

Inevitable tensions? Examining sport for development NGO relationships with national sport organizations

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Abstract 481**

Sport has recently been advocated as a tool to contribute to development. Hundreds of sport for development non-governmental organizations (SFD NGOs) have formed, operating projects in more than 125 countries. These NGOs utilize structured interventions aimed to transform marginalized individuals into flourishing citizens, while focusing on a sport that is available and accessible to all. Contrastingly, current sport policies and practices in many developed countries are often dominated by neo-liberal ideologies, encompassing elite-based conceptions of sport focusing on values such as individualism and performance in lieu of participation and community development.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the nature of Canadian and Swiss SFD NGOs' partnerships with national sport organizations, and to identify how these relationships connect to sport policy influence. The specific research questions guiding this investigation include: i) What are the reasons behind partnerships between SFD NGOs and national sport organizations? ii) How do potential value tensions between SFD NGOs and elite sport organizations permeate their relationships? iii) How do these partnerships possibly produce competing policy agendas between elite and 'grassroots' sport?

Qualitative research methods were used, including document analysis and interviews. A content analysis of websites used to display information about both Swiss and Canadian SFD NGOs and key documents were analyzed, including annual reports, mission statements and policy documents. From each of the two SFD NGOs, 4 key staff members (one staff member twice) were interviewed.

Findings revealed that motives for partnering included: developing corporate social responsibility platforms for national sport organizations; knowledge sharing and program development; resource mobilization; and enhancing legitimacy and advancing the agenda of the SFD movement. Information exposed during interviews provided evidence that SFD NGOs had the abilities to capitalize on their relationships with their partners by promoting their ideas and policy agendas. However, results also uncovered tensions between the values of sport for development (emphasizing the social priorities of sport) and the development of sport (where sport is valued in its own right). This paper concludes that there is a need for more concrete policy procedures to guide partnerships between elite-based sport organizations and SFD NGOs.

This research contributes to understandings of: i) how interorganizational theories are useful in drawing attention to the underlying relationships between and amongst SFD NGOs and their partners; and ii) how these relationships are able to shape and articulate unified or disconnected policy concerns. Future research in this area might examine how partnerships between SFD NGOs and national sport organizations can work more closely towards enhancing the ability of citizens to influence and contribute to sport policy formation.