Olympism for Humanity in Action: Systems Thinking and Science-driven Action Research for Change and Development

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Method - Mixed-methods (Other)  Saturday, June 1, 2019
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  10:35 AM
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Over the past few years, sport and Olympic Studies researchers have been concerned about the impact and relevance of their research (Jarvie, 2007; Lyras 2007). In particular, there has been ongoing interest in the potential that sport programs can have if properly implemented for positive personal and social development (Green, 2008). Consequently, there has been substantial effort to identify and categorize the potential uses of sport (Coalter, 2012) and Olympism in Action (Lyras, 2007, 2017), to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for sport to enable positive benefits from sport (Hartmann, 2003), and to formulate means to integrate theory with practice when seeking to use Olympism-based programming for purposes of change and development (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011).

The consequent challenge has been to identify research strategies that can enhance formulation and implementation of programs that are likely to render desired impacts and that can also enable development of useful theory. It has been argued that action research can perform that function (Chalip, 2015) and potentially, under certain conditions-embrace the role of Olympism in Society (Lyras, 2017). Several action research efforts have been reported but have been limited to small scale organization or program development, such as creating support for young elite athletes (Richardson, Gilbourne, & Littlewood, 2008), fostering emotional regulation in sport organizations (Wagstaff, 2013), and designing after school sport programs (Holt et al., 2013). More substantial Olympism-based application of action research to enable broad-based social change has rarely been attempted.

The effort to develop effective evidence-based interventions that incorporate sport and Olympism for Humanity in Action has been hampered by the challenges of making sport relevant to the needs that targets of change deem most relevant, and by incorporating target populations into the research process throughout formative, monitoring, and outcome evaluation stages (Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoeber, 2005; Lyras, 2007, 2012). Those problems are exacerbated research foci that treat sport in isolation rather than considering the ways that sport can be integrated effectively with non-sport resources in the local community (Chalip, 2006, Lyras 2007). It has been demonstrated elsewhere that planning and evaluation of effective change requires ongoing analysis of the prevailing socio-ecological systems (Cote & Nightingale, 2011), as does the implementation of change tactics (Asheim, Smith, & Oughton, 2011).

This presentation describes tactics for enabling broad and sustainable social and personal change strategies that incorporate Olympism as core a element (Lyras, 2007). Key elements include challenging predominant assumptions, building theory dialectically, using systems thinking, and confronting contingencies that distance researchers from those who are seeking change. Examples from the presenter’s work in Cyprus, Japan, USA and South East Asia are used to illustrate the means and the challenges.

Participants formulate applications for their own work by utilizing an integrated and applied theory and praxis. Those applications are then further developed in order to formulate shared and complementary research agendas. Finally, consequent potentials and means to establish and sustain a network of scholars using Olympism action research to design, implement, and evaluate broad-based change initiatives using sport are elaborated.