally situated and connected, is also professional and organized about managing the activities and the forms of cooperation: “they’re good at doing business from it . . . making sure that they’re financed.”

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the mechanisms, conditions, and opportunities for formalization that enable sustained operation. Centrally, this concerns the design elements of interventions that are governed or viewed as governable. In the descriptions analyzed, a range of elements of the sports-based interventions are pinpointed with respect to governing and infrastructuring. We spotlight three recurring dimensions: practice, program, and preconditions. These dimensions are not necessarily generalizable to other interventions—they are context specific with respect to the explorations made (cf. Svensson & Hambrick, 2019);

however, they provide a conceptual framework and model for analyzing how interventions develop, become formalized, and create opportunities to later diffuse and multiply. This framework is generated from the findings presented and contributes to a refined understanding of the conditions of design, formalization and diffusion of interventions (cf. Schulenkorf, 2017).

First, when it comes to the footballing activities, the foundation provides an elaborate design for the practices. This involves five-a-side football and the setting up of rules and organization for play, as well as the educational arrangements with which practices are imbued. This is what the East City MF manager refers to, for instance, as the “concept” provided by the foundation. The practice is easily described and communicated and is used as the basis for diffusion.

Second, the sports-based interventions are described as also being about organizational matters, not just about the practices. Analytically, the program refers to the management of coaches (for instance, recruitment and salaries), financial administration, strategies for cooperation and communication with cooperating agencies, communication with and strategies for funding from supporters and, the capacity to apply for funding (cf. Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Welty Peachey et al., 2018). As the foundation does not provide a structured program design, this influences East City and West City in different ways, with East City managing a program, while West City is struggling to set one up. Although both practice and program are governable levels of operation, it seems clear that it is primarily with respect to the level of practice that there is a developed design that is open for implementation at the local sites of intervention (cf. Lindsey et al., 2019). The lack of program design illustrates that the sports-based interventions develop programs locally (cf. Welty Peachey, 2018), depending on a range of contextual aspects involving, not least, personal capacities and networks (cf. Jégou & Manzini, 2008) as well as external preconditions. Accordingly, the variations in program development and the allocation of organizational competencies conditions how practices can be implemented (cf. Burnett, 2009). Governing how networks are mobilized requires organizational competencies. Such competencies seem not to be part of the central intervention design being diffused but instead need to be developed locally (cf. Björgvinsson et al., 2010). When looking at the different network visualizations from the distinct sites, it becomes obvious that access to the competences that need to be mobilized in order to facilitate the formalization of operations and to enable sustainability differs significantly.

Third, and consequently, the development of the MF interventions is described as depending on a variety of external preconditions that extend beyond the practice and the program: both local conditions concerning existing sports associations and institutions and the political strategies for civil society cooperation affect the opportunities for the interventions to achieve more formalized conditions (cf. Lindsey et al., 2019). In West City, there was a lack of well-functioning associations in the area, which eventually led to the forming of a new sports organization with the primary purpose of conducting MF. In the words of the foundation executive, “if there are no associations, as with West City, one is created.” The municipal representatives originally preferred other forms of organization, for instance, cooperation through the municipal youth and cultural center. Also, policymakers and administrators in West City expressed high ambitions about controlling and having insight into the interventions being supported, which constitutes a barrier to formalized cooperation. For West City, these preconditions have meant that the calibration of intervention objectives is as yet underdeveloped. In East City, the intervention is organized through and in cooperation with a local sports association that has provided sports practice in the local residential area for over 30 years, with well-established forms of organization and even established collaborations with other associations in the city, as well as developed contacts with municipal agencies. Accordingly, existing channels of operation can be mobilized for novel purposes (cf. Burnett, 2009). In East City, both the chairperson of the board and the chief civil servant of the administration stressed the forms and opportunities for “dialogue” with the municipality, eventually resulting in formalized cooperation and substantial financial support (cf. Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019). Moreover, the municipal policymakers and administration are less engaged in controlling the program and its practices, thus constituting a lower threshold for establishing municipal cooperation, which enables the calibration of the intervention’s objectives.

