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A Case Study of Regional Sport Organization Development in Triathlon

Andrew J. Martin
Andrea N. Eagleman
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Abstract

The current qualitative case study examined how a Regional Sport Organization (RSO) in New Zealand dealt with macro and micro environmental pressures in the development and evolution of increasing participation in the sport of triathlon over a 15-year period. Organizers managed a total participation increase from 300 adult participants in 1999 to close to 1,200 in 2012–13. An increase in child participants from 300 in 2004 to 3,400 in 2012–13 also took place. Archives of the results of the respective adult and children's series of triathlon events from 1998–2013 were analyzed along with the environmental pressures. The findings indicated that informal and formal organizational responses to internal and external pressures directly or indirectly assisted in increasing sport participation of adults and children. These responses involved new events targeting different groups and periodic adaptive organizational infrastructure review/change. Implications of the research included the highlighted importance of ongoing sport product changes and enhancements and the use of formal internal and external review processes, such as the Organization Development Tool, for community or regional sports to support increased physical activity and participation.

Keywords: *activity; participation; triathlon; community; organization*

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Introduction

Organization initiatives that increase a community's sport participation, physical activity, and health are important (Casey, Payne, & Eime, 2012; Green, 2005; Henderson, 2009; Mummery & Brown, 2009; Priest, Armstrong, Doyle, & Waters, 2008). In particular, declining or stagnant sport participation (Vail, 2007), and obesity as an epidemic have affected both developed and developing countries worldwide (Blair, 2009). Recent social science studies indicate that social networks involving family, defined as parent and child, impact participation (Green & Chalip, 2005; Kirk, 2005; Kremarik, 2000) specifically in conjunction with healthier behavior, education, and sport management intervention in physical activity (Griffiths & Rainer, 2009; Henderson, 2009).

There is extensive research on physical activity and health-related initiatives in sporting environments (e.g., Henderson, 2009). However, Priest et al.'s (2008) review of research studies noted that there was a lack of high-quality evidence to support effective interventions by sport organizations to increase and sustain accessibility and opportunities through which social networks can support physical activity and sport participation (Humpel, Owen, & Leslie, 2002; Hannon, Craddock, Gortmaker, Wiecha, El Ayadi, Keefe, & Harris, 2006). Misener and Mason (2006) indicated that "if we are to truly understand how different cities are using sport for community development, numerous case studies of different cities and events need to be performed to develop empirical evidence regarding impacts on community networks" (p. 51). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to examine the ways in which a New Zealand-based Regional Sport Organization (RSO) for the sport of triathlon adapted to environmental pressures over a 15-year time period to increase participation amongst community members. The research framework for the study is informed by social network theory, which is covered in greater detail in the following section.

Social Network Theory

Social network theory has received increased attention recently in the sport management literature (Love & Andrew, 2012; Misener & Mason, 2006; Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008), as it allows researchers "to explore and identify the existence of collaborative patterns between particular groups" (Love & Andrew, 2012, p. 246). Quatman and Chelladurai (2008) indicated that social network analysis provides a description of the relationship among the entities of interest and attempts to explain the how and why of the observed relationships, as well as the factors that forge these relationships. In applying this theory to sporting contexts, Misener and Mason (2006) argued that "sporting events bring large numbers of people together and involve local community" and "new social networks are being created through participation, planning, volunteering, and often consumption of, events" (p. 50). However, Love and Andrew (2012) indicated that social network theory has been used sparingly in the study of sport, despite the clear link be-

tween organizational development and the value and benefit of social connections (Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008).

Literature Review

The current study sought to use social network theory as a frame for examining an RSO's responses to environmental pressures in order to increase participation amongst community members in triathlon. Therefore, the following literature review focuses on similar research conducted on community sport organizations' and clubs' participation rates. The review outlines the need for a multidimensional approach that develops organizational partnerships and volunteer capacity alongside increasing access opportunities and more welcoming environments aimed at enhancing family participation.

The rapid growth and development of "grassroots" community sport has impacted the volunteer leadership and nonprofit organizations' capacity (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Casey, Payne, & Eime, 2012; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sharpe, 2006). Misener and Doherty (2009) supported "the use of a multidimensional approach for generating a comprehensive understanding of organizational capacity in community sport, and for identifying where and how capacity may be enhanced" (p. 47), particularly the critical factor of human resource capacity (Sharpe, 2006).

Vail's (2007) study of increased and sustained community tennis participation focused on developing collaborative partnerships and delivering a quality sport program involving a community champion. Whilst the program was successful, it was identified that partnership building needed education and training. Amis et al.'s (2004) review of six case studies of Canadian National Sport Organizations (NSOs) reinforced the important role of volunteer leadership in developing sport organizations' capacity for change. Casey et al. (2012) explored 10 State Sport Organizations (SSOs) in Australia and indicated that some achieved system changes by implementing formalized club development programs. Once again, these changes were dependent upon the organizational capacity for change and required a broad range of partnerships to build programming expertise.

