

Session: **Managing sport in upcoming economic conditions III.**

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### **Managing Community Sport Under Neo-liberalism: Dealing with the Issues**

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#### Background

Neo-liberalism has produced many issues throughout local and global societies, most prominently the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Regardless, it will take time for these issues to be reversed or even subside: especially at the local level. While all levels of national sport delivery have to deal with issues of less government funding and the need to seek alternate resources, the need to create and deal with policies that reflect this ideology, and the need to deal with the regulations, accountabilities, and other aspects of managerialism, it is community sport that has the least ability and resources to deal with these issues. The focus of this paper is firstly on these issues.

In previous arguments the author noted the risks to community sport and to its sustainability by managerialist impositions (Zakus, 2009a, 2009b). Results from other studies indicated the issues faced by volunteers who are at the “heart” of world sport; where individuals are first introduced to sport and where they first develop as sportspersons. This paper secondly reports and discusses issues raised in an empirical study to add further suggestions on how they might be rationally dealt with: With these suggestions having great salience for the graduates of sport management programs.

Perspectives of both paid staff and a large sample of sport volunteers in a state sport organisations and associations were gathered in the Australian state of New South Wales as part of a consultancy project. Data from both perspectives will be reported, with the key focus being on the latter group.

#### Methods

As noted above this paper reports on the findings of completed research in Australia into the issues confronting, the innovations implemented, and the sustainability of community sport organizations (CSOs) or voluntary sport organizations (VSOs) (Ringuet, Cuskelly, Zakus, & Auld, 2008). These reports are based on both qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups and on quantitative surveys derived from the former. The surveys sought information on issues arising from: personal matters, social and system factors, and those inherent in CSO/VSOs. The surveys were delivered online after being pilot tested. Both types of data will be presented at the conference.

The overall potential sample of 632 identified and targeted volunteers (based on particular sporting contexts) resulted in a sample of 242 (38.3%) individuals who agreed to take part in the study. This resulted in 227 completed surveys being submitted (93.8%).

## Results

In identifying salient issues, there was much commonality between paid staff and volunteers. In particular, the key findings of import include the following: In terms of personal issues, family pressures, pressures of paid work taking more time, and lack of knowledge and skills for certain roles were identified. Organisational issues included: roles were too demanding, too many pressures to obtain resources (especially financial ones), and succession of volunteers were listed. Finally, social and sport system issues included: increasing expectations, contrarily a great deal of bureaucracy, managing risk, a loss of a sense of community, and the lack of flexible employment options were noted. These reinforce findings of Auld (2008), Doherty and Mizener (2008), Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell (2008), and Zakus (2009a, 2009b) in sport contexts, which add to an extant literature in economics, political science, sociology, and new fields such as New Public Management (NPM) (see Paulsen, 2006).

## Conclusion/Application to practice

In the above issues it is clear that neo-liberalism and its handmaiden managerialism have played an important role. As it is unlikely that these ideologies will go away quickly or totally, new ways to structure work and new fields of employment for sport management graduates are indicated.

Many people have to work more than one job or longer hours for less return or both adults (if present) must work to support families under the current economic ideology. The author has argued elsewhere (2009a) that work must be rethought and restructured to ensure that public goods such as the community provision of sport will continue.

A key argument is that sport management graduates take on a “social welfare” role to aid VSOs; skilled graduates manage the regulatory, accountability, resource acquisition, and risk management issues beset on VSOs. An example would be a sport manager who works for a handful of clubs to deal with the management issues just identified and let the sport volunteers deliver sport as they seek to do; without the burden of neo-liberal managerialism dictates.

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