Where People Play: A Research Symposium on Community Sport Club Management

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Organizational theory / culture  Saturday, June 4, 2011  2:25 PM  60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop (Room 11)

A growing body of research from a number of countries is examining various aspects of community sport (e.g., policy, capacity, innovation, volunteerism, financial resources, social capital, interorganizational relations; Cousens et al., 2006; Cuskelley, 2004; Hoeber et al., 2009; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Shibli et al., 1999; Tower, Jago, & Deery, 2006; Breuer & Wicker, 2009). It is timely to congregate several of the individuals undertaking this work and, at an international academic venue such as NASSM, present and discuss some of the key themes being examined. For some, the work has been prompted by regional and national sport and health policies that are drawing an increasing focus to the role of community sport in the physical activity of citizens. For others, there is a particular interest in the nature and mechanisms of the grassroots foundation of a country’s sport system; where its people play.

The purpose of this symposium is to provide a forum for the presentation of a range of research projects that have a common focus on community sport, and discussion that draws links and identifies gaps among those research efforts. This session comprises four presentations on research examining different aspects of sport club management. Community sport clubs represent the largest proportion of nonprofit voluntary sport organizations in many Western countries (e.g., Donoghue, Prizeman, O’Regan, & Noel, 2006; Gumulka, Barr, Lasby, & Brownlee, 2005; Lorentzen & Selle, 2000), and are where most people engage in organized sport (e.g., CFLRI, 2005; Delaney & Keaney, 2005). It is critical, therefore, to understand the challenges facing these organizations, and factors affecting their ability to achieve their mandates. Each presenter will provide a short overview of their research (or some aspect of it), as outlined below, followed by a chaired discussion among the presenters and attendees.

The first presentation reports on a mixed-methods study of organizational capacity in community sport in Canada. Capacity is defined as the ability of organizations to draw on various assets and resources in order to achieve their goals (Hall et al., 2003; Horton et al., 2003). Based on Hall et al.’s (2003) multidimensional conceptual framework of capacity in nonprofit voluntary organizations, focus groups were conducted with the presidents of 51 clubs to uncover elements within five dimensions of organizational capacity (human resources, infrastructure, financial, planning/development, external relationships) that are specific to sport clubs. A subsequent field survey study was undertaken (n = 336) to verify these elements as key strengths and challenges facing community sport organizations. Factor analyses revealed support for a working model of organizational capacity in community sport, with multiple elements within each of the five dimensions of capacity. The presentation reports on these findings and highlights directions for future research that include examining the relative impact of these elements and dimensions on various aspects of organizational performance.

The second presentation reports on several aspects of a longitudinal study of community sports clubs in Germany, the Sport Development Report. The project is based on a model of knowledge based governance and the concept of viable sport organizations (Breuer, 2005). It contends that systematic knowledge is used for the development of organizations and that, to remain viable, sport organizations have to adapt to their internal (shareholder, stakeholder) and external environment (government, community institutions, sponsors, etc.). A third wave of online data collection took place in 2009, with 19,345 clubs participating. Conventional methods of data analysis (descriptive, regression) and relatively new methods such as data mining techniques are applied. The findings indicate that investments in the formation of employees can reduce problems of sports clubs. Moreover, longitudinal data analysis indicates that sports clubs are viable organizations as they are able to substitute dwindling human resources (volunteers) with other types of resources. The findings have implications for sports clubs, regional/national sports federations, and policy makers. For example, there should be increased investment in the formation of employees, as well as increased recognition of voluntary work.

The third presentation is based on a project commissioned by the Central Council for Physical Recreation in the UK, to inform
its work of supporting and representing the voluntary sector in sport (Taylor, Barrett, & Nichols, 2009). A questionnaire survey was used to elicit data about sports clubs run by their members regarding membership, facility use, number of volunteers, volunteers’ roles, club income and expenditures. A total of 2,991 clubs provided information about facility use, while 1,975 clubs provided data on income and expenditures. The presentation considers implications for facility use, income and expenditures of sports clubs, in the context of major reductions in public expenditure announced in October 2010 and the Government’s policy objective of promoting a “Big Society” in which community activism is promoted.

The fourth presentation reports on an exploratory study of the process, attributes, and determinants of innovation in community sport organizations. This work contributes to a better understanding of how clubs are responding to pressures to change and innovate. Innovation is defined as “any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption” (Zaltman et al., 1973, p. 10). The conceptual framework consists of three stages of the innovation process: (a) initiation, (b) adoption/rejection decision, and (c) implementation; three sets of innovation attributes: (a) process/product, (b) technical/administrative, and (c) radical/incremental; and determinants of innovation at three levels of analysis: (a) managerial, (b) organizational, and (c) environmental (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). The research involved semi-structured, telephone interviews with presidents of 42 sport clubs in Canada. Data analysis involved coding and categorizing, and association rule discovery. Participants identified and discussed 188 innovations, with the majority classified as process (55%), administrative (59%), and incremental (88%) innovations. The presentation focuses on the particular determinants of innovation in community sport that were uncovered. The findings have important implications for building the capacity of community sport organizations to innovate in order to continue to provide sport programs and services that encourage, and meet the demands of, a physically active society.

The symposium is designed to cover a range of topics under investigation in community sport, and is not meant to be exclusive. Discussion of related ideas and research is welcome and will be encouraged as the session is structured to allow sufficient time after the presentations for interaction among the audience and presenters.