

The Interface Between Sport Management and Social Work

Aidyn Iachini, The Ohio State University
Packianathan Chelladurai, The Ohio State University

Session 2: Organizational Theory Presentation (25-minute)

Thursday, May 31, 2007

8:30 AM - 8:55 AM

In declaring year 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education, the United Nations acknowledged that sport and physical education could contribute to human development through its essential attributes of participation, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. Sport can bring individuals and communities together by highlighting commonalities among groups of people and bringing together various cultural groups. Sport is also instrumental in inculcating discipline, confidence and leadership which, in turn, foster tolerance, cooperation and respect which are essential to a democracy. Based on this perspective, the UNO Resolution on International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE 2005) called on the governments and sport organizations to include sport as a tool in their development programs, and form partnerships to work collectively to promote health, education, social and cultural development through sport.

The notion that sport can serve social causes is embedded in the Constitution of the North American Society which states that "the members of this Society are concerned about the theoretical and applied aspects of management theory and practice specifically related to sport, exercise, dance, and play as these enterprises are pursued by all sectors of the population" (NASSM, n.d.). While the emphasis on sport, exercise, dance, and play attests to the overlaps among the fields of sport management, fitness management, recreation management and such other fields that deal with sport and physical activity, the second focus of NASSM constitution on the service to "all sectors of the population" implies that the community as a whole is the recipient of sport services. In a similar vein, Frisby (2005) noted that sport can perform an important function in society by promoting social cohesion.

The wide spectrum of activities with which sport management is concerned can be broadly classified as spectator sport and participant sport and it has been shown that participant sport is a much larger piece of the pie accounting for more than 60% of the economic worth of the sport industry (Chelladurai, 2005). As the stage for participant sport is the local community, it can contribute greatly to the developmental efforts directed at the community. This would entail the cooperation and collaboration among the entities that are focused on community development. The thrust of the present paper is to focus on one such entity, namely, social work.

The National Association of Social Workers is concerned with the enhancement of well-being of all people with a special emphasis on the needs of vulnerable, oppressed, and poor people (National Association of Social Workers, 2006). Social work is an enterprise of linking people together and reducing the conflicts among them (Sallee, 2003). Shriver (2004) refers to social work practices that develop human capacities.

To the extent participant sport is also concerned with both physical and psychological well being of the people it serves in the community there could be considerable overlap among the activities of sport and social work. This congruence among the purposes of participant sport and social work has been highlighted by Lawson (2005) and Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2001) who have conceived sport as social work. Lawson (2005) has argued that empowerment-oriented and community-based sport programs can help (a) enhance human health and well-being across the lifespan, (b) reduce the harms of poverty, social exclusion and isolation, and inter-group conflict, (c) contribute to human capital development, (d) develop collective entities, and (e) foster social networks and voluntary associations. Houlihan (2001) related sport and recreation to citizenship and civil society. Hartman (2003) conceives of sport as a social intervention. In his view, "sport is better understood as a tool for social outreach, a hook or instrument whose impact depends upon the ends toward which it is directed, how it is implemented, and the context in which it is deployed" (p. 134). He goes on to suggest that sport programs by themselves cannot succeed alone in the challenging and complex environment today. Thus, it would be necessary to tie our efforts to those of other fields such as social work.

Scholars in the field of sport management have not made any serious overtures toward building bridges with the field of social work. One notable exception is the work of Frisby (1998) who made available recreation opportunities (self-defense, fun and games for moms & preschoolers, and fun & friendly fitness) to those living in poverty.

Given that organizations that foster participant sport and social work share the same mission and goals and that they mount their operations at the community level, it is unfortunate that the fields of sport management and social work have not made

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

significant efforts to collaborate and cooperate in furthering their respective goals. As Lawson (2005) noted, the contribution of participant sport (contrasted with elite sport) community building can be greatly enhanced with collaboration with other professionals such as the social workers who are well versed with such an endeavor. The purpose of this presentation is to identify and articulate the benefits of interfacing the fields of sport management and social work. In addition, the presentation will explain the structures and processes that would make such an interface more efficient and effective.

References

- Chelladurai, P. (2005). *Managing organizations for sport & physical activity: A systems perspective*. 2nd Edition. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.
- Frisby, W. (1998). *Leisure access: Enhancing recreation opportunities for those living in poverty*. Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Health Research Foundation.
- Hartman, D. (2003). Theorizing sport as social intervention: A view from the grassroots. *Quest*, 55, 118-140.
- Houlihan, B. (2001). Citizenship, civil society, and the sport and recreation professions. *Managing Leisure*, 6, p.1-14.
- Lawson, H. (2005). Empowering people, facilitating community development, and contributing to sustainable development: the social work of sport, exercise, and physical education programs. *Sport, Education, & Society*, 10(1), 135-160.
- Lawson, H. & Anderson-Butcher, D. (2000). The social work of sport. In *Sport for All and Governmental Policies*. Quebec, Canada: Congres Mondial du Sport pour Tous.
- National Association of Social Workers (2006). Code of Ethics. Retrieved September 19, 2006, from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>.
- Sallee, A.L. (2003). A generalist working definition of social work: a response to Bartlett. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 13(3), 349-356.
- Shriver, J.M. (2004). *Human behavior and the social environment*. 4th Edition. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- United Nations Office (2005). *Sport 2005: International Year of Sport and Physical Education*. Geneva, Switzerland: Office of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.