

The politics of sport regulation and policy in post-apartheid south africa – paradoxes of global and community imperatives

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Introducing the 2011 National Sport Conference, the National Sports Minister averred that many strategies to transform sport in post-Apartheid South Africa had failed. This included racial transformation, policy formulation and was evident in the relative lack of success by South African athletes and teams. He argued that the lack of a strategy and the failure of developing a single “developmental theory for post-apartheid South Africa” were key paradigmatic shortcomings in both policy and implementation. In response, the development of new policy and strategies for implementation are currently subject to vigorous deliberation throughout civil society and government sport institutions. The current National Sports Plan (2011), for instance, is being presented as a national “strategy (shifting) from policy to action”. Nonetheless, these debates are not new. In 2005 and in 2010, the South African Sports Ministry lamented that it was inconceivable that after nearly two decades of democracy, contestation over sport transformation and development remained the most vexing and divisive issue for post-apartheid sport.

In this paper I examine post-apartheid sport strategies and policies, critically assessing the increasing tension and contestation between elite and community sport, highlighting the way in which unresolved tensions between global and local imperatives have deepened inequalities in post-apartheid sport rather than mitigated them. The paper will explore the factors that influenced national post-apartheid sport objectives, and the ways in which global interest groups shaped the local policy discourse. I will argue that an acceptance of global imperatives by the post-apartheid South African government has shaped sport policy and strategy in ways that are often detrimental to community sport and civil society sport organizations at the local level. During 1990, international sports bodies such as the International Olympic Committee pressurized South African sports bodies

to reintegrate into international sport, undermining the calls by local sport activist organizations to focus on complex post-apartheid realities such as reconstituting sport institutions and redistributing scarce resources. Over the ensuing decade, pressure intensified on national sport institutions to embrace global changes and commit to an elite and increasingly global sport discourse. I explore the ways in which these tensions, contestations, discontinuities and contradictions influenced South African sport policy, institutions and resource distribution at community levels in particular. I critique state centered post-apartheid sport discourses that have privileged international and elite competition, to the detriment of community sport between 1990 and the present.

Conceptually, I locate my analysis within a Foucauldian governmentality framework (Foucault 1991), focusing on the field of power and its negotiations at global and national level. I focus on the way in which the post-apartheid South African state negotiated these influences in shaping the post-apartheid sport policy agenda at local level (Houlihan 2009). Focusing on power relations and governmentality assists in critically assessing the ways in which the South African government continues to shape the policy agenda, rhetoric and delimits and subordinates the roles of various institutions and actors in a global and local context. Building on analysis by Sam and Jackson (2004) in the context of New Zealand, I assess the paradox inherent to South African sport policy, specifically the policy conundrum between the need for centralized government agency and action that often occurs at the expense of empowered, but ultimately fragmented civil society institutions at the community scale. A qualitative methodology was employed focusing on critical engagement with policy documents and in-depth interviews with 18 national and local sports policy practitioners, exploring the tensions highlighted above.

References:

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