

Capacity and Infrastructure: Conceptualising the Canadian Sport Policy Environment

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**Governance
Abstract 2009-248**

**May 30, 2009
4:00 PM**

**25 minute oral
(Richland C)**

In 2000, the Canadian federal government embarked on a consultation process that led to the release of the Canadian Sport Policy in 2002. The policy identified four pillars upon which Canadian sport would be based; enhanced excellence, enhanced participation, enhanced interaction, and enhanced capacity. The process through which the policy was developed presented an appearance of an emerging era of inclusivity and consultation in the national sport policy process.

While many sport stakeholders heralded the seemingly open policy development process, one was left to wonder what groups would be included and whose interests would be most reflected in the policies and programs emanating from the new consultative approach to state-sponsored sport in Canada. This paper will examine one of the pillars identified in the Canadian Sport Policy, namely enhanced capacity, and use it as a case study to explore how the dynamics of group interests and influence have evolved since the release of the Policy.

While this topic is highly relevant to those interested in studying the role of the state, interest groups, and public policy in Canada, the approach taken in this paper will draw attention to the importance of understanding government priorities for supporting sport programs and organisations, who the sport stakeholders are and how they have their voices heard, and the dynamics of sport policy development. Understanding these points are vitally important to the Canadian sport administrator, as knowing how to affect change will allow their organisation to influence policy development and capitalise on available government support.

By addressing earlier work relating to policy networks (Atkinson & Coleman, 1989; Atkinson & Coleman, 1992; Coleman & Skogstad, 1990; Pross, 1992; and Smith, 1990) and sport policy development in Canada (Church, 2008; Green & Houlihan, 2004; Harvey & Proulx, 1988; and Harvey, Thibault, & Rail, 1995) the current status of the sport capacity policy network will be identified. The paper will also identify how sport capacity policy is currently being shaped and how the policy network has evolved from its earliest incarnation as a network. In order to frame the findings and to better understand the role of the Canadian state, consideration will also have to be given to understanding government and institutions in Canada (Atkinson, 1993; Brooks & Miljan, 2003; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; and Simeon & Robinson, 2004).

In order to arrive at the results identified above, the author will pursue a neo-pluralist approach to examining the policy actors historically and presently involved in the sport capacity policy network. By examining various communiqués between interest groups and the state, and through an examination of the various consultative processes that have taken place, the conclusions will point to the dynamics and degrees of influence currently at play within the sport capacity policy network.

Identifying the degrees of influence individual stakeholders have within the sport capacity policy network will lead to better understanding how sport policy is currently being influenced and developed in Canada, which will assist current sport administrators in their decision-making processes. The findings will also lay the groundwork by which a closer examination of the other three pillars identified in the Canadian Sport Policy may be carried out in the future.