Trade-offs with Legitimations for Sport: The Case of an Elite Youth Development Program and its Effect on Salubrious Socialization and Community Development

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Based on the notion youth development programs should benefit their participants, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the youth development outcomes of one such program and to ascertain whether “trade-offs” arise in its attempt to achieve these benefits. Through the analysis of case study data collected over eight years from an elite youth development program in the Southwestern part of the United States, we aimed to assess how the emergence and growth of this program has affected the salubrious socialization and sense of community among its stakeholders.

Both sense of community and salubrious socialization are seen as potential sport-for-development outcomes (Chalip, 2006). Of particular interest in this study is the potential for trade-offs to arise when programs attempt to achieve two or more sport-for-development outcomes; do measures towards salubrious socialization (e.g., individual focus on members) come at the expense of overall sense of community (e.g., larger focus on members and their community). As of yet, there is scant research on these potential trade-offs. What we do know is that most youth sport development programs generally have more than one goal in mind (Richards & Foster, 2014; Wallis & Lambert, 2014). Thus, it is important scholars examine the dynamics of potential trade-offs that arise when programs attempt to achieve two or more external goals.

For purposes of this study, interviews and document research were sources of data utilized. In an effort to access individuals who possess knowledge of inner workings and internal purposes of the program itself, purposive criterion sampling (Creswell, 2007) of “members” and “non-members” was employed. Participants consisted of approximately 30 individuals representing the noted member and non-member criteria. Data were also collected from public sources (e.g., online discussion boards, local newspaper articles, meeting minutes) to provide additional insight into the operations within the youth program and discussions related to the program in the public space, providing some perspective for the analysis of the interview data collected.

Results of this research revealed the youth development program was developed to increase the quality of sport, athletes, and coaching in the area, thereby causing an increase in salubrious socialization and talent development among its member stakeholders. Yet, because the program most likely lured the best resources and players away from other recreational programs in the area, the authors found that community development was adversely affected by rifts within different organizations and communities directly and indirectly affected by the program. Other important trade-offs between Chalip’s (2006) legitimations for sport were investigated and will be forwarded.

This study contributes to our understanding of sport-for-development programs and introduces the notion of “trade-offs” in this particular field. According to Schelenkorf and Adair (2014), “Some stakeholders within [sport-for-development], whether out of naivety or by design, are overly optimistic about the aims and efficacy of the programmes they either fund or deliver” (p. 5). Such optimism often translates to a long list of sport-for-development when the program is designed, without any consideration for how the program should achieve these goals over time.