In conclusion, these midnight football interventions are dependent on local development at the program level. There is little diffusion of strategies between local sites of intervention, and strategies are not open for implementation. Rather, the programs are developed locally. The entirety of the interventions cannot be assessed as being deliberately designed, but they are rather the effect of personal capacities allocated and incubated in an organizational form (cf. Svensson & Seifried, 2017). A calibration, or ongoing alignment, of strategies and objectives between the various collaborating agencies has become the local strategy to increase capacities in the management of coach recruitment, financial administration,

and general forms of cooperation (cf. Hillgren et al., 2011). Still, a detailed program design suitable for general implementation does not seem to be viable for different sites of intervention, because there are great variations in the preconditions of the operations (cf. Lindsey et al., 2019). However, open-ended program design structures (cf. Star & Ruhleder, 1996), could potentially be developed concerned with general reflections about and the local development of administration and cooperation (cf. Joachim et al., 2019). In this endeavor, it becomes obvious that the capabilities needed to structure the program level reside with the individuals engaged in management or within the pre-established and incubating associations and their relations (cf. Jégou et al., 2008). The intervention managers in East City and West City need to navigate among the municipality, the foundation, and the sponsors, and they are engaged alongside the other central actors in infrastructuring (cf. Svensson & Seifried, 2017). Incidentally, the East City management seems to be equipped with the necessary capabilities and resides within a municipality that is willing to integrate civil-society forms of engagement into the mix of welfare provision. In contrast, the West City management seems less equipped with such capacities and lacking in organizational structure. According to the insurance company CSR representative, “they’re totally unstructured” (cf. MacIntosh et al., 2016). Furthermore, the West City manager resides in a municipality that seems eager to demand high-quality and professional welfare provisions, even in civil-society cooperation. Effectively, the levels of formalization and regularity of programming and practice seem higher in East City than in West City, even though practices that are seemingly alike are carried out at both sites. In many ways, the analytical discussion presented here resonates with findings in the previous literature on interventions involving sport for development. However, based on our empirical findings, we have systematized these levels of design, infrastructuring, and operation, enabling us to map out the challenges confronted and the opportunities for development.

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous sections, we have explored the mechanisms, necessary conditions, and likelihood of interventions achieving increased formalization and sustained operation. We have also sought to better understand how they may be diffused. We looked closely at how networks of collaboration were formed and the role that they play in development and increased formalization, how collaboration, cooperation, and communication were understood from the perspectives of different agencies, and what mechanisms and conditions could be assessed as being

important for the development and formalization of interventions. Thus, we outlined how the intervention designs and infrastructuring could be understood at three different levels of operation: practice, program, and preconditions.

These findings support previous research regarding the importance of the strategic, organizational, relational, and networking capacities of the partnering agencies involved in and conducting sports-based interventions in cross-sectoral forms of cooperation. Most notably, it is the organizational, management, and network capacities (cf. Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Dobbels et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017a; Svensson et al., 2018; Welty Peachey et al., 2018, and communication and calibration of goals (cf. MacIntosh et al., 2016; Schulenkorf & Sugden, 2011; Sherry & Schulenkorf, 2016) that are instrumental in developing the program structure needed for formalization and sustained operation. Taking an infrastructuring approach (Björgvinsson et al., 2010), and focusing particularly on openness to emergence and ongoing alignment (Star & Ruhleder, 1996), conditions for successful practices can be established by making the levels of programming and preconditions visible in the form of building relationships and collaborative assemblages (Jégou & Manzini, 2008). Once forms of communication and the calibration of goals were established, long-term plans of action could be facilitated, making it possible to foresee future development and management (cf. MacIntosh et al., 2016). Here, the presence of particularly capable individuals to manage and develop the programs locally benefit such endeavors (cf. Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012). Furthermore, our findings seem to support notions about starting with small operations, which can then develop and diffuse (cf. Welty Peachey et al., 2018 over time as program structures are consolidated.

