

MANAGEMENT OF SPORTS DEVELOPMENT: AN EMERGING ACADEMIC FIELD AND A PROFESSION

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INTRODUCTION

Sports development is enjoying a growing interest in academic, professional and policy circles worldwide. Despite its popularity, however, sports development remains an under conceptualised and loosely constructed academic area. Most texts have been written from a narrow sport perspective and little attention has been given to the nature of the development enterprise, at the heart of which are the people and not objects or targets. Even less has been said about its management. This paper twins sports development with management and develops an argument for the justification of the management of sports development as an academic discipline and a profession.

METHODS

Drawing on the rich tradition of development studies literature, the study uses analysis, observation and interviews to interrogate the corporate writings and practices of a number of local, national and international organisations, and university curricula. In particular, examined were sports development practices of local authorities, regional developmental agencies and Sports Governing Bodies (SGB) in the UK, as well as the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Solidarity and Federation Internationale de Football Association's Goal programmes, and academic courses listed on UCAS.

RESULTS

Traditionally, sports development (SD) has been concerned with practice, and there has been little attention to its theoretical aspects. Two high profile international conferences (Maggingen, 2003, 2005) reinforced this tendency. Reducing sports development to practice ignores the meaning of development as a vision and process of social change, but at the same time it also urges us to consider sports development practice as an important source of theory building. Years of experience with the management of development both in the 'developed' North and 'underdeveloped' South have shown that the 'main stream management' techniques cannot produce the desired outcomes due to the prescribed behavioural patterns they promote and their neglect to local cultures and indigenous knowledge production. UCAS lists 246 SD courses offered by 46 UK institutions with no clear development/management orientation.

DISCUSSION

This paper advances three key contemporary meanings of sports development as a vision (a desirable end state), process of social change, and practice expressed in the deliberate efforts for improvement of human conditions (Thomas, 2000, Schech & Haggis, 2000). The concept of sports development is presented as a social construct and contested knowledge battlefield, a perception, and a collective endeavour, which reflects specific visions about the purpose of human life, time, progress and social change. It is also a process of intended state practice, a form of relationship between developers and developed, a specific language with its meaning generating capacity, and a set of functions performed by managers.

Building on Thomas (1999) it is contended that the management of sports development has as its main concern a clear developmental orientation. Seen as a vision the focus of management will be for sports development aimed at a progressive and sustainable change. Many otherwise excellent sports programmes fall short to

deliver developmental outcomes because of their short-term orientation. Considered as a social change, the role of management is realised in the context of sports development process. Of particular importance here is to understand the framing of change unfolding simultaneously at the level of society, community and individual. When conceived as practice management becomes of sports development and is concerned with various interventions. Its focus is both on delivery and sports development-as-leverage (Edwards, et al, 1999).

The management of sports development possesses three interrelated aspects: normative (for), which reflects various ideals of development; analytical (of) dealing with how the specific tasks involved in different interventions have to be managed; and process oriented (in), which sets it 'not simply as a set of tasks to be performed but an ongoing set of relations, changing and emerging, affected by communication, perception, behavioural problems and styles, which need to be nurtured, developed or changed on a continuing basis' (Linstead, 1997, p. 88). It is value-laden and differs from the 'main stream' management in its orientation and starting point. Thus, couching the management of sports development in terms uncritically borrowed from the tenets of the New Public Management (NPM) school of thought is highly problematic. This is because the NPM is not simply a neutral and technical set of activities, performed by technical experts, but an ideology and a normative system.

Bernstein (2006, p. 53) argued that 'what justifies development studies as a specialism in its own right is the presumption that it is dedicated and equipped to generate applied knowledge in the formulation and implementation of development policies and interventions'. Virtually all academic writings dedicated to sports development have centered on three sets of issues: (i) how to use sport for personal development; (ii) participation in sport and how to increase it; and (iii) inequality and how to overcome it through sport. Lawson's, (2005) comprehensive study provided support for this conclusion noting that sport, exercise and physical education professionals strive to achieve three interrelated aims concerned with improving the wellbeing of people, of places, and government policies. Thus, the management of sports development as an academic discipline implies an expressed concern with generating applied knowledge in the form of development policies and implementations. This definition of the management of sports development locates it in the realm of political, social and historical as well as the management and organisational science. As an academic subject it has to contain both applied and non-applied theoretical aspects ranging from policy analysis to social and personal change and running of practical programmes. The methods for knowledge generation and dissemination used by students and practitioners of management of sports development need reconsideration to accommodate its people orientation and cultural specificity.

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