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**‘Creating and Managing a Sustainable Sporting Future’**

**Guest Editors**

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**Editorial**

**Re-thinking Sport and Physical Activity: Management Responses to Policy Change**

**Purpose and Scope**

This special issue contributes to a critical understanding of the challenges key stakeholders across the globe encounter as they seek to manage periods of transition brought about by public policy change relating to the provision of sport and physical activity. Such challenges have for example, characterised work across the UK where policy change and subsequent strategic responses have been predicated on an alternative vision for the development of an active nation through engagement with a broader physical culture. This engagement typically requires established stakeholders across sports sector to operate as part of a new configuration of actors where partnerships are encouraged with a range of public, private and third sector organisations. In the UK the governments sport strategy ‘*A sporting future: A new strategy for an active nation*’ (2015), which has promoted concerns for wellbeing, is reflected variously in physical activity, community development, public health, education and environmental agendas.

Seeking a wider range of outcomes through sport-based interventions and establishment of partnerships with non-sport sectors is characteristic of policy aspirations internationally (e.g. Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Lyras & Welty-Peachey, 2011; Mansfield, 2016; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008; Trendafilova, Ziakas, & Sparvero, 2017; Weed, 2016; Weed et al., 2015; Ziakas, 2015). This special issue, triggered by the thematic problematics emerging from the UK Sport Development Network (UKSDN) 2017 conference, seeks to uncover the global challenges in terms of managing the re-orientation of stakeholder activities and organisational strategies in response to re-alignments of sport policy.

The resulting collection of papers in the special issue constitutes a balanced synthesis of contributions from those present at the conference and from academics and practitioners who form part of the wider global sport and leisure management research community.

### **Issues, Challenges and Trajectories**

Sport and physical activity have become increasingly prominent in recent UK political debate and policy development (Bloyce & Smith, 2009; Houlihan, 2013; King 2014). Most commentators suggest a ratcheting up of such engagement took place as part of the New Labour administrations (1997 – 2010) attempts to address a range of social, educational, health and community challenges through sport, whilst the interventionist tenets were carried through into the Coalition government of Cameron and beyond. At the same time, the principles of sport-based interventions associated with individual and community development initiatives, are reflected internationally, for example through the relatively recent Sport for Development and Peace movement; whose principles are explored and critiqued by a series of commentators (Coalter, 2007; Darnell, 2012; Levermore & Beacom, 2012). Perhaps the greatest challenge in this process is evaluation of the efficacy of sport and physical activity-based interventions in delivering anticipated outcomes. This has led to a growing body of literature which addresses emerging evaluative frameworks and questions the capacity of sport-for-development to achieve many of the claims made for it (Coalter, 2013; Schulenkorf & Adair, 2014). The potential for such narratives to penetrate the policy domain, given the outcomes-based nature of policy making is worthy of consideration when attempting to map the future trajectory of sport and related policy areas.

The example of the UK Government's most recent public sport policy document (*Sporting Future*) is illustrative of signaling a fundamental shift in the approach to engaging more physically active lifestyles. It envisaged such engagement as predicated on forging partnerships outside the traditional sporting community as a means of promoting behavioural change amongst those alienated by the mainstream sporting culture. As in any policy shift, the management of funding streams has become a key tool in the pursuit of these new priorities. In response to this shift toward physical activity broadly defined, the role of local coordinators and providers has become pivotal for sport and physical activity provision and delivery. To respond to the changing political environment, local sport organisations must re-

imagine their mission and recalibrate their objectives. This special issue is concerned in part, with better understanding that ongoing process. From this perspective, we can examine the responses of sport organisations to the waxing and waning influence of key strategic partners and the emerging dichotomy between ‘sporting’ and ‘physical’ cultures. This line of inquiry can suggest approaches to the management of these tensions and pinpoint subsequent research priorities required to better understand the emerging physical activity landscape worldwide.

