

A framework for interdisciplinary research for managing community sport

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Background

Following recommendations outlined by Doherty (2012), this paper adopts an interdisciplinary research approach to understanding the effective management of community sport. In doing so, it provides a framework that enables scholars to build on, broaden, and extend knowledge to date regarding community sport.

Community sport has been referred to as the 'fabric of the community,' given its extensive local presence and impact (e.g., Misener & Doherty, 2009). It encompasses a wide range of recreational and competitive programs and activities engaged in by children, youth, adults and older adults, alike. Community sport is also uniquely characterized by a heavy reliance on volunteers for its governance and delivery (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006; Doherty & Misener, 2008). There is a growing body of research in the field of sport management addressing problems and issues in this critical segment of the sport industry. However, an interdisciplinary research approach may be expected to advance understanding of community sport through the combination and integration of multiple perspectives.

Interdisciplinary research involves several scholars, from different disciplines, working closely together to identify a research problem or question, design a study, and interpret the findings. Interaction among scholars from different disciplines can generate creative approaches to study new or even existing questions, and generate new insights (Bruhn, 2000). It is distinct from disciplinary research, which we are most likely to find in sport management scholarship (cf. Bruhn, 2000; Love & Andrew, 2012), and which involves a researcher(s) from a single discipline investigating a problem, and likely building on previous research and knowledge from within that distinct discipline or particular "way of observing, thinking and formulating problems" (Bruhn, 2000, p. 61). While the same problem may be investigated relatively independently by researchers in several different disciplines, research is interdisciplinary when the particular perspectives of different disciplines are interrelated with each other in order to consider a problem, a study design, and findings from a new, joint perspective (Buller, 2008). Doherty (2012) argues that interdisciplinary research allows us to more effectively address complex problems in sport and examine phenomena from different angles. This may also help to generate research that better "impacts, and is meaningful to" the management of community sport (Amis & Silk, 2005, p. 355).

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework of the multiple disciplines that may be engaged in a systematic research program that advances understanding of effective community sport management through integrated scholarship. The framework was developed through several stages: (1) a systematic review of empirical literature pertaining to community sport management to capture what problems have been addressed and how; (2) identification of academic

disciplines that have been used to investigate community sport management to date; and (3) identification of additional/alternative disciplines that may be useful to inform and shape community sport research.

The framework and implications

Presentation of the interdisciplinary research framework is facilitated by a graphic illustration. It is important to include in the framework a compilation of work to date, as indicative of existing knowledge pertaining to given issues and how they have been investigated. Thus, the first layer of the framework presents the findings of the systematic literature review identified in stage 1. These include, but are not limited to, a focus on sport volunteerism and volunteer management, organizational capacity, innovation, partnerships, sport development, and sport delivery. A second layer of the framework highlights the academic disciplines that are the basis for those investigations (identified in stage 2), allowing us to focus on the scholarly perspectives rather than just problems studied. These disciplines include, broadly, human resource management, governance, policy, organizational theory, community development, and sport for development. Finally, a third layer of the framework proposes additional disciplines that may inform the study of problems and issues around managing community sport, and interpretation of findings (e.g., urban geography and planning, community psychology, ethics, child and youth development, law, accessibility, Aboriginal studies, anthropology); through an integrated approach in which scholars work together to, perhaps, reconceptualize what and how we study, and ultimately understand about, community sport. The rationale for the inclusion of these disciplines is addressed.

The framework provides a roadmap for advancing interdisciplinary research for managing community sport. Perhaps most importantly, it first provides a foundation for discussion about interdisciplinary research in this context, and the form and academic disciplines which that could involve.

References

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