

Exploring Interdependence Among Local Sport Organizations: A Comparison of Basketball and Swimming Providers in Niagara

Joanne MacLean, Brock University
Laura Cousens, Brock University
Martha Barnes, Brock University

**Session 17: Organizational Theory
Presentation (25-minute)**

Friday, June 1, 2007

11:00 AM - 11:25 AM

A stated goal of the Canadian Sport Policy (2002, p. 19) is to "increase collaboration, communication, and cooperation amongst the partners in the sport community, government and the private sector, which, in turn, will lead to a more effective sport system." Within the context of the Canadian Sport Policy, enhanced interaction among stakeholders in the sport system was one of four key areas of focus identified by policy makers to facilitate movement towards a more integrated, effective, and efficient sport system by the year 2012. Importantly, the Canadian Sport Policy emphasized the need to foster linkages between sport organizations, educational institutions, and stakeholders not previously included, to enhance sport participation and athlete development.

Calls to improve interdependence and collaboration among organizations in Canada's sport system are hindered by a lack of understanding of the current nature of linkages between and among sport organizations at the local, provincial and national levels. Similarly, the relationships between same-sport providers in communities, and the linkages between local sport organizations and sponsors, equipment or facility providers, and parent groups were difficult to comprehend given the lack of research in this area. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to facilitate the move from these broad policy statements and objectives to action by exploring the relationships between and among providers of basketball and swimming within the regional district of Niagara.

Exploring the group of organizations that deliver basketball and swimming, and considering the nature of coordination among these organizations and their governance and supplier providers, promises to extend our current understanding of network analysis by considering both the organizational and network levels of analysis, and by devoting attention to the policy implementation problems that exist within networked environments as compared to hierarchical forms of organization. These two key areas of exploration represent, according to Berry, Brower, Choi and Goa (2004), issues in need of harvesting to expand the field of network analysis.

Understanding the ways in which organizations that deliver the same sport perceive of their role within the broader network of the sport's governance and athlete develop system is fundamental to understanding the structure of the network, the norms and beliefs that guide decision making, as well as the level of integration and collaboration that exists between and among these actors (Barry, et al., 2004). This theoretical approach was particularly salient for this research given that the organizations that deliver the sports of basketball and swimming, for example, exist within different sectors (public, non-profit, commercial) of the sport industry, are governed by different organizational values (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs).

Initially, efforts to identify the organizations that deliver these sports, whether they are, for example, educational institutions, parks and recreation departments, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, or commercial enterprises were undertaken. Next a phone survey of the 24 providers of basketball programs and the 25 providers of swimming programs were completed to assess the level of collaboration or integration that exists between same-sport providers, between local sport organizations and their provincial or national governing bodies, and between sport organizations and their suppliers of funding, facilities, or equipment. Additionally, in-depth personal interviews were completed with a selection of survey respondents.

The results of this research provide insight into the level of interdependence among local providers of basketball and swimming. The data revealed an absence of linkages between same-sport providers, and the existence of only a few weak ties between local sport organizations and their provincial and national governing bodies. Similarly, local sport providers used exchange relationships, rather than more enduring forms of inter-organizational interaction, to access resources such as money, facilities or equipment. Explanations for the lack of coordination and integration included the continued adoption of historical practices for managing interactions with other organizations, a lack of awareness of the ways to enhance integration, and the lack of expertise or resources to establish and maintain stronger relationships.