Mapping the Landscape of Sports Facilities Management in Trinidad & Tobago: A Critical Approach

Sherlan Cabralis, University of the West Indies
Cornell Foo, Auburn University at Montgomery
George Schaefer, Auburn University at Montgomery

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In the global landscape of sport facilities’ management, the presence and maintenance of sports infrastructure is paramount to the success of any organization (Wicker, Breuer, & Pawlowski, 2009). More specifically, a national approach aimed at supporting governmental policy objectives to fostering sport participation calls for a great commitment towards providing adequate sport infrastructures for all stakeholders (Houlihan, 2002). The complexity involved with a national approach to providing an acceptable sport infrastructure according to Wicker (2009), lies with the level of variability that exists from sport to sport and facility to facility. Therefore, success is not only dependent on an acceptable supply of sports infrastructures, but equally dependent on proper management.

Modern global sport facilities have evolved in size and functioning from their ancient predecessors (Fried, 2015). This change has seen a greater emphasis on organizational structure in the context of managing extensive physical infrastructures. Conversely, the sports infrastructure within the Caribbean region fails in stature to these. Evidence of this lies in the fact that sport facilities are small and dated structures with minimal technical oversight or requirements. More specifically, Trinidad and Tobago has over 568 small, community sports, and recreation facilities in use, which are managed by either local authorities or the central government. These facilities are very under-utilized and poorly maintained. This managerial dilemma is further compounded by the fact that the government of Trinidad and Tobago is in the process of completing construction of three international sports facilities; a cycling velodrome, a tennis center and an aquatic center. The estimated cost is around $800 million in Trinidad and Tobago currency ($126 million US). Lacking what may be defined as an inadequate sport infrastructure, these grand investments will certainly require sound facility management to ensure a positive return.

Governmental oversight in Trinidad and Tobago within the past decade may be characterized by many as slow and ineffective when it comes to the infrastructure for sports. However, September 2015 saw a change in leadership and a new commitment towards local government reform. Historically, there were several attempts at local government reform during the post-independence era of 1962. This brought a resurgence of establishing committees and commissions of enquiries as precursors for reform, but very little, if any results were evident (White Paper, 2013). Notwithstanding the slow movement, the 2009 and 2013 white paper report both included a Facilities Maintenance and Physical Infrastructure Division with a Facility Management Department underpinning the ideal opportunity for Sports Facilities Management review.

This study while exploratory in nature is first geared towards mapping the landscape surrounding the sports infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago and secondly, critically assessing facilities management protocols currently in place. The rationale for this comes from the fact that, public sport and recreation centers have been generally managed by local authorities since the mid-1980s; i.e. managed by teams directly employed by local authorities (Kung and Taylor, 2010). Since then however, there seems to have been a shift in responsibilities and an increased dependency on commercial sector contractors and trusts; this despite the fact that the majority of the management functions are still the responsibility of the local government authorities (Audit Commission, 2006). With the new outsourcing trend combined with the fact that local government authorities are essentially still charged with the initial responsibility, there seems to be some overlap and confusion with the management functioning involving these commercial sector contractors and trusts. Specifically, all sports and recreational facilities in Trinidad and Tobago are directly managed by fourteen (14) Regional Corporations. These corporations are responsible for the local facilities in Trinidad and The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is over the facilities in Tobago. In support is the Ministry of Sport who is responsible for all national facilities. The lack of a defined organizational structure and transparency has resulted in the rise of informal management arrangements between the Regional Corporations and
local individuals, clubs and groups. These arrangements are the genesis for this research as they offer a possible option to management that may positively impact the quality of service.

The methodological approach for this study will be qualitative in nature. As a case study, this project will allow for a critical examination of the sport infrastructure and organizational map of Trinidad and Tobago (Merriam, 1988). A combination of semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis will be used to collect the needed data with the purpose of mapping the landscape surrounding the sports infrastructure and critically assessing facilities management protocols currently in place. Eight Directors will be interviewed; specifically 6 of the 14 Regional Corporations based on population densities ranging from high to low, the THA and Ministry of Sport. Interview questions were generated from an extensive review of literature. The qualitative methodological approach will offer participants the opportunity to respond freely to the question(s) presented.

While there is a strong belief that qualitative research may limit the impact and generalizations of findings, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) make the argument that a qualitative approach brings a bit of reality to the research process. The validity of findings for this project rests on the data collection procedures involving semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents analysis. The implications of this study will bring clarity and define an organization structure that may be more beneficial to the operations of sport facilities. Results will be discussed in the presentation.

References