Eime et al.'s (2008) study of sporting clubs recommended that to increase membership there needed to be a move away from providing only participation programs, and instead clubs should work toward developing healthy and welcoming environments involving the support of key volunteers. Along those lines, human resource capacity was identified as the most critical factor influencing club development in Misener and Doherty's (2009) case study of organization capacity in not-for-profit community sport, which was consistent with the work of Sharpe (2006) involving grassroots sport. Sharpe (2006) also indicated that there was a need to expand the volunteer base in community sport organizations and that little research had been undertaken at the grassroots level of sport in terms of developing organization capacity. Following their community engagement project, Mum-

mery and Brown (2009) pointed out that “physical activity interventions present enormous challenges for researchers. There is still a great deal to be learned about the mechanisms of community engagement, the effectiveness of community coalitions... which when implemented simultaneously in a coordinated approach, will result in behaviour change in populations” (p. 41).

Green (2005) argued that mass sport participation at the grassroots level is at the base of a pyramid leading to high performance. However, Henderson (2009) noted that greater understanding was needed of how to manage sports as a means for promoting active lifestyles for both children and adults. Humpel et al.’s (2002) review of adult participation indicated that accessibility, opportunities, and aesthetic attributes had significant associations with physical activity. Kirk’s (2005) review of England’s strategy for physical education (PE) and sport suggested that traditional primary and secondary school PE programs had largely been ineffective in promoting lifelong physical activities and there was a need for development of interventions centered on the multi-sports club and modified physical activities that foster a task climate. Kremark (2000) argued that family involvement was critical to long term participation of both adults and children. Children who received family support, or had parental involvement in organized sports as participants or volunteer administrators were significantly more likely to participate than other children.

The purpose of the current study sought to build upon this previous research in an attempt to fill gaps in the literature regarding effective interventions in developing an increased and sustained social network of community sport participation by adults and children. Specifically, the research focused on the case of an RSO for the sport of triathlon in New Zealand. The following section provides greater details and context regarding this case.

Case Context

Adapting Triathlon

Triathlon (swim, bike, run) provides the opportunity of enhanced cross training, physical activity, and health benefits (Loy, Hoffman, & Holland, 1995). Some people perceive the word “triathlon” to mean the original longer version of the sport, the Ironman triathlon (3.8K swim, 180K cycle, 42.2K run), although in reality, triathlons vary widely in their distances. Because of the common misconceptions about the distance and necessary fitness level, converting triathlon into a regular and accepted physical activity for the whole community (male, female, older adults, children, and families) is of particular interest to this current study. An Olympic distance triathlon consists of a 1,500m swim, 40K cycle, and 10K run. This event has been shortened to a half distance “Sprint” triathlon, consisting of a 750m swim, 20K cycle, and 5K run. Both the Olympic and Sprint events now have world championships and international age group events.

Increased triathlon participation in New Zealand. In contrast to the overall sport participation declines indicated above, the sport of triathlon over the past decade has shown increased numbers globally, particularly in New Zealand (NZ), where growth has been substantial, “with a 94.4% increase since 2000” (Triathlon New Zealand, 2009, p. 26). For example, total participation numbers in the national summer series of events rose from 47,000 to 87,000 between 2000 and 2009 (Triathlon New Zealand, 2009). Triathlon also became an Olympic event in 2000, with NZ enjoying positive results, winning the gold and silver medals in the 2004 Athens Olympics and a bronze in the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

In the current NZ case study of a Regional Sport Organization (RSO), distances have also been adapted. At a national level the Olympic and Sprint distances have national series and championships. A shortened 3:9:3 (300m swim, 9K cycle, and 3K run) and 1:2:1 have been introduced to attract newcomers to the sport and primary school children, respectively. A national ladies-only series targeting female participants and the Weet-Bix Tryathlon series, for children ages 7–15, also use formats similar to 3:9:3 (a 1:4:1 format is used for kids aged 7–10). The Weet-Bix has awarded over 200,000 medals since 1993 (Weet-Bix Tryathlon, 2011).

Event death. In 2001, the death of a participant in a recreational cycling event (‘Le Race’) in Christchurch, NZ, resulted in a conviction of the event organizer for criminal nuisance. The organizer was criticized for failing to run a safe event, although the defense criticized the deceased for not following the event rules and not taking responsibility for her own safety. After the trial, numerous event organizers in NZ cancelled events for fear of being prosecuted if there was an accident (Lynch, Jonson, & Dibben, 2007). According to Lynch et al. (2007):

The polarization of opinion that arose around the trial signaled concerns about the unwritten relationship of trust between event organizers and participants (p. 47) ... The Le Race incident (irrespective of the legal outcome) illustrates the vulnerability of the organizer and the participant when the trust relationship breaks down or is not maintained, or is not observed (p. 60).

The organizational development tool. The NZ Government’s Sport & Recreation (SPARC) agency’s financial support of clubs was delivered through Regional Sport Trusts (RSTs) who administered (as a prerequisite for awarding this funding) a review of sport clubs, providing recommendations for organizational management development. The Club Assist project and subsequent award provided an organization health check using a self-review tool. SPARC further developed and formalized this initiative into the Organization Development Tool (ODT), which is available for national and regional sport organizations (Sport New Zealand, 2013). The ODT is a practical and comprehensive process designed by experts as part of Sport New Zealand’s focus on developing increasingly capability, sus-

tainability and success in sport and recreation organizations at national, regional and club levels. It provides a comprehensive ‘warrant of fitness’ to help identify strength, weaknesses and priority areas for measuring improvement.

