

## **Empowerment as a means of sport promotion**

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### **Introduction**

During the first half of the nineties the political scene in South Africa has changed drastically. The apartheid system was totally replaced by a new dispensation in regard to for instance, the philosophy, policy, values, norms, practices and institutions of the new government. In order to attain its goals the new government published the Reconstruction and Development Programme (R.D.P.) in 1994 (A.N.C. 1994). In the R.D.P. sport and recreation are seen, together with education and training, literacy, further education and skills, arts and culture and youth development, as an integral part of reconstructing and developing a healthier society. The process of development of sport and recreation was formally started with the acceptance of related laws and the national policy *White Paper on sport and recreation*. In 1998 the Free State (one of the nine newly formed provinces) also published its White Paper. To attend to the aspects highlighted by the White Papers the Free State Province decided to first undertake research (sponsored by the Flemish Government) in order to obtain an overall picture of the needs of the previous disadvantaged communities regarding sport and recreation. The objective of this paper is to report on a section of the research results of an extended pilot study that has focused on the transformation of sport and recreation in the province. This paper will give attention to three matters: (a) The political context – mainly at municipal level – of sport and recreation development before and after 1994; (b) An overview of research results; (c) The attainment of cultural based sustainability regarding sport development through empowerment of sport officials and entrepreneurs.

### **Method**

Empirical, qualitative research was conducted in 2003 over a period of 6 months in a rural, densely populated area (estimated population of 336 000) in South Africa known as Qwaqwa. The area was previously a self-governing state of the South Sotho speaking people, but since 1994 it became part of the Maluti-a-Phofung municipality situated in one of five districts of the Free State Province. Twenty-nine of the thirty-four wards of the Maluti-a-Phofung municipality (being the original Qwaqwa area) were selected as the study unit with the municipal councillors (each ward has one) and their sport committees/representatives as major sources of information. A compressed research design was followed in which data collection was obtained through typical ethnographic techniques, namely two structured questionnaires, on site observations of facilities and in-depth interviews with key informants (e.g. councillors, municipal staff and sport organisers/club owners). The goal of the exploratory research was mainly to find descriptive information regarding the preferences in sport and recreation as well as the changes over time and therefore the procedures for data analysis were aimed at interpretation, comparison and understanding.

### **Discussion**

The political and public structures responsible for sport development within the Qwaqwa context are still in their infant stage. After the first municipal election (held in December 2000) a tiresome process followed to get the municipality structures and management in place. The municipality management paid in the first instance attention to bread and butter needs. Thus, the first councillor on the mayoral committee responsible for sport and recreation was only appointed on 25 February 2003. The major findings of our research regarding sport and recreation in Maluti-a-Phofung municipality (Nel & Esterhuyse 2003) reflect the difficulties of a very poor community with a high unemployment rate (57%), where involvement in sport and recreation is not a central motivating force in the people's life-style, but is predominantly seen as a means of employment, financial gain and to keep children away from television and drug and alcohol abuse. Nonetheless, we found that the younger generations (35 years and younger) are enthusiastic about sports participation and are trying to keep a variety of sports codes alive despite badly neglected and vandalised facilities, very little proper equipment and basically insufficient funds to pay for club membership, tournament fees, transport and clothing. Even though we do not deny the

severity of these circumstances, we have recommended that the first priority should be to strengthen the support system.

One of the key mechanisms in building a support system for sport and recreation is the idea of empowerment (cf. Friedmann 1992). The most common form of empowerment is developing on the one hand, the organisational structure by establishing offices and official decision-making bodies (e.g. sports committees, forums), or on the other hand, to enable sports officials to attend training seminars/workshops for coaches, managers or technical matters. On the surface there is nothing wrong with this type of thinking, but we are convinced that sustained empowerment will only be accomplished through cultural means and by focusing on human development (Cernea 1991; Chambers 1997). Sustainable cultural empowerment means that individuals (in this case sports officials) should become educated through training programmes that are founded on three cornerstones: Entrepreneurship, community involvement and reflexivity. Promotion of sport and recreation will only transpire if sports officials will introduce novel cultural based solutions for the problems of poverty, unemployment and ignorance (to name but a few) (cf. Chernushenko 2002). Any project or training that do not directly involve the community will have little chance of success (cf. Sands 1999; Stringer 1996). By involving the community, issues such as voluntarism, vandalism and spectator support will be addressed. Although it could be a long and exasperating process, it is certain to get the community to take ownership of facilities, sports activities and future development of sport and recreation. Community involvement will also ensure that any promotion of sport will be familiar in cultural thinking and practices. Lastly, an attitude of reflexivity should be encouraged in sport drivers/entrepreneurs and sport officials (cf. Schön 1995). This means that training programmes should enable the attendants to become proficient in consciously reflecting on their own cultural actions, thoughts and ideals, as well as their situation regarding sport and recreation. They have to become confident and independent thinkers who will be able to position themselves and their communities in the global world of sport.

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