

# **Insight, Critique and Transformative Redefinition: Making Sense of Sport-based Intervention Programmes Through the Lens of Critical Management**

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## **Aim**

This paper interrogates the process and outcomes of a sport for Development programme in the south of England using a critical management studies (CMS) approach as its analytical lens. The significance of this paper lies in the retrospective application of CMS and the emergence of particular tensions, dilemmas and controversies that have implications for policy making and programme design in the context of sport management. Specifically, this paper clarifies how established frameworks for managing sport development programmes are subject to power, control and domination through relative policy contexts and technologies of practice.

## **Objectives:**

To establish how a specific sport development programme can challenge dominant approaches to management and control

To clarify and challenge neoliberal technologies as organising concepts in the management of sport projects

To establish how transformation can be achieved through managing sport differently

## **Theoretical Background**

Despite Frisby's (2005) call for more critical sport management research, there still appears to be a general lack of engagement with this field of research. Critical management in this regard may be problematic as it requires individuals to refocus (Knoppers, 2015) on what it is to manage and how we might think of management. Recent research has moved away from dominant instrumental and managerialist approaches (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) to more sociologically infused approaches. Knoppers (2015), for example, has argued that sport management scholars can usefully adopt a sociological lens as a means to develop a 'critical reflexivity' in the study of power and social inequalities in sport management. It is in this spirit that we invoke the key elements of critical social theory, namely insight and critique and transformative redefinition in our analysis (Frisby, 2005).

Critical Management Studies (CMS) is an umbrella research orientation which embraces various theoretical traditions including anarchism, critical theory, feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism and psychoanalysis. In this respect it represents a pluralistic, multidisciplinary field. CMS is often associated with business/management schools, but has global presence, which suggests that it is a research approach. Accepting that there is no particular 'right' way of doing CMS our analysis, using critical social theory, seeks to challenge a dominant vision of sport development practice (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011) and suggest how a sport intervention programme based in the south of England can provide a model for reconstructing the way we might think about managing sport development practice.

## **Research Methods**

The research was designed to capture in-depth and longitudinal data from both programme participants and key stakeholders involved in the programme over the duration of three years.

Data collection consisted of interviews and focus groups. Sampling for participant interviews and focus groups was based on the range of programme activities. In total, eleven focus groups took place; football (two, each of four participants), fishing (three, each of two participants), boxing (two, each of two participants) and gym-based activities (four, each of three to four participants). In addition, eight participants participated in individual interviews, six for gym-based activities and one each for boxing and football activities. The participants involved in the research were all male aged between 19-45 years of age. There were also nine semi-structured interviews with key agency representatives and six interviews across all partner sport and leisure providers. All interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The analysis of data employed qualitative content analysis to deconstruct and interpret data in a logical and coherent manner.

### **Discussion, Implications and Conclusions**

The findings indicate that the use of a wide range of free, regular, structured and semi-structured opportunities across a range of sports and physical activities whilst integral to the programme was not the transformative mechanism. The findings suggest that the distinctiveness of this programme was the lack of predefined or prescribed outcomes from the implementer and funder. This created a bottom-up orientation that embraced the needs of the participants and developing programme provision organically over time. We argue that there are significant implications for policy makers and practitioners whose interests are served by operationalizing sport management/development programmes. CMS allows us to view these concerns as fundamentally embedded in relative contexts of enforcement, technologies of evaluation and how forms of domination impact on asymmetries of power in the performance of sport management practices. We conclude by arguing that this programme, by simply sidestepping managerial straightjackets, is able to challenge, reconstruct and be more effective in meeting needed social outcomes through sport.

### **References**

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