The tool is offered in three different versions, supporting national sport organizations (NSOs), RSOs, and clubs (Sport New Zealand, 2013). All are based on the six-module framework outlined below (see Figure 1), which reviews aspects of an organization’s leadership, planning, customer focus, sport delivery, people management, and internal sport management. This ensures every facet of the organization is assessed. The tool is supported by a five-step development process as follows: preparation, assessment, report, development, and review. Implementing formalized and systematic review programs to support club development were also highlighted by Casey et al. (2012) in their examination of implementing health promotion programs Victorian State Sporting Organizations in Australia.

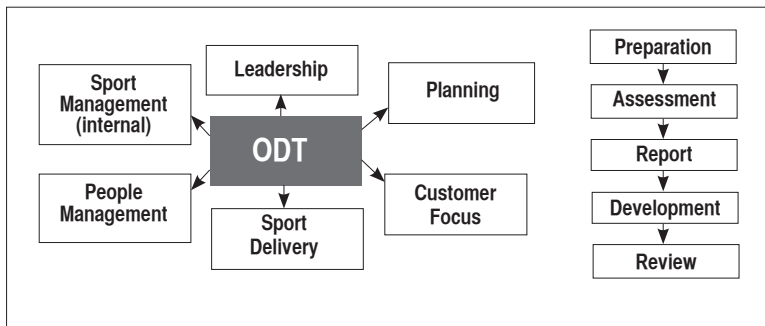


Figure 1. The organizational development tool six-module framework and five-step development process (Sport New Zealand, 2013).

The triathlon RSO case. The objective of the current case study was to examine the RSO development that led to increased and sustained triathlon event participation over the past 15 years. The research question asked how the RSO adapted to macro and micro environmental change in its development and evolution of increasing physical activity participation. The research presented utilized a case study methodology (Bassegy, 2003; Stake, 2008; Yin 2009), was informed by social network theory (Love & Andrew, 2012; Misener & Mason, 2006; Quatman & Chelladurai, 2008), and allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues of interest (Merriam, 1998). This review also involved analysis of archive results of adult and children’s participation.

Setting

The current study was based in Palmerston North, the main city in the Manawatu region on the North Island of NZ, with a population of approximately 82,400 (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). Of the population, 52% are female, the me-

dian age is 32.4 years, and ethnicities include 71% NZ European, 19% Maori and Pacific Islanders, and 8% Asian. In Maori and Pacific Islander communities, obesity and diabetes are significantly higher compared to other ethnic groups due to many socioeconomic and cultural factors; 5–10% of Maori are disproportionately represented within the diabetes pattern of 2–5% of all New Zealanders (Ministry of Health, 2011).

In response to the health issues indicated above, Push Play, NZ's national physical activity campaign, was launched in 1999 by the Hillary Commission and aimed to use the mass media to raise New Zealanders' awareness of the benefits of physical activity. It promoted the need to do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week (Bauman, McLean, Hurdle, Walker, Boyd, van Aalst, & Carr, 2003). Since 2005, the campaign, supported by community programs and regional events, has been a call to action for more New Zealanders to get "more active more often" (SPARC, 2010).

The Manawatu Triathlon Club

The Manawatu Triathlon Club is the RSO for triathlon in the Manawatu region of New Zealand and the only triathlon club in the region. Established in 1997, the club's philosophy is "to create events where all age groups and people of varying abilities can come along, enter on the day and pursue their own goals" (Manawatu Triathlon Club, 2012, para. 7). It consists of approximately 300 members and is managed by volunteers. The club hosts major regional community events in the city throughout the year, including a duathlon series, triathlon series, and kids' triathlon series, which all consist of five events. Additionally, it hosts non-series events such as a ladies' triathlon, a team relay challenge event, family triathlons, and an off-road duathlon.

Since its inception, organizers have managed participation increases from approximately 300 total participants in 1999 to close to 1,200 in the adult and family events in 2012–13. Additionally, the number of children participating has increased from 300 in 2004 (the first year kids' events were held) to 3,400 in the 2012–13 events. Due to the intense demand from the community, the number of events per year also increased over time. For example, there were three adult/family triathlons/duathlons and three kids' summer triathlons first organized by the club in 1997 and 2004 respectively, while from 2007 to 2013, there have been a series of five adult/family triathlons/duathlons and five kids' triathlons organized regularly each year. The triathlon series offers adapted pool-based long (5K run: 20K bike: 400m swim), medium (3:9:3), and short (1:4:1) courses. The duathlon series events, held over winter, consist of a run, bike, run format, and range in distance from the long course (5K run: 20K bike: 3K run) to medium (3:10:1.5) to short (1.5:5:1.5).

For the I Tri'd the Tri Kids' Triathlon Series, adapted Olympic triathlon distances are used. Children under 13 participate in 10% adapted distances: 150m swim, 4K bike, and 1K run. Distances for primary school children are at 5%: 75m

swim, 2K bike, and 500m run. Families with preschool children as young as age two also participate, and distances are approximately 1% of Olympic distance triathlons. These mini-events are characterized by a 15m swim, where children may touch the pool bottom and use swimming aids; 400m bike, where children have training wheels; and a 100m run. Children of this age are often assisted by parents/siblings following a roped grass course.

In 2008 and 2012, a triathlete from the regional community, Kris Gemmell, was selected to represent NZ at the Olympics in Beijing and London, respectively. His attendance, particularly at the Kids' Triathlon Series, helped provide a regional role model for the children.

