

## 2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

### Management of Diversity in Sport Organizations: Interrogating the Business Case

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**Diversity**

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(including questions)**

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Management of diversity has gradually supplanted equal opportunities initiatives to become a common discursive practice in many organizations including those in sport. Its use marks a shift from a focus on affirmative action and anti-discrimination policies with respect to specific groups to valuing a broad range of social differences among individuals (Wrench, 2005). This appreciation for difference is rooted in the assumed positive consequences that the presence of difference has for the performance of an organization. The emphasis on these consequences has been called the business case for organizational diversity. The business-case rationale assumes that the presence of social difference contributes to organizational productivity and efficiency (e.g. Catalyst, 2004; Thomas & Ely, 1996). This business-case rationale has helped to ensure that management of diversity, that is, valuing social difference, has become an important stated organizational value in the US and in Europe (Embrick, 2011; Heres & Benschop, 2010). Scholars have used this business-case logic to emphasize the relevance of their study of diversity in sport organizations by arguing that diversity influences organizational performance. For example, Cunningham (2011) showed how the presence of sexual diversity was positively associated with organizational performance. Fink & Pastore (1999) used business-based arguments to emphasize the relevance of their model for the management of diversity in sport organizations. They argued that (more) diversity could improve the effectiveness and productivity of organizations, increase their client base and enhance employee retention. Similarly, Cunningham and Melton (2011) argued that the discriminatory and marginalized experiences of gays and lesbians resulted in unique competencies that added value to their presence athletic departments.

This use of the business-case rationale for diversity in organizations has been problematized in the critical management and feminist literature but thus far has received relative little attention in the scholarly sport literature. Yet a critical examination of the management of diversity discourse and the related justification for the use of the business-case may help explain why change in diversity at the managerial level has been slow in coming. Despite organizational and managerial commitment to diversity, senior managerial levels in sport continue to be characterized by their homogeneity, due to the underrepresentation of social groups such as women, ethnic and sexual minorities (e.g., Hovden, 2012; Knoppers, et al, 2012; Lapchick, 2010; Pfister & Radtke, 2009).

In this paper we critically interrogate the use of a business-case rationale for managing and researching diversity in sport organizations. We use a post-structural lens assuming that management of diversity is not a neutral fact but a discourse that is informed by a constellation of social relations of power that constitute organizational members (Prasad et al., 2006; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). We begin by tracing the emergence of the diversity discourse as a reaction to equal opportunity policies that seem to benefit only specific groups such as women and minorities. Management of diversity in contrast, is assumed to benefit not only all individuals but also the organization, since its purpose is to create an inclusive culture in which all organizational members and their talents are valued (Herring & Henderson, 2011). The research in this area has yielded a great deal of insight and understanding of ways in which the management of diversity can be enabled and continues to be restrained in sport organizations. Subsequently, we examine the popularity and weakness in the association of the business-case of the management of diversity discourse. We argue that management of diversity approaches that are justified with the use of the business case may do little to diminish social inequality and instead may make the management of diversity discourse an "oppressive ideology" (Embrick, 2011). We then argue for alternatives to the business case rationale that may be more congruent with the erasure of systematic inequality and discrimination (see also Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Specifically, we explore how the justification for diversity, especially in sport, may be more congruent with the public values of a civil society than with the business case (Beck-Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007) and how/when the use of the business-case may be used as a temporary strategic rhetorical device.

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