Governance, Control and the Demise of the Voluntary Sport Sector: International Comparative Cases from Canada, UK, and Cyprus

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Abstract
Declining participation in sport has been observed across many developed, industrialized nations (Downward et al., 2014; Ferry and Fahlén, 2016; Harris, Nichols and Taylor, 2017; Widdop, King, Parnell, Cutts and Milward, 2017). Research has also noted the importance of volunteers to sport, including their role in the delivery of sport programs and events (Taylor and Morgan, 2017) yet notes that there are difficulties in recruiting volunteers in sport (and challenges associated with retaining volunteers. This persistent pattern in participation and volunteering is problematic given rising government investment in policy (Kang et al., 2015; Klostermann and Nagel, 2014), infrastructure (Wicker et al., 2009; Wicker, Hallman and Breuer, 2014) and numerous programs designed to increase participation and its associated positive social and economic impacts (Fahlén, Eliasson, & Wickman, 2014).

Research on declining participation has primarily focused on individual barriers (Wicker, Hallmann and Breuer, 2013), with considerably less research on organizational determinants (Cochrane Report, 2008) which represents a gap in our understanding of how to increase participation and volunteering as a large majority of organizations involved in sport delivery are community sport organizations. Efforts to increase participation through community sports clubs have occurred primarily through top-down control mechanisms designed to ‘enhance’ governance and professionalization at the grassroots level (Byers, 2017; Sport Canada, 2017). The purpose of this research is therefore to investigate the impact of changes in governance and control in community sports organizations on participation and volunteering. We present a theoretical and methodological approach to build a comparative case repository of community sports organizations.

Theoretical Framework
Declining participation (including volunteering) is defined as a ‘wicked problem’ (Sam, 2009; Rittell & Weber, 1973) because it (a) is difficult to define and often symptomatic of other problems; (b) cannot be solved with a single solution, policy or intervention but requires the collaboration of multiple stakeholders; and (c) has unintended consequences which need continuous monitoring to redefine the problem as interventions are applied. Governance and control are conceptualized using Byers, Anagnostopoulos and Brooke-Holmes’ (2015) holistic model.

Methods
Case studies of community sports organizations and their governance will be conducted in Canada, Cyprus, and England initially. The case design will follow the Byers et al. (2015) conceptualization of governance and control to examine how changes in governance and control mechanisms may have impacted on sport organizations efforts to increase participation and volunteering. Data collection methods will include qualitative and quantitative data. This presentation presents preliminary findings and welcomes discussion and collaboration in this attempt to build an international repository of cases to compare and deepen our understanding of community sports clubs and specifically provide comparative data on the effects of changes in governance and control of these organizations on participation and volunteering.