Strategies for increasing sport participation exemplify the conventional dichotomy between sport narrowly defined as organised/structured, and physical activity broadly defined as unstructured/recreational encompassing different forms of physical expression. The divide is clear within an institutional landscape, which promotes a disconnect between the delivery of sport and physical activity and subsequently constrains the development of integrated approaches. The fragmentation of organisational actors along with the constant change of local sport and physical activity priorities, restrain the development of stable collaborations between agencies involved in sport and physical activity (Lindsey, 2009). In the case of the UK, the activities of multiple stakeholders operating locally against the backdrop of a rapidly changing policy and funding environment, generates additional complexity with attendant management issues. For example, the management of sport services by Local Authorities faces challenges around accountability, equity, service quality and sustainability (King, 2014). At the same time, the role of regional sport coordinators and providers is construed in a number of contrasting ways by partner agencies, creating the potential for misunderstanding over the shifting priorities for sports development (Mackintosh, 2011). This creates concerns about the effectiveness of the Government’s physical activity and sport participation strategy at the local level (Grix & Phillpots, 2011); concerns that are brought into sharp focus at a time of rapid change and thus challenge the sustainability of sport and physical activity provision strategies. At the same time, from a global perspective, the economic downturn and the imposition of austerity measures in different countries limit available funding for sport organisations (Giannoulakis et al., 2017; Parnell et al., 2018).

The reduction in funding and the imperative to enhance capacity to secure funds from alternative sources has created increasing pressures on non-profit sport development organisations already experiencing a number of operational and strategic challenges (Berry & Manoli, 2018). As a result, these organisations have to institute re-structuring towards a more

entrepreneurial model in order to align with the new realities and serve their sport-for-development, educational, well-being, public health, economic or environmental purpose. This raises questions about the position of non-profit sport development organisations within the sector and the extent of their operational reach. It is at such times of transition that the more unpredictable future policy priorities become, that the more transient policy networks appear as individual stakeholders responding to rapid policy changes through strategic re-positioning. At the same time, the environment within which sport organisations operate is itself changing – through for example, climate change, demographic shifts, changing features of local economies and alterations to the structures of local government and governance. The responses of sport organisations to these new realities will differ greatly depending on location, institutional structures and leadership. There is a need therefore to illuminate the increasingly erratic trajectory of sport development service providers.

### **Overview of Contributions**

The special issue contributions highlight the changing social, economic, environmental and policy contexts within which sports organisations operate and seeks to understand the need for new approaches to partnership working, physical activity re-scoping and integrated education programming in response to these changes. The first article by Legg, Jones and White examines Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in United States Youth Sport. They argue that as youth sport programmes are delivered by public recreation agencies in the United States, the current political environment creates increased pressure to either increase fees or “contract out” to private providers to compensate for budget reductions. This study contributes to understanding PPPs as an essential driver to the sustainability of youth sport by analysing the perceptions of PPPs that involve public recreation agencies and private youth sport providers. In a similar vein, the need to attain economic sustainability for the management of public sport facilities is raised in the second article by Findlay-King, Nichols, Forbes, and Macfadyen who examine how volunteer-led sport facilities have transformed services for local communities in England. The paper explains how the transfer of public sport facilities to management led by volunteer groups (for example in the form of local Trusts) has increased the responsiveness of services to local needs; whilst at the same time reducing running costs. This also promotes volunteer effort by changing the public perception of the facility to an asset created by the community, rather than just as a public service consumed by it.

The third article by Dingle and Stewart expands the focus on the relationship between sport and the environment by investigating the implications of climate change for major sport stadia in Australia and their subsequent organisational responses. The study demonstrates that the primacy of commercial and operational imperatives determine organisational responses ahead of government climate policy. Given that different public policy and regulatory responses to climate change apply across the globe, this article brings to the fore the need to further understand how sport managers interpret climate risks to inform management processes and effective adaptive responses. The pragmatic connection of sport to the natural environment is not only apparent in the context of facility management but is also evidenced in the domain of outdoor recreation. Mackintosh, Griggs and Tate in the next article look at the growth in importance and scale of the outdoor recreation sector in the United Kingdom. They establish a five component model to help understand the growth in this sub-sector of the wider sport and physical activity industry. From determining the factors that are underpinning the growing importance of the sector, the authors go on to draw implications for policy and practice in sport policy and development in the UK and beyond. In addition, they identify potential future research directions for those working in outdoor recreation and physical activity spaces and places.

The intersections of sport and social sustainability are brought to the fore in the next two articles. These examine the potential of sport to enable social change, given that community organisations are increasingly employing sport-based programmes to foster social as well as individual development. Ekholm and Dahlstedt provide a critical analysis of philanthropy and the promotion of sport-based interventions in Sweden. They examine two midnight football projects located in two mid-sized Swedish cities that aim to promote social inclusion. Their study explores how supportive community actors conceptualise their charitable contributions that enable opportunities for under-privileged youth to participate in sports. They find that these interventions are guided by certain notions of the good society and of the good citizen. The article concludes that involvement of community actors provides a site for realising particular visions of social change. Along the same lines, Walker focuses on a sport-based project delivered by a Housing Association in Glasgow. The programme uses rugby to promote personal development and employability for unemployed individuals, incorporating behaviour change processes to help participants move into potential employment. The research demonstrates that participants perceived an increased sense of belonging

demonstrated by increased autonomy, relatedness and the development of competencies necessary for future employment opportunities. The paper identifies that the provision of these key skills provides a key step towards work-readiness, benefitting both the individuals and the Housing Association community investment activities; extending their role as social landlords.

