Sport Management “Student as Producer”: A Radical Teaching and Research Framework for Sport Management Studies

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Towards Establishing Critical Management Studies in Sport

The world of sports is transforming rapidly, especially after the turn of the century. In recent years, apart from the evolutions in records, stadia, broadcast and marketing; the world of sports has been involved in some of the most controversial moments of the new millennium. Scandals, like the Lance Armstrong drug abuse case, or the recent major FIFA corruption scandal; racist and other equity issues – e.g. Caster Semenya case; and most importantly, a growing opposition against the hallmark sporting events, the World Cup and the Olympics (Lenskyj, 2008; Shaw, 2008; Zervas, 2012). These phenomena, along with the global economic crisis and the political reconfigurations in Europe and Asia, signify the fluid environment of sports in post-millennium era. The question which derive from this realisation for all the academics, and specifically those of us in sport management courses, is: are our graduates capable of identifying this complex situation? Are they “equipped” with those skills and knowledge to deal with the new challenges in the modern workplace and answer to the calls of society?

From the mid “noughties” there were several academics that pointed out the need of re-evaluating the curriculum of Sport Management studies in Higher Education. Sport management programmes have repeatedly criticised for lacking critical perspective both in terms of curriculum and research (Frisby, 2005; Amis and Silk, 2005; Shaw and Frisby, 2006). More specifically, sport management programmes had been accused of focusing, largely, on profit-oriented approaches, in consistency with conventional management programmes (Frisby, 2005); thus, widely ignoring social considerations on equity and diversity (Shaw and Frisby, 2006) and leaving graduates unable to cope with the complexities of modern workplace. The significance of those academic’s work - especially Wendy Frisby’s – to sport management can be seen on the impact which it had on HE programmes around the world. Slowly, but steadily, the importance of incorporating the Critical Social Studies (CSS) tradition into sport management curricula, was starting to be acknowledged, and the debate for the future of sport management studies was on.

Still, there are a lot to be done, further than appreciating the contribution of CSS to the theoretical concepts of sport management. In the last decade, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid into conceptualising the contribution of CSS to sport management research (Knoppers, 2015), and more importantly, even less progress has been made into sport management “praxis”. Alvesson and Spicer (2012a) call for “critical performativity” on management and condemn the “stupidity-based” theory of organisations (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012b). This critique derives from a functional inability, of current leadership and management theories, to use intellectual capacity in order to deal with social crises and furthermore to reflect to contemporary challenges. For these reasons, more effort must be made towards establishing a solid theoretical tradition of Critical Management Studies (CSM) in Sport, as described by Wendy Frisby, among others. And beyond that, we ought to work towards forming an intervening academic framework for HE, which will enable our graduates to “take action in times of crises”.

Towards a Research-Engaged Sport Management Curriculum.

In the last five years, University of Lincoln in the UK, has launched an ambitious project called “Student as Producer” (Neary and Winn, 2009; Neary, 2012). This “organising principle” is based upon the concept of research-engaged teaching, which promotes research and research-like activities across the entire undergraduate curriculum (Neary, 2014). As Mike Neary - the academic mind behind this radical idea – explains; the whole concept of “student engagement” in HE is based on finding ways to incorporate student intelligence in quality processes for teaching and learning, and involving students into research projects (through collaboration with academics) of real intellectual value. This academic framework focuses on placing the students at the heart of the institution, as producers of knowledge, and in extend, as producers of history.
This radical idea, according to Neary, derives from a single question posed by Walter Benjamin in his “author as producer”: “How do radical intellectuals act in a moment of crisis?” (Benjamin, 1934 cited in Neary, 2014: 27). Clearly, “student as producer” academic framework is only about achieving teaching excellence, but also a way to train graduates, who will become better citizens and better professionals. It urges them to “take sides”, participate in decision making and investigate social power. It is the essence of critical social research, as a mean of acting towards progressive social transformation, linking theory and practice.

The implementation of student as producer in sport management courses, requires a critical academic framework (as described above), a specific bureaucratic basis (from the institutions) and a commitment to radical interactive teaching and assessment methods. This presentation will present the findings and conclusions of an ongoing process of implementing the basic principles of student as producer framework, while incorporating a critical science tradition of sport, in the new sport management course launched by Leeds Trinity University. The aim is to contribute further to the discussion of the future of sport management studies and to the creation of a solid academic tradition of critical management studies in sport. And I honestly believe that by enhancing critical research in this field and by re-evaluating its academic context, we can expect to have more qualified graduates, more reflective sport professionals, and more responsible citizens in the coming future.

References

Neary, M. (2014). Student as producer: Research-engaged teaching frames, Council on Undergraduate Research, (35)2, 28-34