Adapting to formalization. A formalized organization, firmly recognized and embedded in the community network, required a number of key internal volunteers/organizers willing to contribute to the Manawatu Triathlon Club's success. These individuals were identified in the strategic plan, but at the same time provided necessary extension of the local network to key external organizations. For example, the Manawatu Triathlon club president linked with national stakeholders such as Triathlon NZ, the NSO for the sport of triathlon in New Zealand, and the vice president created partnerships with regional stakeholders such as sponsors and sport organizations, including event, media and website promotion. Many of those taking on planning roles were event participants themselves who also had other family members actively involved, such as parents with children. In addition to the funding from external community agencies and donations from major external events, growing participation attracted regional business sponsorship, in particular for the Kids' Triathlon Series (e.g., the town's largest bike shop providing major giveaway prizes and financial support). Secondary regional funding was primarily linked to low cost entry fees, which were typically less than \$10 USD. These internal fees remained largely unchanged throughout the period of study.

Method

Case study research involves the intensive in-depth study of a specific case (Yin, 1995) and is particularly applicable to a sport organization (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Yin (2009) indicated that descriptive case studies provide a narrative of the phenomena under investigation and are often used to illustrate events and their specific context. Investigation of a case in a longitudinal setting aims to discover and explain changes within the case over time (Yin, 2009). The current case study of the RSO covers the time period 1998–2013, specifically examined the organization development, participation growth, and sustainability of the Duathlon Series, Triathlon Series and Kids' Triathlon Series. In this project, the methodological difficulties usually associated with a study over a long period (e.g., time-consuming, complex data analysis) were offset by the fact that data derived from the Manawatu Triathlon Club records were well organized through the club's website and easily accessible due to the lead author's involvement throughout the period, as participant, event organizer and vice president.

It is acknowledged that we were involved in the study as event volunteers, as well as participants (regular or occasional). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) supported this approach, indicating that participant observation was central to every case study, with the researcher being part of the group or the activities being observed (Yin, 2009). The lead researcher's prolonged involvement aimed to increase the study's credibility. Our involvement could have also increased biases, but it should be noted that we had no vested (financial or otherwise) interest in positively reporting the RSO.

We retrieved participant data archives storing the results of the respective Duathlon Series, Triathlon Series, and Kids' Triathlon Series during the period 1998–2013. Data collected and retrieved for analysis included event date, location, lengths of the duathlon/triathlon parts, number of participants, and their respective age and gender subgroupings. The longitudinal monitoring of participation data of the Manawatu Triathlon Club events identified a number of related macro and micro environmental factors, social network impacts and initiatives.

Data Analysis

The participation data were analyzed in two steps. First, we summed all participants for all events in one year (see Table 1). Then we processed separately the numbers of Duathlon, Triathlon, and Kids' Series participants. The Duathlon/Triathlon Series participation was then presented based on average numbers per race during the 15-year period of 1998–2013 (see Figure 2). The Kids' Triathlon Series participation was found to follow a linear function of time for the decade 2004–2013, as seen in Figure 3. There were no Kids' Triathlon Series events prior to 2004. Figure 4 illustrates the participation relative to the different event age groups: masters, open, and youth for both males and females.

The nature of interpretive and case study research seeks to form a unique interpretation of events rather than produce generalizations. Transferability, the interpretive equivalent to generalizability, is enhanced here by the provision of a 'thick' description (Merriam, 1998) of the long-term developments of the RSO.

Findings/Discussion

The results of the case study of how an RSO in New Zealand adapted to macro and micro environmental change in its development and evolution of increasing physical activity participation are presented in this section. We also provide an in-depth discussion of the findings and their implications for sport managers.

Increased Sport Participation

In Figure 2, the average number of Duathlon/Triathlon Series participants per race over the monitored 15 years is presented. Figure 3 represents the steadily increasing Kids' Triathlon Series participation numbers averaged per race over a decade. This overall trend indicates that from the seventh year (2006), steadily increasing Kids' Triathlon Series participation is the main contributor to the Manawatu Triathlon Club's event growth.

Table 1

Overall Annual Participation in Manawatu Triathlon Club Events

Year	MM	MF	M	F	YM	YF	Team (of 3)	Total du & tri	Total kids	Total du + tri + kids
1998/1999	17	13	132	54	58	40	120	434		434
1999/2000	28	29	112	26	69	35	36	335		335
2000/2001	37	67	96	55	106	64	39	464		464
2001/2002	39	43	88	36	97	71	27	401		401
2002/2003	58	23	103	64	110	77	63	498		498
2003/2004	73	40	169	301	92	68	84	827	363	1190
2004/2005	114	126	208	370	117	123	72	1130	526	1656
2005/2006	119	158	174	282	171	147	153	1204	1183	2387
2006/2007	120	119	163	177	183	125	69	956	1577	2533
2007/2008	180	130	144	143	172	119	63	951	1875	2826
2008/2009	128	91	96	98	115	94	39	661	1599	2260
2009/2010	131	104	134	133	170	128	108	908	2299	3207
2010/2011	158	123	118	169	169	116	81	934	2655	3589
2011/2012	219	171	112	231	220	115	69	1137	2866	4003
2012/2013	227	202	147	221	238	124	30	1189	3378	4567

Sub-cohorts: Open male and female (M/F over 20 & under 40); Masters male and female (MM/MF age over 40), Youth male and female (YM/YF age under 20)

