Sport for Development in Canada: Perspectives from National Sport Organization Leaders

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Sport for Development - Other (Other)  
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Sport for development (SFD) is an increasingly popular context for sport management research (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016; Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Chalip, 2015). In North America, researchers have uncovered critical capacity elements for SFD organizations (Authors, 2015; Svensson, 2015; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016); explored how partnerships influence resource acquisition and the importance of sustainable resource planning for SFD initiatives (MacIntosh, Arellano, & Forneris, 2016); reported how sport can serve as a vital entry point to social services and networks of friendship and support (Scherer, Koch, & Holt, 2016); and continued to challenge conventional views of the power of sport through critical sociological analyses (Darnell, Chawansky, Marchesseault, Holmes, & Hayhurst, 2016).

In Canada, SFD goals are codified in the Canadian Sport Policy (2012) which supports the use of sport “as a tool for socio-economic development and the promotion of positive values at home and abroad” (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012, p. 14). However, many SFD initiatives are promoted and funded by professional sport organizations, including the Toronto Maple Leafs; Toronto Raptors; and Toronto Football Club through the Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) Foundation (Authors, 2016). International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) including Right to Play are also funding and promoting initiatives in northern Ontario (MacIntosh, Arellano, & Forneris, 2016) and across Canada (righttoplay.ca). Yet, despite support from the private sector and INGOs, sport leaders who are responsible for “governing all aspects of sport in Canada” (canada.pch.gc.ca/eng/1414085745696) are notably absent in this area. Indeed, scholars have suggested NSOs consideration of SFD is at odds and may conflict with their primary focus on sport development for high performance (e.g. Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010).

Thus, the current study seeks to engage sport leaders (NSO Presidents and Executive Directors) in this discussion, and examine their views regarding existing (or potential) SFD programs in their respective sports. Specifically, this research will explore whether NSO leaders experience “institutional pluralism” (Kraatz & Block, 2008) facing competing expectations for sport development and SFD in the Canadian Sport Policy. Following a framework for institutional pluralism (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2010), the investigators will determine whether SFD is a divergent expectation for NSOs; what are the nature of the demands for SFD facing NSOs; and what is the strategic response of NSOs to expectations for SFD. The framework outlines that organizations facing institutional pluralism may respond by eliminating or avoiding one of the demands, compartmentalizing and dealing independently with the demands, attempting to balance the demands, or establishing a new organizational form to address both demands (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2010). The strategy chosen depends on whether the focal demand is ideological (e.g. “we should do this”) or functional (e.g. “we have to do this”), and whether pressures are internal or external.

Semi-structured audio-recorded interviews with a purposeful sample of leaders of up to 30 NSOs in Canada are underway. The interview guide was developed by the investigators to determine the demands facing NSOs with regard to SFD, and their response to any divergent expectations. The sample was identified based on the history of the sport engaging in SFD at the community, national, or international level. Open coding will follow the framework for institutional pluralism; namely, the nature of demands and strategic responses (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Pache & Santos, 2010) with further emergent coding that allows sub-themes to be identified (Patton, 2015).

Waldman and Wilson (2015) note that “top level executives remain an underrepresented group in research on [sport for development and peace]” (p. 21). The current study addresses this gap. The findings are expected to contribute to the SFD literature by providing valuable insight into the perspectives of senior sport leaders regarding the role of NSOs in SFD. The institutional pluralism perspective provides a vantage point from which to examine potentially
competing demands of sport development and SFD, with implications for addressing any conflicts through policy and strategy.