Measuring the Contribution of Sport to Society: Social Capital, Collective Identities, Health Literacy, Well-being and Human Capital

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Recently, sports have been recognized as a powerful means to promote education, culture health, sustainable development and peace by many organizations including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace. This unique potential is based on the universal popularity of sport and on its capacity in global communication platforms (Beutler, 2007). There is, however, little empirical research to examine the contributions of sport to society and measure the outcomes from those contributions. Many past findings regarding the contribution of sport to society are based on qualitative examinations by interview, observation, focus group, poetry readings and video messages (Bailey, 2005; Beutler, 2008; Jarvie, 2003). Therefore, a more standardized, quantifiable and consistent measurement is required to demonstrate the role of sports for education, health, sustainable development and peace. This may also serve to persuade policy-makers and potential cross-sector partners (i.e., corporate sponsors, governments and Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs) / Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)), who are often involved in the development and implementation of sport initiatives, of their justified roles and resources.

Numerous policy papers claim that sport contributes to society in terms of social inclusion and the development of social capital. For example, in a review paper, Bailey (2005) identified the five areas of physical health, cognitive and academic development, mental health, crime reduction, and reduction of truancy and disaffection as areas where sport makes contributions to society. There has been consistent support for the potential of sport to contribute to social development directly and indirectly (Bailey, 2005; Delaney & Keaney, 2005; Jarvie, Botcheva & Huffman, 2004; Munro, 2005; Seippel, 2006; Tonts, 2005) but for all the initiatives undertaken the evidence is sparse. One exception is the work of Zhang, Pease, and Hui (1996) on the perceptions of value contributed to communities from professional sports. Their developed scale had eight dimensions including community solidarity, public behavior, pastime ecstasy, excellence pursuit, social equity, health awareness, individual quality, and business opportunity. While these dimensions share some aspects with other conceptualizations of sport’s contribution to society, the scale items were oriented to the contributions professional sport can bring to society.

In groundwork for a general measure of sport’s contribution to society, there has been little agreement on how to approach the evaluation of the social contribution outcomes of sport and what core criteria should be measured. In a theoretical framework, Lawson (2005), suggests the broad base of sport, exercise and physical education (SEPE) can contribute to sustainable and integrated social and economic development in terms of 1) social networks, 2) collective identities, 3) health and health-enhancing environment, 4) well-being and 5) human capital, arguing that SEPE professionals may design and deliver their practices, programs, and policies to maximize their impact on society.

Thus, the objectives of this study are to 1) develop a general instrument to measure contribution of sport to society in a systematic and efficient manner by adopting Lawson’s framework, 2) test the instrument with a convenience sample.

A convenience sample employed. The instrument was administered to undergraduate students (N=220) at large public university in the Midwest in the United States for the pilot study. We developed the composite measure for the contribution of sport to society based on the standard psychometric procedures including extensive literature review and synthesis of the existing scales with theoretical framework by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994). Therefore, the composite measure of each construct is supported theoretically and conceptually. It, however, has some practical limitations, for example, the length of the measure (80-90 items for the five constructs) may limit its use in surveys and lead to fatigue to respondents and subsequent bias (Breaugh & Colihan, 1994). Thus, we also developed global measures for the same constructs which are designed to overcome these practical limitations with fewer items (15 items for the five constructs) and be applied to a variety of sport programs or events. We followed guidelines by Hinkin (1995) and Breaugh & Colihan (1994) in writing global items. For the items of both composite measure and global measure, the content validity was assessed with feedback from a panel of seven experts in sport management and sport marketing.
The questionnaire was distributed to the undergraduate students by one of the researchers. The instrument included the focal social contribution measures, demographics and information regarding the sport participation and sport viewing habits of the participant. Individuals were not compensated for participation. Distribution of 230 resulted in 221 completed surveys. We conducted an initial assessment of the factor structures of the measurement models and the structural model by using confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood method. We also used a correlation analysis to examine how efficiently the five constructs of the global measure represents the same constructs of the composite measure.

We found the measurement models of the five constructs in the composite measure including social capital, collective identities, health literacy, well-being and human capital, fit well. In addition, the measurement models of those constructs show that the global measures represent the composite measures (correlation $r = 0.8$- 0.9). Further, the structural model shows frequencies of participation in or exposures to community oriented sports (e.g., intramural sports, soft ball league or a local community tennis tournament) have a positive impact on social capital, collective identities and health literacy, while frequencies of watching a university football game on TV has a significant negative on those constructs.

This study provides a new conceptual frame and measurement scale to assess the contribution of sport to society in more standardized and systematic ways so that policy makers or potential partners for sport related initiatives can be better informed of their value and roles. This study demonstrates that 10-15 items of the global measure for the contribution of sport to society can very efficiently represent the 80-90 items of the composite measure for the same constructs. Thus, we can apply the instrument using the global measure to different types of sport programs, events or activities to measure the multi-dimensional values of the contribution of sport. The final implication of the research would be to offer measurement outcomes of sport programs, events, or projects as a valued asset for a potential sponsor or partner who is willing to make contributions to society through sponsorship, partnership or corporate social responsibility.