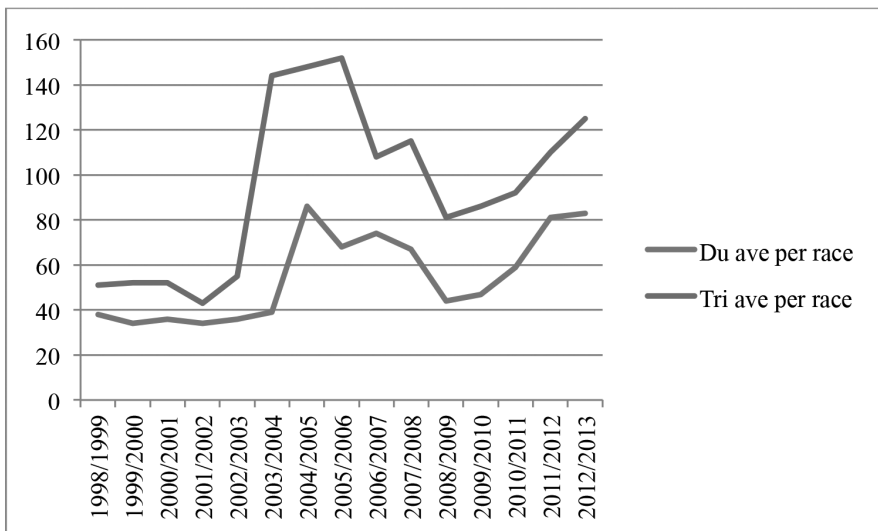


Figure 2. Average participation per race in the Duathlon and Triathlon Series.

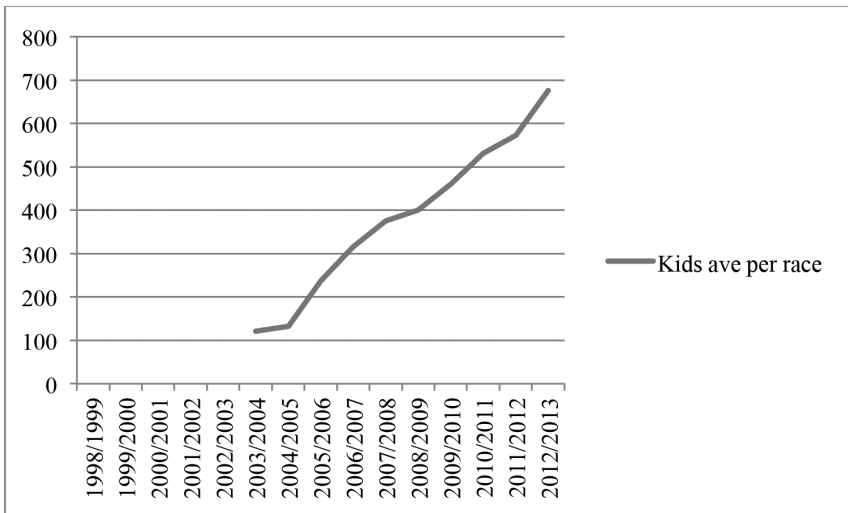


Figure 3. Average participation per race in the Kids' Triathlon Series.

The longitudinal monitoring of participation data of the Manawatu Triathlon Club events identified a number of related macro and micro environmental factors, social network impacts, and initiatives. Within the family role, as noted by Kremarik (2000), the role of the children was also identified, which was manifested in findings that showed increases in participation of children since the Kids' Triathlon Series was introduced in 2004. In contrast, the trend in participation for adults indicated a steady state in which new participant entry rates seemed to be just compensated by participant exit rates.

The current findings indicate that the male group best fit the “attender” category (Diggle, 1984). These enthusiasts were initially committed to regular competition and challenge, and individuals in this group were the initiators and catalysts in increasing community participation. We argue that the junior and veteran groups, both male and female, the “intenders” (Diggle, 1984), have been influenced most by the increased accessibility (Funk & James, 2011; Torkildsen, 2011) and participation opportunities offered by the major new targeted external and internal events. The introduction of the women’s-only triathlon appeared to reduce the barriers to participation for this group, increasing awareness and attraction (Funk & James, 2001), but their subsequent decline in participation indicated that women remained largely “indifferent” (Crofts, Schofield, & Dickson, 2012; Diggle, 1984), with a lack of attachment and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). The subsequent involvement of family in the regular physical activity appeared to make the sport more socially accessible and acceptable for them. We argue that this community-based physical activity initiative, whilst initially focused on attenders, enabled participation barriers to be removed for intenders, as well as for some in the indifferent category, whose participation attitudes were positively changed.

Environmental Factors

The fluctuation in participation in Figure 2 indicates times when internal environmental factors, described in greater detail below, impacted the Manawatu Triathlon Club's organizational structure and events. These factors were identified as important during the study by their coherence with the overall participation increase as well as by their time-match to participation fluctuations. The organization was adapted accordingly by implementing infrastructure modifications, described in more detail below, in sequence. Figure 2 indicates that these adaptations were successful in increasing and sustaining community participation in the Manawatu Triathlon Club series of events.

Internal factor—major new targeted events.

Kids' triathlon series (2004). The development of the Kids' Triathlon Series in 2004 led to significantly increased participation. Organizationally, the formation of this series meant that the organizers had to adapt the distances and difficulty of the course so that it was an appropriate event for children. This was implemented after consultation with RSO expertise and—very importantly from a community participation perspective—conducting and considering pilot experiences within the organizers' families with their own children.