With respect to situating our findings in relation to the existing research, within the scope of our empirical examination we have given an analytical account of how the particular social interventions considered here could be developed. These findings are not necessarily generalizable to wider contexts, but they do provide an abstract conceptualization of how development, formalization, and sustainable operation can be explored in interventions beyond the particular cases examined and explored here. In order to do this, it is analytically important to move beyond strict sector divides in order to understand the forms of cooperation being developed (cf. Villadsen, 2008). In order to understand the rationales of the developing cooperation, we need to avoid viewing the actors and agencies involved as being limited to their sectoral attribution. Our analysis illustrates that the agencies intersect and transcend any perceived sector distinctions. Rather, the intersections

display how cooperative forms of welfare provision are developed in assemblages and how they establish cross-sectoral technologies of governing. Moreover, in addition to disseminating how the networks and forms of operation are developed, the analysis pinpoints how networks and operations facilitate and enable increased formalization and conditions for sustained operation. In addition, we want to stress that, from the perspective of networks, such conceptualizations of cooperative relations do not always grasp the organizational and managerial forms of operation (see primarily West City in this analysis). Rather, concepts such as “action nets” (Czarniawska, 2004), which place more emphasis on temporary and changeable forms of relations (networks and assemblages) and the constitutive relational activities, may provide profitable perspectives. In future research, more emphasis could be placed on examining the exact practices that constitute the networking interactions that are formative of organizations and institutions. From such a perspective, networks and organizations would rather be analyzed as institutional *effects*—we ought to “study organizations as products of organizing” actions, rather than studying networks and organizations as “the study object in themselves” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 783). In addition, looking more closely at the actions that are formative of networks and organizations means also taking the experiences of actors more systematically as a central point of recognition—action nets are not objective realities but rather entities that are experienced in a range of different ways. Such an approach would conveniently align with outlining the governmental rationality, whereby the organization and institution could be seen as a form of enabling (and constituted by) certain technologies of governing (Dean, 2010).

When it comes to the practical utility and implications of our findings, we stress the importance of paying attention to the levels of program and preconditions when developing or implementing sports-based interventions in cross-sectoral cooperation. Program mechanisms concerning coach recruitment, financial administration and strategies for funding, as well as structured and considered strategies of communication with cooperating agencies, are here noted to be instrumental, although dependent on preconditions concerning political strategies and pre-given forms of established associations. We stress the importance of infrastructuring for the program (rather than for the practices) in order to facilitate increased formalization and sustained operation. Notably, it is the program that needs to be center stage in relation to the given preconditions. Furthermore, according to the different informants, and as can be seen through the network visualizations, in order to make MF possible, not all levels, nor all aspects of each

level, need to be accessible to any one individual actor. That is, it is through the integration of resources between the actors that the different levels become available to act upon. Distinguishing between practice, program, and preconditions provides an empirically situated scheme for understanding the formalization of interventions as well as for guiding the (re)development of innovative interventions.

Critically, though, there is a wide range of dimensions in the forms of communication and cooperation, and these have been only briefly touched on in this study. They require further investigation concerning, for instance, the motivations for cooperation of the various agencies involved, the overarching policy context of cross-sectoral cooperation and the internal dimensions of organization within the local managements.

Furthermore, the examination presented here is an exploratory study of two instances of sports-based interventions. It contributes to the body of knowledge by providing conceptual frameworks for how development, formalization, and sustained operation can be understood and assessed. In this particular sense, we have only gone into analytical detail in the scrutinized interventions. However, given that sports-based intervention schemes such as the midnight football interventions analyzed here are gaining increased recognition as an innovative way of providing welfare provision and for engaging private and civil-society agencies in such provision, this needs to be empirically mapped and critically problematized. Even though our focus on football and social or educational objectives have previously been researched in other contexts (e.g., Schulenkorf et al., 2016), we suggest that explorations need to be conducted in a manner that is free from essentialist notions of civil-society authenticity or of statist bureaucracy, focusing on the enabled infrastructuring of technologies of governing in practice. Sports-based interventions may be developed and the infrastructuring and governing created and instigated based on engaged mobilization or on the basis of strategic and calibrated cooperation.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We declare no conflicts of interest.

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