

The Governing of Governance: Metagovernance and the Creation of New Organisational Forms within Canadian Sport

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Background

The Canadian sport landscape has been characterised by significant change in recent years, yet there has been scant research examining the nature of these changes. In parallel to these developments, there has been a growing interest in the creation of new organisational forms in response to increasing political and environmental change (Misener & Misener, 2017) and the role of non-traditional actors in delivering sport and leisure services. The broader outcome of the above has been an increasing recognition and need for sport management scholars to keep pace with these developments by drawing upon new theoretical approaches in which to help theorise and understand these new organisational and systemic responses to environmental change.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to theorise recent developments within Canadian sport as a form of metagovernance (i.e. the governing of governance) by drawing upon two empirical case studies of newly created organisational forms within the Canadian sporting context. More specifically, we focus on the inter-organisational dynamics between state agencies (Sport Canada) and quasi-autonomous organisational entities (Own the Podium and Sport for Life) to examine the nature of these new governance arrangements and whether their creation has extended governmental control over Canadian sport. In theorising recent developments within Canadian sport as evidence of metagovernance, we explore further the implications of the proliferation of these new organisational forms for Canadian sport landscape in general and for sport practitioners specifically.

Theoretical Background

This study is primarily informed by governance theory and builds upon discussions surrounding the ‘governance narrative’ (Grix, 2010) that most closely aligns with public administration and political science understandings of governance (Bevir & Rhodes, 2010). In particular, we draw upon the notion of metagovernance as an alternative conception of governance which “refers to the role of the state in securing co-ordination in governance and its use of negotiation, diplomacy, and more informal modes of steering” (Marsh, 2011, p. 35). It is for this reason that it is often described as ‘the governance of governance’ in that the state (or any powerful actor) can adopt a more strategic role in coordinating actors within networks in order to achieve its objectives.

Methodology

To support our contentions, we draw upon empirical data collected as part of two previous studies (Dowling & Smith, 2016; Dowling & Washington, 2017), which examined the changing role, and influence of these new organisations in Canadian sport. These data included semi-structured interviews with Sport Canada officials (n=5) and members of the Sport for Life leadership team (n=17) and organisational and policy documentation (n=27) relating to the creation and development of Own the Podium.

Results

The analysis highlights the similar trajectories of the two case-study organisations and reveals similar underlying patterns of control by Sport Canada in that both newly created entities have been used to strengthen the governmental agencies' capacity and reach over the sport sector. More specifically, we focus on how these organisations have influenced Sport Canada's ability to govern as they help reveal the inherent nature of these new governing arrangements and the underlying mechanisms through which Sport Canada has utilised these organisations in order to achieve its own objectives.

Conclusion and Discussion

We argue, therefore, that while new organisational forms have undoubtedly been beneficial to developing sport within Canada, it is important to recognise how these resource dependent organisations are being utilised and leveraged by government, often through negotiation, diplomacy and other informal modes of steering in order to achieve its own objectives. The proliferation of sport organisations across Canada and many other countries in recent years should not necessarily be viewed as the devolvement of power to sport organisations, but rather an attempt by government to re-order governing arrangements in order to respond to the growing complexities of increasingly pluralistic networks. We consider the implications of findings for sport organisations and practitioners

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