Collaborative Governance: Mapping Future Sport Governance Research

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Ansell and Gash (2008) define collaborative governance as a “governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544). Collaborative governance has its origins in public administration and the need for government to work with multiple stakeholders to deliver major projects and services to communities (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Although grounded in public administration, collaborative governance has wider application beyond this sphere. The application of collaborative governance in federal sport systems where each association is a separate legal entity, yet collectively the regional associations form the national governing body is an area in which such an approach could have utility.

Given the specific challenges confronted by national and state sport organisations in a federal model to collaborate to ensure good and cohesive governance for the sport as a whole, the purpose of this paper is to examine and identify future research directions in this domain. Specifically, this conceptual paper applies Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh’s (2012) collaborative governance regime (CGR) to identify themes that can guide future research in the application of collaborative governance to sport organisations existing within a federal model. In recent years an emphasis on improved governance has been supported by scholars investigating sport governance (e.g., Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). This empirical work has highlighted the challenge of governance structures across multiple organisations in, for example, a federal sport structure (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Few solutions have, as yet, been offered to address the vexed issue of how separate legal entities in the same sport might work together in terms of effective and cohesive governance. A limited number of scholars have directed their empirical or theoretical attention to the role of collaborative governance in sport organisations, and in particular to those sport organisations that exist within a federal structure.

Emerson et al.’s (2012) development of the CGR was the result of an attempt to “develop a useful framework for collaborative governance with which to better understand, develop, and test theory, as well as improve practice…” (p. 4). The framework consists of three nested boxes or dimensions including system context, collaborative governance regime and collaboration dynamics. Each nested box represents a series of influences or processes important to governance. The system context (outermost box) represents the surrounding systems as they relate to the political, legal, socioeconomic and other environmental influences. This box depicts the enablers and constraints influencing a national sport organisation (NSO). The second nested box is labelled collaborative governance regimes and is central to the model. Within this box is a third nested box entitled collaborative dynamics and contains three interrelated components: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. These three interactive components are used to map the collaborative actions required to implement shared purpose through collaborative governance.

The implications of the CGR and its utility in respect of NSOs embedded in federal structures will be examined. For example, the system context allows for a review of the environmental conditions in which an NSO exists. Such a review would include NSO government relations in terms of policy and funding, profile, economic characteristics and resourcing. However, specific starting conditions which enable or constrain collaboration according to Emerson et al., are measured through an assessment of leadership, consequential incentives and interdependence. An NSO, for instance, requires the presence of an individual or individuals in a position to initiate and secure collaboration. In a federal model, as reported by Shilbury, Ferkins, and Smythe (2013), this is not so easy to achieve. This extends to the incentives for collaboration and the degree to which member associations view the need to work together to achieve broader goals they cannot achieve on their own. Eleven key questions are identified in relation to system
context and will be outlined during the presentation.

It is self-evident, that NSOs and member associations of the same sport need to share the same goal in respect of developing the sport. What appears as self-evident, is not easily achieved by many sports, and consequently, the CGR proposed by Emerson et al. has the potential to guide a deeper analysis for why and how a sport could institute collaborative governance arrangements, and as a consequence develop a coherent and untied strategic vision across a sport. NSO board leadership, is in particular, important in shaping governance behaviour of member associations and will be examined more deeply. It is this aspect of the framework that the majority of research questions are identified. Fourteen questions emerge from an examination of collaborative dynamics and what new knowledge is sought to better understand sport governance in this context.

The 25 identified research questions are ultimately distilled down to three overarching themes: 1) People, Leadership and Motivation; 2) Decision Making; and 3) Power and Structure. How these three themes are discerned is a focus of this presentation as well as how the themes provide direction for future collaborative governance research for NSOs grounded in a federal model of governance. Implications for collective board leadership are also discussed in the context of collaborative governance.