The potential of sport to enable social change is also predicated in the leveraging of sport events for positive legacy outcomes by the next two articles. First, Bell and Daniels focus on legacy following the 2016 BMX World SuperCross event held in Manchester at the National Cycling Centre. This article considers the impacts on people, processes and practice, or 'soft legacy', through the realistic evaluation of two BMX projects established around the hosting of the BMX World Cup event. Using a realistic evaluation framework the impact of attempts to leverage social and sport development outcomes in particularly challenging circumstances and communities are highlighted. This paper has implications for those planning event-based sport development interventions that are used as part of an attempt to engage hard-pressed communities. Second, Postlethwaite, Kohe and Molnar highlight some additional challenges for event-based sport interventions in the context of London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic legacy planning. They explore how London's 2012 educational legacy programmes, such as the Get Set programme, affected relations between stakeholders in the Olympic and Paralympic movement, and those in the UK sport and education sectors. They explain that discourses emerging around the purpose of the educational programmes and London 2012 were a missed opportunity. The findings also highlight a tension between competitive sport-based and values-based education discourse. Furthermore, a tension was created from the fragmented accountability between the local organising committee and the host city. The findings encourage stakeholders to reflect on potential fragmented accountability and the purpose of sport-based educational programmes.

The final two papers examine the role of education to achieve sustainable sport development. Mwaanga, Dorling, Prince and Fleet focus on the management challenges associated with the implementation of the Physical Activity Teaching and Learning (PATL) pedagogy. The authors study the case of three schools on the Isle of Wight (UK) that have adopted PATL as part of a holistic island-wide intervention aimed at increasing pupils educational attainment, health and wellbeing. This has entailed a shift for some UK schools towards promoting a physical activity culture that complements traditional PE and school sports provision.

Findings support PATL pedagogies as a holistic and joined-up policy response to this challenge. However, they also highlight the need for critical conversations in order to unravel and unlock collaborative solutions when discussing physical activity in schools.

The last article by Graham, Trendafilova and Ziakas explores how the gaps between environmental sustainability and sport management education can be bridged. Their study conducted an audit of environmental sustainability courses offered in sport management programmes in North American higher education institutions; this was complemented by a series of expert panel interviews regarding the benefits, drawbacks and challenges of including sustainability in sport management curricula. Findings reveal that there are significant barriers to adopting environmental sustainability in sport as a stand-alone course and module. The paper suggests ways to overcome barriers and integrate environmental and sport management education.

### **Present Tensions, Future Avenues**

The special issue sheds light on evolving responses to the management of sport and leisure at a time of changing policy priorities. The international mandate of creating active lifestyles requires the exploration of the policy trajectory, appropriate mode of governance and local service delivery models. As the papers in this special issue illustrate, the fluid nature of the contemporary sport policy domain means that its boundaries are increasingly difficult to define. Public policy areas of transport, environment, education, health, social, community and economic development all provide links to the sport and physical activity agendas. To maximise the potential of sport and physical activity discourses to penetrate these extant policy areas, stakeholders are increasingly required to operate as boundary spanners, that is to identify areas of common concern and effectively manage relationships as organisational entrepreneurs. At the same time, conceptually, there is a need to address the dichotomy between sport and physical activity, perhaps synthesised as physical culture. This involves the re-constitution of regional sport strategies centred on physical activity, while re-thinking roles, responsibilities, parameters and partnership-building as shaped by the funding imperative and the subsequent partnership responses to the new sport-physical activity environment. Within complex sport policy environments, we need to find innovative means to better connect national sport-physical activity participation policies with local network



entities and non-sporting sectors. On the whole, a new reality is manifesting itself in search for new skill sets and competencies. In response, sport organisations need to become more externally facing; establishing links and networks with non-sport sectors to develop strategic intelligence that traverses long-established insularities, and promoting adaptation to changing conditions. Such a process cannot only contribute to re-defining sport but also in identifying novel ways for building and managing a sustainable sporting future.

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