Sport for Who's Development? A Critical Examination of a City's Event Leveraging Strategy for Community Development

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Governance
Abstract 2015-133
Friday, June 5, 2015
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
2:10 PM (Joliet)

The concept of sport for development (S4D) is essentially to seek particular development goals through sport, most commonly social issues, health and education, and economic development (Darnell, 2008). Given that S4D-specific organizations often misalign their well-intentioned agendas with local demands that are resultantly met with the resistance of residents, it is a reasonable assumption that local governments may have a more accurate understanding of residential needs. The 1990s signaled a radical change in Canadian S4D, as neo-liberal policy implementation transformed local initiatives into increasingly targeted strategies (Houlian & White, 2002). Governments began to incorporate intentional S4D agendas into their broader development strategies, including the incorporation of S4D in bids for the hosting of large-scale sport events. The current Canadian Sport Policy (CSP) urges cities to purposefully leverage sport events to achieve social objectives and contribute to positive domestic development (Sport Canada, 2012). Sport events provide a powerful platform to initiate and deliver these efforts as they have been acknowledged as sources of national identity, social cohesion, and community pride amongst other social benefits (Schulenkorf, 2012). Literature examining the use of sport events for sustainable community development is lacking and more research is needed to test and further develop appropriate S4D framework. Herein, the purpose of this project is to further our understanding of cities' framing of S4D policies around the CSP.

The CSP operates through broad directions to shape provincial and territorial governments’ policies, wherein communities utilize the CSP as a “road map” for planning and organizing local policy direction (Sport Canada, 2012). This reinforces Veal’s (2011) research emphasizing that successful sport planning requires a localized approach, and that a “one-size-fits-all” approach does not appropriately account for local conditions. Although, local governments may have greater understanding of desired local outcomes, communities are often regarded as recipients rather than active partners in S4D projects (Schulenkorf, 2012), and their targeted benefits missed. Essential to successful S4D are projects initiated from within local communities, or “bottom-up” approaches wherein stakeholder groups are consulted for input (Schulenkorf, 2012; Veal, 2011). This approach is demonstrated in Schulenkorf’s S4D Framework (2012), designed as a guide for strategically designing, monitoring and evaluating S4D projects for directed social impacts and outcomes. Underpinning the Framework are three different, albeit interrelated areas: sport event management, direct social impacts, and long-term social outcomes; the latter resultantly influencing sustainable development and community empowerment through cyclical processes (Schulenkorf, 2012).

Therefore we turn our attention to a medium-sized Canadian city that has successfully utilized a bottom-up approach regarding S4D policy implementation. The city has recently experienced dramatic change following the decline of the steel and auto industry, and has resultantly bid for numerous large sport events to enhance their community development projects. The city is one of several host sites for an upcoming major sporting event, and has used the event to capitalize on community development initiatives. In addition this is seen as a unique research opportunity, as the city is not the main host of the event, and limited research exists around the nonhost cities involved in the hosting of an event (i.e., Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Ritchie, Shipway & Cleeve, 2009). The community surrounding the proposed games’ venue is a marginalized neighbourhood, wrought with unemployment, poverty, prostitution and drug use. Resultantly, the city has incorporated the sport event into their community development plan through part of broader community development policy. In order to holistically conceptualize the city’s S4D agenda within broader local developmental policies, numerous documents (i.e., news releases, bid documents, minutes of municipal meetings etc.) and archival records were collected and analyzed to form a case study as per Yin’s single case analysis (2008). In addition the use of a single case study method is most beneficial for critical examination when testing...
Also included in evidence collection were assorted city and neighbourhood meetings and open houses with various stakeholder, where community participation was encouraged, a key component of both Schlenkorf’s (2012) and the United Nation’s (as cited in Schlenkorf, 2012) concept of community building. While this study is still ongoing, initial analysis indicate several interesting findings surrounding the city in question. From early documents profiling the neighbourhood around the event venue, it is reported that there is a larger proportion of residents with activity limitations, one of the city’s aforementioned marginalized population. The city’s strategic plan for 2012-2015 indicates that increasing accessibility standards is a priority objective, and included in the 2015 event bid document is a mandate for a positive accessibility legacy for the city amongst several other nonhost sites. When examining the case against Schlenkorf’s S4D framework, we can see that there is a well-organized community action team made up of concerned residents, local businesses and institutions, that has take the role of Change Agent – parties who assist communities with developing projects for cooperation and sustainable development initiatives in cities (Schulenkorf, 2010). Preliminary results indicate Schlenkorf’s S4D framework is suitable for examining Canadian S4D initiatives amongst broader community development strategies, and that the city in question is implementing various “bottom-up” strategies that will likely leave beneficial long-term impacts to the community.

This study deepens our understanding of Canadian cities’ S4D policies framed around the CSP, as well as gives depth to S4D initiatives embedded within broader community development strategies. Canada has not hosted a major sporting event since the 2010 Winter Olympics and this continues to enhance our understanding of international major sport event hosting for sustainable outcomes. This is also seen as a rare opportunity to analyze a major sport event’s nonhost city leveraging the event for community development initiatives. This project contributes to the need for research to test and validate Schlenkorf’s (2012) S4D Framework, as well as fills the research gaps concerning sport events used as successful community development projects. The findings will be shared with the city in question, as well as a more accessible version online for the broader public in order for knowledge translation surrounding sport event hosting and related policy matters. Finally, the project adds to the scarce body of literature surrounding non-host cities of sport events, in order for host countries to develop increasingly holistic bids and outcomes for sustainable event hosting cities.