It was the success of this event that five years later attracted the commercially sponsored national Weet-Bix Triathlon event to Palmerston North in conjunction with the Manawatu Triathlon Club for the first time. Weet-Bix is a popular cereal manufacturer in New Zealand and sponsors the Weet-Bix Triathlon Series in 13 locations throughout New Zealand annually. The initial event in Palmerston North attracted over 1,000 children between the ages of 7 and 15. In 2013, the number of participants grew to 1,840, at which time registration was closed and the event was deemed "sold out."

Family triathlons (2009). In response to periodic relative fluctuations in participation, Manawatu Triathlon Club event organizers regularly attempted to creatively modify the triathlon event structure and diversify its target markets in order to increase participation and manage the continued interest and demands of participants. For example, the introduction of new family targeted events was started in 2009. Examples include the family triathlon, team triathlon, dad's day duathlon, a women-only triathlon, and the whanau (extended family) triathlon.

Internal factor—periodic organizational infrastructure review/change.

Adapting to risk review (2001). As shown in Figure 2, an approximate 25% decrease was observed in Duathlon and Triathlon Series participation after 2001. Manawatu Triathlon Club event organizers responded to this participation decrease by the formalization of the regional triathlon organization, which is detailed in the next section. It took approximately two years before structured risk and safety management plans were put in place, in particular following formal traffic management guidelines and procedures. With up to 500 participants who were regularly attending at that time, each with bicycle, equipment, support, fam-

ily and additional spectators, the new infrastructure and safety were key elements to Manawatu Triathlon Club's organization success in subsequent years.

Adapting to organizational review (2006). We argue that the formalization of the Manawatu Triathlon Club, induced originally by the safety infrastructure concerns (Lynch et al., 2007) and participation volume, and subsequent internal and external organization review (Casey et al., 2012; Sport New Zealand, 2013), allowed it to achieve additional increases in participation and broad community acceptance. In particular, the event locations are now chosen to minimize risk particularly related to traffic management. For example, a nearby military base is used for many of these events and the Kids' Triathlon Series is held at a local park. Locations are chosen to provide a safe event environment for races and are designed to take place away from public roads where possible.

The organization became more efficient in adopting another general principle for sustainable improvement—adaptation of new event initiatives to match the needs and interests of different target groups within the community (Casey et al., 2012; Henderson, 2009; Mummery & Brown, 2009; Priest et al., 2008; Veil, 2007). The triathlon RSO infrastructure is now well organized, community backed, and capable of adaptive activity design review/change. The importance of effective volunteer leadership in increasing the capacity of grassroots organizations is also noted by Amis et al. (2004) and Sharpe (2006). In response to requested participant feedback, a range of new subevents within the Manawatu Triathlon Club umbrella were developed, each optimally matching the interests of specific target participant subgroups. For example, the Manawatu Triathlon Club's women's only triathlon was introduced in recognition that for a number of reasons, including body image and self-esteem (Crissey & Honea, 2006), it is often daunting to undertake physical exercise activity alongside men, particularly for those women participating in a triathlon event for the first time.

Community sport participation. Figure 4 illustrates the change in participation relative to the open male group (M between the ages of 21 and 39) of the different targeted age and gender groups: masters male and female (MM/MF age over 40), youth male and female (YM/YF age under 20), and open female (F between 21 and 39), throughout the 15-year period. The male group was the initial dominant group, as in the first years of the study it represented two and half times as many participants as the other groups.

The steady growth of the junior and veteran categories throughout the duration of the study is of particular interest, as their relative participation since 2005 and 2007, respectively, exceeded that of the male group. The trend in female participation relative to males, indicated in Figure 4, shows a spike in 2003, tripling initial numbers, which correlates with the introduction of the externally organized new Special K Women's Only triathlon. This event was part of a national series of advertised events targeted at women who had previous novice participation in triathlon (New Zealand Tourism Research Institute, 2005). These events also

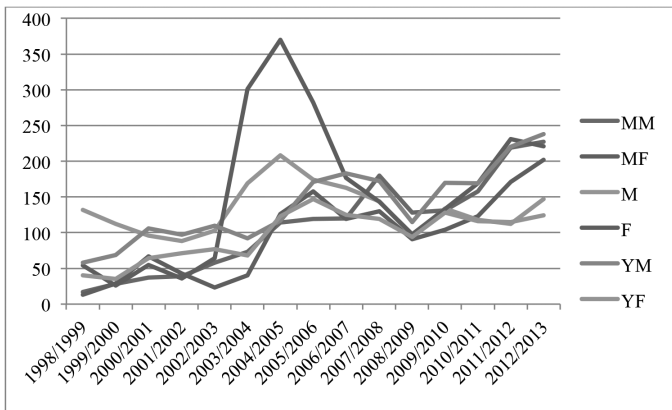


Figure 4. Longitudinal trends in age and gender sub-groupings participation. Sub-cohorts: Open male and female (M/F over 20 & under 40); Masters male and female (MM/MF age over 40), Youth male and female (YM/YF age under 20).

had a major cereal manufacturer sponsorship and were promoted through mass media television and radio advertising. This campaign was evaluated externally and the sponsor was recognized by SPARC with the best national nontelevised sponsorship award for 2003, acknowledging that convincing nonactive women to participate in a triathlon series was a daunting marketing challenge that the series executed successfully. At the time, the Auckland event was the largest triathlon staged in the Southern Hemisphere and the fifth largest in the world, and was easily NZ's largest triathlon (Endurance Sport, 2003; Triathlon New Zealand, 2009). This external series, which also took place in Palmerston North (attracting over 1,800 women), although independent of the Manawatu Triathlon Club Series, appeared to have a dramatic effect on women's participation in the club's triathlons in 2003, 2004, and 2005 (see Figure 4).

