

Policy Making in Sport and Recreation: Addressing Multiculturalism

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As noted in previous research (cf. Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Nakamura & Donnelly, 2006; Tirone & Pedlar, 2000, 2005), elements of multiculturalism have not been extensively addressed in the development of sport and recreation policies and thus have not been featured in strategies and programs to enhance participation among new Canadians. The purpose of this study was to examine current sport and recreation policies existing at the local (Vancouver), provincial (British Columbia), and national (Canada) levels. Interviews with 25 policy-makers and analyses of sport policy documents at all levels of government were undertaken to investigate the extent to which sport and recreation policies addressed the needs of a group of newly immigrated women of Chinese descent living in the Greater Vancouver Area.

Findings demonstrated that elements of multiculturalism have not been specifically addressed in the development of sport policies and thus have not been featured in strategies and programs to enhance participation among new Canadians. Even though policy-makers identified multiculturalism as a serious gap in the Canadian sport policy discourse, they all recognized the importance of addressing this gap in the development of policies and strategies to encourage sport participation among diverse cultural groups. In addition, findings revealed important challenges of addressing multiculturalism and its diversity in policy development and implementation. Among these challenges, policy-makers discussed the overwhelming difficulties of addressing the needs of approximately 240 recognized multicultural groups in Canada. Achieving a balance between the adoption of assimilation models of sport participation delivery and the development of culturally sensitive initiatives to respond to different values, needs, and interests of multicultural populations was raised. Challenges also included the establishment of multilingual communication between sport policy-makers and the various multicultural groups. Another challenge involved lack of coordination existing between various levels of government involved in promoting sport participation for Canadians.

Our study also revealed that the local government was 'closer' to multicultural population and had developed successful strategies to reach out to various multicultural groups (i.e., hired multilingual community sport leaders, involved in outreach initiatives to increase sport participation, and adopted citizen participation models to meet the sport and recreation needs of diverse groups). Although policy-makers within the provincial government recognized the various needs of multicultural groups, their dual foci of healthy living initiatives and Olympic and Paralympic sports did not leave many resources to deal with multicultural diversity. Conversely, sport policy-makers at the federal government level appeared to still be rooted in a youth-oriented elite sport model. Even though a shift to sport participation is currently under way at the federal level, it has not yet translated into initiatives to respond to the needs of these multicultural populations. For provincial and federal levels, target clienteles for sport initiatives mostly included First Nations, people with disabilities, and women and girls. In sum, multiculturalism in sport and recreation in Canada remains largely invisible even though it is extensively addressed in Canadian public policy.