However, this sudden increase was not sustained and numbers reduced rapidly within the following three years to participation numbers comparable to the male group. This resulted in decreasing relative participation until 2009. The volunteer organizers were able to reverse this decreasing or flat trend in the female gender group through the introduction of the internal women's only event, although it is acknowledged that other factors could have influence these trends. This adaptation has contributed again to increasing women's relative participation in the recent period (from 2009 to 2013) to double that of the pre-2003 levels.

Results of the NZ longitudinal study presented here also support the very important role of family in the success of sustainable participation in physical activity (Green & Chalip, 2005; Kirk, 2005). The fact that the male-female ratio in the events had a strong linear correlation supports the creation of social networks in

encouraging physical activity participation (Misener & Mason, 2006). Increasing numbers of families now appear to be committed to participation. The adaptation of these findings by the volunteer organizers into the event infrastructure resulted, for example, in the family team event. In this event, family members participated in one part each of the triathlon, and this was found to be one way to increase the level of the whole family's involvement.

We argue that the social network involving children, adults and associated family relationships became a catalyst for increasing and sustaining participation (Kremerik, 2000). The development of extension events (e.g., family triathlon, team triathlon, women's only triathlon, dads' day duathlon, whanau [extended family] triathlon) were linked to the importance of the family's role (as the basic social community unit) in increasing and sustaining community participation in sport (Kremerik, 2000).

Organizational changes implemented in the Duathlon and Triathlon Series appear to have been successful in increasing accessibility for these groups, who are becoming increasingly committed to the sport. Increased family membership supports the notion that the increased and sustained participation has resulted from the engagement of both younger and older adults, as part of social networking within their families.

Conclusions

The regional community-based triathlon initiative highlighted in the current study demonstrated how one organization dealt with macro and micro environmental pressures to increase community members' participation in the sport of triathlon. Adopting a research-based view of organization management and undertaking the informal and formal processes prescribed by the self-report version of the Organizational Development Tool (Sport New Zealand, 2013) helped this non-profit volunteer organization grow its participation base and effectively increase and sustain adult and child involvement in physical activity. The internal and external organization factors identified as important in developing the significantly increased and sustained participation were inferred to be (a) the influence of major new targeted events and (b) periodic adaptive organization infrastructure review/change. While it is accepted that participation in triathlon can be rather unique to the sociocultural context, the findings may be transferred in broader contexts.

The review of the Manawatu Triathlon Club's performance was important for improvement in the RSO infrastructure. The successful adaptation of the Organizational Development Tools review requirements and findings resulted in a number of community awards for this non-profit regional triathlon organization from 2006 to 2011, including organizational management, financial management, volunteer management, marketing management, and event management awards. These findings support those of Misener and Doherty (2009) that the use of a

multidimensional approach is required to develop nonprofit sport organization partnerships and volunteer capacity. This approach supports increasing access opportunities alongside more welcoming environments aimed at enhancing family participation and the social network impact of sporting events on communities (Misener & Mason, 2006). Future research should focus on developing empirical evidence regarding social networks and the impact of events on community engagement involving participants, volunteers and sponsors. While the results of this current research are unique to the Manawatu Triathlon Club, the findings reveal information that similar organizations should keep in mind when attempting to sustain or increase participation levels.

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Management Whitepaper

A Case Study of Regional Sport Organization Development in Triathlon

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I. Research Problem

The purpose of this paper was to examine how a Regional Sport Organization (RSO) in New Zealand dealt with macro and micro environmental pressures in its development and evolution of increasing and sustaining physical activity participation in the sport of triathlon over a 15-year period.

The research focuses on how this voluntary organization adapted to environmental change. It highlights for volunteer community and regional sports organizations the importance of ongoing sport product changes and enhancements. In particular, it demonstrates the use of formal internal and external review processes, such as the Organization Development Tool, to support increased physical activity and participation.

II. Issues

Organization initiatives that increase a community's sport participation, physical activity, and health are important. In particular, declining or stagnant sport participation and obesity as an epidemic have affected both developed and developing countries worldwide. However, there is a lack of high-quality evidence to support effective interventions by sport organizations to increase participation, and in particular community involvement.

Social networks involving family, defined as parent and child, impact participation and health issues specifically in conjunction with healthier behavior, education, and sport management intervention in physical activity. Although there is extensive research on physical activity and health-related initiatives in sporting environments, there is a lack of high-quality evidence to support effective interventions by sport organizations to increase and sustain accessibility and opportunities, through which social networks may support physical activity and sport participation.

In response to these health issues indicated above, Push Play, NZ's national physical activity campaign launched in 1999 by the Hillary Commission, aimed to use the mass media to raise New Zealander's awareness of the benefits of physi-

cal activity. It promoted the need to do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week. Since 2005, the campaign, supported by community programs and regional events, has been a call to action for more New Zealanders to get more active more often.

III. Summary

The findings indicated that the informal and formal organizational responses to internal and external pressures directly or indirectly assisted in increasing sport participation of adults and children. These changes involved the influence of major new targeted events and periodic adaptive organization infrastructure review.

The longitudinal monitoring of the events of an RSO in New Zealand, the Manawatu Triathlon Club, and an analysis of the periodicity in the increase and sustained family based community participation identified a number of related macro and micro environmental factors and initiatives. Within the family role, as noted by Kremarik (2000), we also identified the role of the children, which was manifested in findings that showed increases in their participation, since the Kids' Triathlon Series was introduced in 2004. In terms of adults during the extended study interval, the trend in participation indicated a steady state in which new participant entry rates seemed to be compensated by participant leave rates.

The findings indicated that it was the male group that best fit the "attender" category (Diggle, 1984). These enthusiasts were initially committed to regular competition and challenge and individuals in this group were the initiators and catalysts in increasing community participation. The junior and veteran groups, both male and female, the "intenders" (Diggle, 1984), were influenced most by the increased accessibility (Funk & James; 2011; Torkildsen, 2011) and participation opportunities offered by the major new targeted external and internal events. The introduction of a women's only triathlon reduced the barriers to participation for this group, increasing awareness and attraction (Funk & James, 2001), but their subsequent decline in participation indicated that women remained largely "indifferent" (Crofts, Schofield & Dickson, 2012; Diggle, 1984), with a lack of attachment and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). The subsequent involvement of family in the regular physical activity made the sport more socially accessible and acceptable for them. We argue that a community based physical activity initiative, whilst initially focus on attenders, enabled participation barriers for participation for intenders, as well as some in the indifferent category, whose attitudes can be changed.

IV. Analysis

Major new targeted events and periodic organization infrastructure review/change. We argue that the formalization of the Manawatu Triathlon Club (MTC), induced originally by the safety infrastructure concerns (Lynch et al., 2007) and participation volume, and subsequent internal and external organization review (Casey et al., 2012; Sport New Zealand, 2013) allowed it to achieve

additional increases in participation and broad community acceptance. In particular, the event locations are now chosen to minimize risk particularly related to traffic management (e.g., a nearby military base is used for many of these events and the Kids' Triathlon Series is held at a local park). Locations are chosen to provide a safe event environment for races, away from public roads where possible.

The organization became more efficient in adopting another general principle for sustainable improvement—adaptation of new event initiatives to match the needs and interests of different target groups within the community (Casey et al., 2012; Henderson, 2009; Mummery & Brown, 2009; Priest et al., 2008; Veil, 2007). Participation increase is realized through the reviewed formalized triathlon infrastructure being well-organized, community backed and capable of fast adaptive activity design review/change. The importance of effective volunteer leadership in increasing grassroots organization capacity is also noted by Amis et al., (2004) and Sharpe (2006). In response to requested participant feedback, a range of (new) subevents within the MTC umbrella were developed, each matching optimally the interests of specific target participant subgroups. For example, the MTC 'women's only' triathlon was introduced in recognition that for a number of reasons, including body image and self-esteem (Crissey & Honea, 2006), it is often daunting to undertake physical exercise activity alongside men, particularly for those women participating in a triathlon event for the first time.

Community sport participation. Results of the NZ longitudinal study presented here have also supported the very important role of family in the success of sustainable participation in physical activity (Green & Chalip, 2005; Kirk, 2005). The fact that the male-female ratio in the events is strongly linearly correlated supports the important role of social networks in encouraging physical activity participation (Kremerik, 2000). Increasing numbers of families now appear to be committed to participation. The adaptation of these findings by the volunteer organizers into the event infrastructure resulted, for example, in the family team event with family members participating in one part each of the triathlon, as a good solution to increase the level of whole family involvement.

We argue that the social network became a catalyst for increasing and sustaining participation (Kremerik, 2000). The development of extension events (e.g., family triathlon, team triathlon, women's-only triathlon, dads' day duathlon) were linked to the importance of the family's role (as the basic social community unit) in increasing and sustaining community participation in sport (Kremerik, 2000).

Organizational changes implemented in the club's triathlon series appear to have been successful in increasing accessibility for these groups, who are becoming increasingly committed to the sport. Increased family membership supports the notion that the sustained participation has resulted from the engagement of both younger and older adults, as part of social networking within their families.

V. Implications

Implications of this study are the importance of ongoing sport product changes and enhancements and the use of formal internal and external review processes, such as the Organization Development Tool, for community or regional sports to support increased physical activity and participation.

This regional community-based triathlon initiative has demonstrated how the organization has dealt with macro and micro environmental pressures. By adopting a research based view of organization management and undertaking the processes prescribed by the self-report version of the Organizational Development Tool have helped this nonprofit volunteer organization grow its participation base and effectively increase and sustain family and community involvement in physical activity. The internal and external organization factors identified as important in developing the significantly increased and sustained participation were (a) the influence of major new targeted events and (b) periodic adaptive organization infrastructure review/change. Whilst it is accepted that participation in triathlon can be rather unique to the socio cultural context, the findings may be transferred in broader contexts.

The review of the MTC's performance was important for improvement in the regional organization infrastructure. The successful adaptation of the ODT review requirements and findings resulted in a number of community awards for this nonprofit regional triathlon organization including organizational management, financial management, volunteer management, marketing management, and event management (2006-2011). These findings support a multidimensional approach to develop organizational capacity in volunteer nonprofit community sport.